



AUSTIN
COLLEGE

MASTER OF MEDICAL SCIENCE
PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAM

Student Handbook

Academic Year 2025-2026



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
PA Program Faculty & Staff.....	5
Values of the Program	6
Program Competencies (Learning Outcomes)	7
Program Curriculum.....	7
Advanced Placement Policy	9
Minimum Technical Standards for Admission, Continuation & Graduation.....	9
Required Academic Standards.....	12
Requirements for Progression & Completion	22
Remediation & Deceleration.....	23
Academic Probation, Withdrawal & Dismissal.....	26
Student Appeal: Academic Standing.....	28
Health Screening & Immunizations.....	28
Background Checks	32
Drug Screen	33
Access & Referral to Students Services	33
Leave of Absence.....	36
Assessment Policy.....	36
Grade Disagreement	38
Closed Meeting Policy.....	38
Student Employment Policies.....	39
Student Soliciting Clinical Rotations	39
Faculty as Healthcare Providers to Students.....	39

Academic Coaching.....40

Safety & Security.....40

Allegation of Student Mistreatment42

Student Grievances: Harassment.....42

Student Exposure to Hazards43

Student Lockers45

Computer/Internet Access45

Communication with Faculty & Staff.....45

Minors & Visitors.....46

Transportation and Housing.....46

PA Program Accreditation.....46

Tuition and Fee Refunds and Procedures.....46

Teaching out Policy47

The policies contained in this handbook apply to all students enrolled in the Austin College Physician Assistant (PA) Program and are effective for the 2024-2025 academic year. Austin College reserves the right to make changes to any or all specifications contained herein at any time and to apply such revision to registered and accepted students as well as to new admissions. All students enrolled in the PA Program are expected to abide by the regulations set forth by Austin College as specified in the PA Program Student Handbook and the PA Program Clinical Phase Manual. (A3.01)

Introduction

The Physician Assistant (PA) program upon which you are about to embark will be challenging and exciting. The best educational experience occurs when students and program personnel work together to achieve common goals.

Teaching is the primary responsibility of the principal and instructional faculty. It is the faculty's responsibility to promote an environment which is conducive to the mastery of knowledge and skills necessary to enter the PA profession. Learning is the responsibility of each student. Each student will need to attain the program competencies (learning outcomes) to successfully complete this program. Students must be able to effectively integrate the information and skills taught in the Program. It is necessary for each student to dedicate the time and effort needed for individual success. Any student who experiences difficulty that may interfere with their success should seek assistance from their faculty academic coach, other principal faculty members, or the Program Director as early as possible.

PA training may differ significantly from other educational experiences a student may have previously undertaken. In addition to achieving competence in the application of a significant body of didactic knowledge and psychomotor skills, the student must embody high standards of professionalism. The curriculum is designed to assist students in developing an independent and self-directed approach to learning. This is consistent with the expectations of a graduate PA, who will continually expand their knowledge base and expertise.

It is essential for each student to be able to organize, prioritize, and synthesize a large amount of material. Every student must pursue a consistent study routine which allows them to master a vast body of knowledge. Students will be assessed in their mastery of this knowledge by a variety of methods, to include written, and practical examinations, written or oral assignments, group projects, and other activities. The Program has embraced the fundamentals of universal curricular design and incorporated flexibility into some learning activities to promote inclusion while maintaining academic equivalency. Flexibility in the manner in which some assignments are able to be completed is clearly communicated in each course syllabus.

PA Program Contact Information:

Austin College Health Campus
4616 N US 75 Frontage Rd
Denison, TX 75020
Phone: 903-813-2601 or 903-813-2603
Email: PAprogram@austincollege.edu

PA Program Faculty & Staff

Diana Noller, DHSc, MMS, MSPT, PA-C
Associate Professor of Medical Science
Founding Director, PA Program
903-813-2340
dnoller@austincollege.edu

Alejandra Nieto, MD
Assistant Professor of Medical Science
Medical Director
aneito@austincollege.edu

Athena Todd '13, MHS, PA-C
Assistant Professor of Medical Science
Director of Experiential Education
903-813-2602
atodd@austincollege.edu

Amy Thimesch, MHS, PA-C
Assistant Professor of Medical Science
Director of Student Success
903-813-2609
athimesch@austincollege.edu

Shannon Cain, MPAS, PA-C
Assistant Professor of Medical Science
Director of Didactic Education
903-813-2610
scain@austincollege.edu

