



Accreditation Review Commission on Education
for the Physician Assistant, Inc.

**Clinical Postgraduate PA Programs
Accreditation Process
Issued April 2011, Revised May 2011**

Clinical postgraduate PA programs are formal educational programs in a medical or surgical specialty that offer structured curricula, including didactic and clinical components, to educate graduates of an ARC-PA accredited entry level PA program who are National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) eligible or certified. Programs typically involve full time study not less than 12 months.

The clinical postgraduate PA program accreditation process conducted by the ARC-PA is a voluntary one entered into by institutions and programs that sponsor a structured educational experience. To be eligible to apply for accreditation, programs must be operational with at least one enrolled PA resident at the time of application.

Accreditation Process for Clinical Postgraduate PA Programs

Technical assistance is offered by ARC-PA staff for clinical postgraduate PA programs applying for accreditation. This periodic fee-based service will focus on assisting clinical postgraduate PA programs in understanding the process and application for accreditation.

Letter of Interest

- Clinical postgraduate PA programs interested in applying for accreditation by the ARC-PA should review the ARC-PA web site (www.arc-pa.org). To initiate the process, the sponsoring institution must submit a letter of interest and support for the program to pursue the ARC-PA accreditation process. This letter **must be signed by the most senior institutional official responsible for the program**. The letter should be sent to John McCarty, Executive Director, ARC-PA, 12000 Findley, Suite 150, Johns Creek, Georgia, 30097.

Program Self Assessment

- A critical component of the accreditation process is that of continuous clinical postgraduate program self-assessment. Continuous self-assessment is a comprehensive, regular, and analytical process conducted within the context of the mission and goals of both the sponsoring institution and the clinical postgraduate program whereby a clinical postgraduate program regularly and systematically reviews the quality and effectiveness of its educational practices and policies. During this process of ongoing self assessment, the clinical postgraduate program identifies strengths as well as problems, develops plans for corrective intervention, and evaluates the effects of the interventions. Ongoing self-assessment provides the means by which clinical postgraduate PA programs can envision, attain, and maintain quality education. The accreditation application includes questions that address issues related to a well conceived self-assessment process.

Curriculum Review

- Prior to the administrative review of the application (described later), each clinical postgraduate PA program must have its curriculum reviewed. The program must identify a panel of physicians and PAs to review its curriculum content and required clinical experiences. The ARC-PA **must pre-approve** the panel members from which review of their curriculum will be solicited. As programs begin considering the members or their curriculum review panels, they should contact the ARC-PA Associate Director to discuss the criteria and qualifications of a panel of physicians and physician assistants competent to complete a curriculum review.
- The program must provide the panel with materials as specified by the ARC-PA about the program curriculum.
- A member of the ARC-PA staff will serve as the curriculum review coordinator. This person will collect and compile the reviewers' feedback into one form to be returned to the program and ARC-PA.
- Individually completed curriculum review forms must be submitted by each review panel member to the curriculum review coordinator in the ARC-PA offices. A composite of the reviews will be returned to the program.

Administrative Review

- Applications for initial accreditation will receive an administrative review for completeness. This review will occur after the ARC-PA has reviewed the composite curriculum review and after the program has all components of the application ready for submission for review. This review is not a review of the quality of the content submitted. Achieving a successful administrative review only allows the program to continue in the process and does not predict the accreditation outcome for the program.

Site Visit

- Site visits for initial accreditation **will only be scheduled after the program has successfully passed the administrative review of the application.**
- Site visits will be scheduled for programs whose applications are complete. If the application is incomplete the program will be asked to submit missing components prior to scheduling the site visit.
- Program applications and supporting documentation will be thoroughly reviewed by two site visitors. Site visits will be conducted by at least one visitor on site for at least one day. Visits will require an entire day from 7:30 am to 5 pm or may occur over two half days. Visits may require that the visitor actually stay over two nights for the visit, so as not to shorten the visit for travel reasons.
- The purpose of the site visit is to allow the site visitors to verify, validate, and clarify the information supplied by the program in its application. The site visit team also reviews the nature and manner in which the program's objectives are being pursued, and the manner in

which the program's self-identified concerns and problems are being addressed. The team evaluates the program based on the accreditation *Standards* for clinical postgraduate PA programs and conveys its evaluation to the ARC-PA in light of the evidence presented at the time of the site visit. The team's observations about the program, in reference to the program's compliance with the *Standards*, are sent to the program shortly after the completion of the site visit.

