
8-18-2021

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
August 18, 2021

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Cedarville University: One Step Closer to Physician Assistant Program

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Cedarville University is one step closer to offering its new Master of Medical Science in Physician Assistant (PA) Studies program.

This summer, both the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) and the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE) approved Cedarville University to offer the PA degree program. The final step is accreditation by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc. (ARC-PA). That process, which is already underway, is targeted for completion in 2022.

For PA program director Jason Grahame, reaching these milestones builds momentum as Cedarville prepares to launch the program in 2023.

"HLC and ODHE were looking to make sure the program has support across the university," Grahame explained. "They wanted to see that we would be able to successfully offer the program, from Centennial Library to financial aid, admissions, etc. They interviewed faculty and staff from across campus to make sure we had the resources to make this happen."

Grahame noted that there were two current PA program directors at other universities who served on the HLC review team. "With veteran physician assistants who have started and overseen PA programs before, it was an encouragement to know they were supportive. They know what it takes to run a PA program."

ODHE and HLC review processes are designed as a consumer protection mechanism to ensure that certain standards are met, noted Tom Betcher, director of assessment and accreditation services at Cedarville. Those standards include the program's educational value, appropriate faculty and facilities, student support services, evidence of workforce relevance and consistency with the institution's mission and context.

"ODHE authorization provides the legal basis to operate the program in the state," Betcher said. "HLC approval provides assurance to both the public and the U.S. Department of Education that the program provides a quality educational experience and qualifies for the disbursement of federal financial aid funds."

With these two objectives achieved, the final goal is in sight: accreditation by ARC-PA.

"That application is due in February, with a site visit next May and, Lord willing, a final approval by September 2022," Grahame said. "ARC-PA will review our curriculum, faculty and preceptors to ensure we are able to deliver the educational program."

According to the market demand report and feasibility study conducted by Cedarville, the PA profession is expected to grow 37% by 2026. Conferral of PA degrees increased an average of 10% per year between 2012 and 2016, with 7,682 degrees awarded in 2016 alone.

“Preparing students for godly service and vocational distinction is the outgrowth of our mission as a university,” said Dr. Thomas White, president of Cedarville University. “We endeavor to develop health care providers who care for the whole person – body, mind and spirit - and the PA program perfectly aligns with that desire.”

Cedarville already offers a Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree; a dual Pharm.D./Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree; a Master of Science in Nursing (M.S.N.) with specializations in global public health, family nurse practitioner, pediatric nurse practitioner, nursing leadership and nurse educator; and a dual M.S.N./MBA.

In addition to the PA program, Cedarville is also preparing to offer a Master of Athletic Training program, which is slated to begin next June.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 4,550 undergraduate, graduate, and online students in more than 150 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is one of the largest private universities in Ohio, recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, strong graduation, and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and high student engagement ranking. For more information about the University, visit cedarville.edu.

Story Written by Clem Boyd