Christen Reamy-Jones '13, MPAS, PA-C
Assistant Professor of Medical Science
903-813-2608
creamy@austincollege.edu

Kenna Smith, MPAS, PA-C
Assistant Professor of Medical Science
903-813-2605
kesmith@austincollege.edu

Christina Lascano, MPAS, DipACLM, PA-C
Clinical Assistant Professor of Medical Science
903-813-2604
clascano@austincollege.edu

Fred Noller, MMS, PA-C
Clinical Assistant Professor of Medical Science
fnoller@austincollege.edu

Amy Parsons
Administrative Coordinator
903-813-2603
aparsons@austincollege.edu

Parrish Butler
Administrative Coordinator
903-813-2601
pbutler@austincollege.edu

Kimberly Donnell
Admin and Assessment Coordinator
903-813-2601
kdonnell@austincollege.edu

Mission Statement

The mission of the Physician Assistant (PA) program is to engage committed, diverse learners in a student-centered, transformational curriculum that fosters personal growth, builds community, and produces PAs capable of providing high-quality, patient-centered healthcare that reflects the principles of medical humanities and service to others.

Values of the Program

Excellence. The PA Program educates students in the medical knowledge, clinical reasoning and problem-solving abilities, professional behaviors and clinical, technical, and interpersonal skills needed to prepare graduates for practice as part of collaborative medical teams. We strive for excellence in all that we do.

Engagement. We are members of a community that serves others. We encourage reflection on and refinement of interpersonal communication to promote collaborative engagement with others. We foster lifelong learning, patient advocacy, and positive contributions to the North Texas and Southern Oklahoma regions and beyond.

Accountability. We are accountable to ourselves and each other. We treat others with dignity and honesty and honor diversity. We accept ownership in all that we do, demonstrate self-motivation, initiative, and work hard.

Introspection. We seek to develop a deeper understanding of our own perspectives and limitations so that we can have a clear sense of self, value differing perspectives, and collaborate to meet the needs of others.

PA Program Competencies (Learning Outcomes)

By program completion, it is expected the physician assistant student will be able to:

Medical Knowledge

- Demonstrate the acquisition of broad-based medical knowledge in all major human organ systems (MK1)
- Exhibit knowledge of health systems science that fosters the delivery of effective health care (MK2)

Interpersonal and Communication Skills

- Elicit a medical history accurately and effectively (ICS 1)
- Provide evidence-based basic counseling and patient education that is patient-centered (ICS 2)
- Provide concise and effective oral case presentations (ICS 3)
- Demonstrate accurate medical record documentation (ICS 4)

Clinical Reasoning and Problem-Solving

- Recognize emergent and urgent conditions and initiate care accordingly (CRPS 1)
- Develop and prioritize differential diagnoses (CRPS 2)
- Formulate patient-centered care plans by integrating findings from a medical history, physical examination and diagnostic studies (CRPS 3)

Clinical and Technical Skills

- Perform physical examinations appropriate for the patient presentation and setting (CTS 1)
- Interpret diagnostic findings necessary for the evaluation of medical conditions (CTS 2)
- Safely perform clinical procedures (CTS 3)

Professional Behaviors

- Display professional and ethical behaviors consistent with the PA profession (PB 1)

Program Curriculum

The Austin College PA Program curriculum is designed to lead students through a 24-month plan of study that prepares them to meet the competencies for entry into the PA profession in the areas of medical knowledge, interpersonal and communication skills, clinical reasoning and problem solving, clinical and technical skills, and professional behaviors. The total number of credit units in the program is 28.5, which is equivalent to 114 semester credit hours. Students who successfully meet all requirements for graduation from the PA Program earn a Master of Medical Science Degree.

Pre-clinical Phase

The pre-clinical phase consists of 13-months of didactic instruction. Each semester's courses build upon the content delivered in previous terms and emphasize active engagement to facilitate the application of newly acquired knowledge and skills.