Post Site Visit

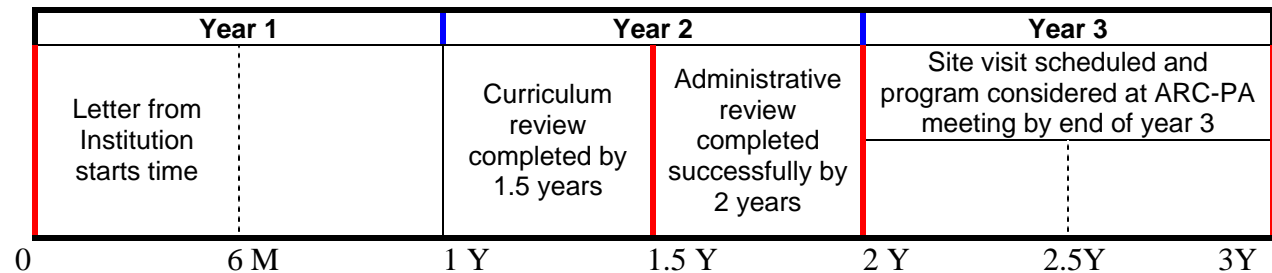
- Within a specified period of time after the site visit, programs are invited, but not required, to respond to any of the observations contained in the site visit summary in order to eliminate errors of fact or challenge perceived ambiguities and misperceptions. The response is NOT to be used to provide new information regarding changes made since the visit or plans for changes in response to the observations contained in the report.
- Programs are reviewed by the full commission in March and September each year. Programs visited from August 1 to December 31 will be reviewed at the March meeting. Clinical postgraduate PA programs visited from February 1 to June 30 will be reviewed at the September meeting.
- Accreditation decisions are based on the ARC-PA's review of information contained in the accreditation application, the report of site visit evaluation teams, any additional requested reports or documents submitted to the ARC-PA by program, and the program's past accreditation history (if applicable). Additional data to clarify information submitted with the application may be requested at the time of the site visit. New unsolicited information submitted after a site visit will not be accepted or considered by the ARC-PA as part of that accreditation review process.
- All accredited clinical postgraduate PA programs will be required to submit an annual report.

Accreditation Application Timeline

- Applying for accreditation for clinical postgraduate PA programs is time limited. There are several 3-year limited components to the process.
 - The initial 3-year eligibility/application time line begins with receipt by the ARC-PA of the formal letter of interest and support for the process as submitted by the **most senior institutional official responsible for the program**.
 - There is a 3 year limit from this date for the program to complete its application process and be scheduled for a site visit. Programs not completing all steps in the process must begin the process again.
 - After being determined to be eligible to apply for accreditation, the program has 1.5 years to complete the curriculum review process.
 - The program has two years from the date of submission of the institutional letter of support to complete its application materials (to include the curriculum review) for administrative review, and receive notification that it has successfully completed its administrative review and is ready for a site visit.

Accreditation Time Limit

- Accreditation for clinical postgraduate PA programs is time limited. Initial accreditation is limited to three years. If the program chooses to continue its accreditation, it will complete a continuing application and will be eligible for three additional years of accreditation (3+3). There is no site visit associated with the second review. (A site visit could be scheduled if the review of documents submitted indicates that a visit is needed to verify, validate, or clarify information.)
- After a 6 year period of accreditation, another site visit may be a required component of the accreditation process for any clinical postgraduate PA program wanting to continue its accreditation



- Programs not meeting the timeline deadlines as noted in the letter of acknowledgment from the ARC-PA in response to their letter of interest will be considered withdrawn from the process. .

Change in Program Director

- Should there be a change in program director at any time after the institution submits the letter of interest up until the time the program achieves accreditation or decides to withdraw from the process, the institution must submit a letter of ongoing support for the program as it pursues accreditation. This letter **must be signed by the most senior institutional official responsible for the program**. The letter should be sent to John McCarty, Executive Director, ARC-PA, 12000 Findley, Suite 150, Johns Creek, Georgia, 30097.

Withdrawal from the Accreditation Process

- A program pursuing ARC-PA accreditation may withdraw from the process at anytime by submitting a letter to the ARC-PA. This letter **must be signed by the program director and the most senior institutional official responsible for the program**. The letter should be sent to John McCarty, Executive Director, ARC-PA, 12000 Findley, Suite 150, Johns Creek, Georgia, 30097.
- Programs not meeting the timeline deadlines as noted in the letter of acknowledgment from the ARC-PA in response to their letter of interest will be considered withdrawn from the process.
- Programs that have withdrawn from the process seeking to again pursue accreditation must do so by reentering the process from the beginning.