Pre-clinical Phase Courses

Semester 1: Summer (12 weeks)	Credit Units
PAED 520 Foundations of Medicine	1.5
PAED 521 Pharmacotherapeutics I	0.25
PAED 522 Patient Assessment & Skills I	0.25
PAED 523 PA Professional Practice I	0.25
PAED 524 Laboratory & Diagnostic Testing	0.75
PAED 525 Clinical Anatomy & Physiology	1.0
PAED 526 Health Across the Lifespan	0.75
TOTAL	4.75

Semester 2: Fall (14 weeks)	Credit Units
PAED 530 Medicine I	2.25
PAED 531 Pharmacotherapeutics II	1.0
PAED 532 Patient Assessment & Skills II	1.0
PAED 533 PA Professional Practice II	0.5
PAED 534 Evidence Based Medicine	0.25
PAED 535 Introduction to Lifestyle Medicine	0.25
TOTAL	5.25

Semester 3: Spring (18 weeks)	Credit Units
PAED 540 Medicine II	2.25
PAED 541 Pharmacotherapeutics III	1.0
PAED 542 Patient Assessment & Skills III	1.5
PAED 543 PA Professional Practice III	0.25
PAED 544 Principles of Emergency Medicine	0.75
PAED 545 Care of the Surgical Patient	0.5
PAED 546 Clinical Decision Making	0.5
TOTAL	6.75

Transitional Phase (4 weeks)	Credit Units
PAED 550 Pre-clinical Seminar	0.5
TOTAL PRE-CLINICAL PHASE	17.25

Clinical Phase

The clinical phase of the program is 11 months in duration and consists of 40 weeks of supervised clinical practice experiences in outpatient, inpatient, emergency department and operation room settings and the Clinical Seminar course, which runs the length of the clinical phase. Students learn to care for patients across the lifespan (infants, children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly) in various medical specialties. There are seven core rotations and three elective rotations, all of which are required.

The clinical phase of the program is **11 months** in duration and consists of **40 weeks of supervised clinical practice experiences** in outpatient, inpatient, emergency department and operation room settings and the Clinical Seminar course, which runs the length of the clinical phase. Students learn to care for patients across the lifespan (infants, children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly) in various medical specialties. There are

seven core rotations and three elective rotations, all of which are required. Reliable transportation is required throughout a student's time in the program. While many of the program's clinical rotations are within the nearby communities, students should expect to commute up to 90 minutes to and from clinical rotations and may complete rotations outside of a commutable distance. All travel expenses related to a student's education while enrolled in the PA program are the responsibility of the student. When clinical rotations occur outside of commutable distances, there may or may not be PA program-identified housing options and often housing expenses are the responsibility of the student. These expenses are factored into the expected cost of attendance figures on the Tuition and Fee tab of our website.

The Clinical Seminar course challenges students to integrate and apply cumulative knowledge gained from all previously completed didactic courses and supervised clinical practice experiences. Synchronous and asynchronous study of selected topics including contemporary issues regarding physician assistant practice will be included. Students will engage in on-campus immersions designed to refine critical thinking and problem-solving skills and promote competency in clinical procedures. This course culminates with students completing summative practical and written examinations and presenting their Capstone project, which represents scholarly work students have engaged in throughout their time in the PA program.

Clinical Phase Courses

Clinical Phase (6/30/25-5/15/2026)	Credit Units
PAED 560 Internal Medicine	1.0
PAED 561 Family Medicine	1.0
PAED 562 Behavioral Medicine	1.0
PAED 563 Pediatric Medicine	1.0
PAED 564 Surgery	1.0
PAED 565 Emergency Medicine	1.0
PAED 566 Women's Health	1.0
PAED 567 Elective I	1.0
PAED 568 Elective II	1.0
PAED 569 Elective III	1.0
PAED 570 Clinical Seminar	1.25
TOTAL	11.25

Advanced Placement Policy

The Austin College PA Program curriculum is administered in a sequential fashion with each subsequent semester of coursework building upon the previous one. Consequently, the program does not consider applicants for advanced placement. (A3.13c)

Minimum Technical Standards for Admission, Continuation & Graduation

Technical standards are defined as the attributes considered necessary for students to complete their education and training and subsequently enter clinical practice. These standards are prerequisites for entrance to, continuation within, and graduation from the Austin College Physician Assistant (PA) Program. They may also

be prerequisites to licensure by state professional boards. Reasonable accommodation will be offered for persons with disabilities in conjunction with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Competency in technical standards will be assessed regularly throughout the Program. The Program has the ethical responsibility for the safety of patients with whom students and graduates will come in contact, and to the public to assure that its graduates can become fully competent PAs. Thus, it is critical that persons admitted to the PA Program possess the intelligence, integrity, compassion, humanitarian concern, and physical and emotional capacity necessary to practice medicine. Students must verify that they meet these Technical Standards prior to or at the time of matriculation to the PA Program and maintain them during their PA training. Students are obligated to alert the PA Program in a timely fashion of any change in their ability to meet the Technical Standards. Students are subject to dismissal if they do not possess the minimum physical or cognitive abilities, or sufficient mental or emotional stability to complete the entire course of study; if they do not participate fully in all aspects of PA training; if they are not deployable as competent PAs (with or without reasonable accommodation); or if they otherwise do not meet the Technical Standards.

Students must possess aptitude, ability, and skills in the following six (6) areas:

1. Observation
2. Communication
3. Motor and Sensory Function
4. Intellectual-Conceptual, Integrative and Quantitative Abilities
5. Behavioral and Social Attributes
6. Ethical and Legal Standards

Observation

Students must be able to observe demonstrations, participate in physical examination sessions and clinical skills workshops, and observe the difference of normal versus pathological states. They must be able to obtain a medical history and perform a complete physical examination in order to integrate findings based on these observations and to develop an appropriate diagnostic and treatment plan.

Students must be able to accurately observe a patient near and at a distance, noting nonverbal, as well as verbal signs. Specific vision-related criteria include, but are not limited to, detecting and identifying changes in color of fluids, skin, culture media, visualizing and discriminating findings on x-rays and other imaging tests, and reading written and illustrated materials. Students must be able to observe and differentiate changes in body movement, observe anatomic structures, discriminate among numbers and patterns, assist with diagnostic tests such as electrocardiograms and competently use diagnostic instruments such as an otoscope, ophthalmoscope and microscope.

Communication

Students must be able to relate effectively to patients while conveying compassion and empathy. They must be able to clearly communicate with patients in order to elicit information, accurately describe changes in mood, activity and posture of patients, and understand verbal as well as nonverbal communication.

Communication includes not only speech, but also reading and writing. Physician Assistant education presents exceptional challenges in the volume and breadth of reading required to master subject areas and impart the information to others. Students must be able to communicate quickly, effectively, and efficiently in oral and written English in the classroom and later with all members of the health care team. Specific requirements include but are not limited to the following: rapidly and clearly communicating with the medical staff on rounds or elsewhere, eliciting an accurate history from patients, and communicating complex findings in appropriate terms to patients and to various members of the health care team. Students must learn to recognize and promptly respond to emotional cues, such as sadness and agitation.

Students must be able to accurately and legibly record observations and plans in legal documents, such as the patient record. Students must be able to prepare and communicate concise, complete summaries of both limited patient encounters and complex, prolonged encounters, including hospitalizations. Students must be able to complete forms in a timely fashion, and according to directions.

Motor and Sensory Function

Students must possess sufficient sensory and motor function to perform physical examinations using palpation, auscultation, percussion and other diagnostic maneuvers. This requires sufficient exteroceptive sense (visual, auditory, touch and temperature), coordination to examine patients and adequate motor skills to use diagnostic instruments.

Students must be able to evaluate various components of the voice, such as pitch, intensity, and timbre. They must also be able to accurately differentiate percussive notes and auscultatory findings, including but not limited to, heart, lung, and abdominal sounds. Students must be able to accurately discern normal and abnormal findings, using instruments including, but not limited to, tuning forks, stethoscopes, and sphygmomanometers.

Students should be able to execute physical movements needed to provide general care and emergency treatments to patients. The student, therefore, must be able to respond promptly to emergencies within the hospital or practice setting, and must not hinder the ability of his/her co-workers to provide prompt care. Examples of emergency treatment reasonably required of a physician assistant include arriving quickly when called and assisting in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), administering intravenous medications, applying pressure to arrest bleeding, maintaining an airway, and suturing wounds. As further illustration, CPR may require moving an adult patient and applying considerable chest pressure over a prolonged period of time.

Students should be able to learn to perform basic laboratory tests such as urinalysis, etc., and diagnostic/therapeutic procedures such as venipuncture or placement of catheters. The administration of intravenous medications requires a certain level of dexterity, sensation, and visual acuity. Students must be able to measure angles and diameters of various body structures using a tape measure or other devices to measure blood pressure, respiration, and pulse. Clinical rotations require the ability to transport oneself to a variety of settings in a timely manner.

Intellectual-Conceptual, Integrative and Quantitative Abilities

Students must be able to learn through a variety of modalities including, but not limited to, classroom instruction; small group, team and collaborative activities; individual study; preparation and presentation of reports; and use of electronic technology. Students must have the mental capacity to assimilate and learn a large amount of complex, technical and detailed information in order to formulate diagnostic and therapeutic plans.

Problem solving, a critical skill demanded of physician assistants, often requires rapid intellectual function, especially in emergency situations. These intellectual functions include numerical recognition, measurement, calculations, reasoning analysis, judgment, and synthesis. Students must be able to identify significant findings in the patient's history, physical examination and laboratory data, provide a reasoned explanation for likely diagnoses, and choose appropriate medications and therapy.

It is essential the student is able to incorporate new information, from many sources, toward the formulation of a diagnosis and plan. Good judgment in patient assessment and diagnostic/therapeutic planning is also essential. When appropriate, students must be able to identify and communicate the extent of their knowledge to others.

Behavioral and Social Attributes

Students must have the emotional stability to function effectively under stress and to adapt to an environment that may change rapidly, without warning, and/or in unpredictable ways. They must be accountable for learning, exercising good judgment, and promptly completing all responsibilities during their educational training. Students must be able to work effectively, respectfully and professionally as part of the educational and healthcare team, and to interact with instructors, peers, patients, caregivers, and health care personnel in a courteous, professional, and respectful manner. Students must be able to contribute to collaborative, constructive learning environments; accept constructive feedback from others; and take personal responsibility for making appropriate positive changes.

Ethical and Legal Standards

Students must understand the basis and content of both general and medical ethics. Students must possess attributes such as compassion, empathy, altruism, integrity, responsibility, and inclusivity. Students must recognize limitations in their knowledge, skills and abilities and seek appropriate assistance with their identified limitations. Students whose performance is impaired by a substance use disorder are not suitable candidates for admission, promotion, or graduation. In addition, should a student be charged or convicted of any misdemeanor or felony offense while in the Program, s/he must immediately notify the Program of the charge or conviction. Failure to disclose prior or new offenses can lead to disciplinary action that may include dismissal. Students must meet the legal standards to be licensed as a physician assistant in the State of Texas.

Required Academic Standards (A3.15a)

Students must meet the required PA Program Academic Standards to remain in good standing. Suspected violations of this code can be expressed by any student, faculty member, or staff to the PA Program Director. The PA Program Student Progression Committee (SPC) determines the consequences for any violation after

thorough review of the incident(s) and holistic review of the student's academic record. Students are invited to submit a written statement for the SPC's review as part of this process. Disciplinary measures may include, but are not limited to warnings, academic probation or dismissal. The SPC is comprised of four PA program principal faculty members and the Program Director.

The PA Program requires that all students maintain a semester and cumulative GPA of 2.75 throughout the program, successfully complete required coursework, including remediation, in the appropriate sequence as defined by the program curriculum and meet the time-to-completion requirement. In addition to maintaining the required GPA throughout the program, students must abide by the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct, which is part of the required academic standards of the PA program. For more information, please see the Requirements for Progression and Completion section of the Handbook.

The grading scale for didactic courses in the program is:

Grading System	
Percentage	Letter grade
94% or above	A
90 – 93%	A-
87 – 89%	B+
83 – 86%	B
80 – 82%	B-
77 – 79%	C+
70 - 76%	C
69% or below	F

Clinical rotation courses (supervised clinical practice experiences) in the Clinical Phase will be graded on a Satisfactory (S)/Unsatisfactory (U) basis.

PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct

Health professions students are expected to one day serve the needs of the public and demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary to do so safely and effectively. In addition to adequate academic knowledge, graduates of health professions programs need to possess behavioral characteristics consistent with professional standards.

It is the responsibility of the PA program to ensure its students demonstrate professional behaviors throughout the course of training and meet professional behavior competencies upon graduation. The following PA program academic standards relating to student conduct and professional behaviors have been established to communicate clear expectations.

Components of the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct are:

- Professional Behavior Standards
- Academic Integrity Policy
- Attendance and Participation Policies
- Social Media Standards

- Appearance and Attire Policy
- Student Identification Policy
- Supervision Policy
- Confidentiality Policy

Students must abide by the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct to remain in good academic standing. Suspected violations of this code can be expressed by any student, faculty member, or staff to the PA Program Director. The PA Program Student Progression Committee (SPC) determines the consequences for any violation after thorough review of the incident(s) and holistic review of the student's academic record. Students are invited to submit a written statement for the SPC's review as part of this process. Disciplinary measures may include, but are not limited to warnings, academic probation or dismissal. Decisions made by the SPC specific to academic integrity violations, academic probation, or program dismissal can be appealed, in writing, to the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA).

Statement on Professional Behavior Standards. This section of the Handbook is intended to expand upon the *Behavioral and Social Attributes* Technical Standards of the PA Program. Students are expected to demonstrate these characteristics both in their academic and personal pursuits. This includes the following:

Excellence. Strives for excellence in all things. Independently identifies tasks to be performed and makes sure that tasks are completed satisfactorily. Performs duties promptly and efficiently. Is willing to spend additional time and to assume new responsibilities. Can recognize when help is required and when to ask for guidance.

Engagement. Reflects on and refines interpersonal communication to promote collaborative engagement with others. Is an active participant in the educational process. Provides support and is empathetic in interactions with peers, patients, and their families. Demonstrates respect for and complements the roles of other professionals. Is cooperative, easy to work with, and earns respect. Arrives on time and actively participates in clinical and didactic activities. Follows through and is reliable.

Accountability. Is accountable to oneself and others; recognizes and admits mistakes. Treats others with dignity and honesty and honors diversity. Accepts ownership, demonstrates self-motivation, initiative, and hard work.

Introspection. Seeks to develop a deeper understanding of one's own perspectives and limitations so that one can have a clear sense of self, value differing perspectives, and collaborate to meet the needs of others.

Resilience. Maintains professional composure and exhibits good clinical judgment in stressful situations.

Appearance. Displays appropriate professional appearance and is cleanly groomed.

An important component of professional behavior is timely completion of administrative tasks including course, clinical site, and preceptor evaluations, patient logging, and communication with the program faculty and staff. In addition, feedback on evaluations and communication with fellow students, faculty, and staff must be respectful and reflect the standards described above.

Academic Integrity Policy. In keeping with its educational mission, Austin College places the highest value on academic integrity and does not tolerate cheating and other forms of abuse of the academic process. The faculty and administrators of the college assume that entering students, in accepting admission to Austin College, are aware that they will submit themselves to the college's standard of academic honesty and agree to follow the procedures by which the college observes and enforces its standard.

General Definitions

Cheating and plagiarism are the primary violations of academic integrity. Cheating is defined as, but not limited to, purposely giving or receiving assistance from another student or source on an assignment where such assistance is not permitted. Examples include, but are not limited to, using or copying another person's work and submitting it as original, the use of "crib (cheat) sheets" or prohibited electronic devices during an exam, and providing the material or mechanism for another student to cheat.

Plagiarism is defined as, but not limited to, using pre-existing work without proper attribution, effectively calling the work original for the current assignment. The plagiarized work may come from a previous assignment, another person, a book or journal, or an internet source or other electronic or print media. Note, however, that with instructor permission and proper attribution, previous work may sometimes be used in a current assignment. Further, any actions which create an unfair advantage by impeding access by course members (PA students) to important information, or the sharing of improperly received information, also violate academic integrity.

Students frequently complete assignments throughout the PA curriculum. The PA Program reserves the right to check all references in all papers and to utilize plagiarism software or websites to evaluate student products.

Responsibilities

Recognizing that specifics of violations may be differently defined in different courses, the college gives instructors the authority to determine expectations and provide instructions for course-specific circumstances. The syllabus for each course must include an academic integrity policy statement and an indication of how it applies to the course.

Primary responsibility for maintaining academic integrity rests with the student. While the instructor is responsible for specifying expectations for appropriate behavior in unusual situations, the student should assume that the general guidelines given above apply to all course work. If students do not understand the academic integrity standards expected in a course or on a particular assignment, students must seek clarification from the Course Director.

In all cases, course grading is the sole responsibility of the Course Director, but the college, through the PA Student Progress Committee and/or VPAA, is not restricted from assessing additional, more severe consequences not affecting the course grade, such as academic probation or dismissal, for any violation, including the first violation.

Attendance and Participation Policies. Becoming a PA is more than taking tests. Becoming a PA necessitates interaction, engagement, and collaboration in learning activities. To ensure that you get the most out of your education, the PA program faculty assesses each student's engagement with the coursework and learning activities.

If attendance and participation expectations are not met, this may result in disciplinary measures including but not limited to warnings, academic probation, or dismissal. Excessive absences from required in-person activities in one or more classes may result in failure of classes and dismissal from the program. This policy is designed to ensure that you receive the training you need to be a successful PA.

Attendance and Participation Standards for the Pre-Clinical and Transitional Phases of the Curriculum

Lectures that require mandatory in-person attendance (MIPA) are marked as such in each course schedule. When lecture attendance is not required in-person, accessing the course learning materials and engaging in course activities is still required (for example, viewing classroom instructional materials posted from lecture-capture software when in-class attendance is not required or viewing posted asynchronous instructional videos). Asynchronous sessions may have learning assignments embedded into them, contributing to part of a course grade.

Students are expected to arrive for all required learning activities on time, which means arriving at least five minutes prior to the start of the session. If a student needs to miss any portion of a required learning activity, he/she must notify the appropriate Course Director before the start of class. **All course activities, for example small group sessions, labs, and assignments, are required.** Failure to attend a small group activity, mandatory classroom instruction, or lab is a violation of the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct unless the absence is excused. Repeated unexcused absences may lead to academic probation or dismissal from the program. Students will score a 0 (zero) on any graded activities that were completed during an unexcused absence.

In the event of an absence, the student should contact the Course Director as soon as possible. The student must present appropriate documentation (i.e., a note from a physician or other qualifying medical professional) to the Course Director to be granted an excused absence. However, no protected health information or confidential medical information is required to be submitted or documented. The student is responsible for all work missed during an absence. Opportunities to make up missed points in the form of class activities and quizzes will be at the discretion of each Course Director.

The following are considered excused absences:

- Personal illness, emergency, or injury
- Family bereavement (i.e., parent, grandparent, guardian, spouse, child, or sibling of the student)
- Attendance at a professional meeting provided that the absence has been pre-approved by the Course Director.
- Jury duty. Students can contact the Office of the Registrar for assistance in requesting a postponement of Jury Duty.

- Religious observance accommodations will be considered. Each student must individually submit a request to the Program Director for absences due to religious observances by the first day of each semester. The Program Director will inform the Course Directors of the request, and the student will be informed of the accommodation that will be provided. The student must work with the Course Directors to minimize disruptions to the educational process and to schedule makeup activities
- Severe weather
 - If the College cancels classes or other services, notifications will be sent via email, and the College’s webpage by 6:00 a.m. Otherwise, please assume the College is open and classes are in session.
 - Classes may be moved to a remote delivery method in the event of campus closure
 - If the campus remains open, decisions about the need to cancel a particular class or shift to REMOTE can be made by individual faculty. Should a faculty member cancel a class or move it remotely, they will notify their students directly.
 - Students are not expected to place travel for class attendance above their own individual health and safety. Students who are unable to attend class for safety reasons should not be penalized.
 - It is the student’s responsibility to contact faculty prior to missing class.

Clinical Phase Attendance and Participation Standards

During the clinical phase of the PA Program, students must attend all scheduled courses, exams, and clinical rotation activities. It is the PA Program policy that students are expected to actively participate in all supervised clinical practice experience hours set by the preceptor and/or clinical site. This time may include daytime business, evening, overnight, weekend, and holiday hours and supervised call time. The rotations are full time and students are to be available seven (7) days a week, twenty-four (24) hours a day for the assignment of hours to be worked. Students should expect to attend clinical days as assigned by the preceptor and be present, on average at least 36-40 hours per week. Students must not alter their rotation start/stop date. **College holidays do not apply to the clinical phase.**

Attendance at all scheduled shifts is mandatory. Students are expected to arrive at least 15 minutes early to each of their scheduled shifts. Repeated tardiness reflects a lack of professionalism and is considered unprofessional. Refer to the *PA Program Student Handbook* for more information regarding the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct.

The PA Program generally does not permit absences for any reason other than personal illness, emergency, injury, or family bereavement, however, in situations of severe weather, students are not expected to place travel for rotation or class attendance above their own individual health and safety. Students who are unable to report to their assigned location (rotation or class) for safety reasons should not be penalized.

Students are not permitted time off to study for exams or to seek employment, except as noted later in this section. **Any length of absence must be reported to the Program and clinical site immediately.**

If a preceptor unexpectedly needs to be away from the clinical site for any period of time outside of his or her normal schedule, the student must immediately notify the PA Program so alternate arrangements may be made. **Failure to notify the PA Program may result in the student receiving an unexcused absence. An unexcused absence may result in the loss of a personal day (described below).** When a PA student is

participating in a clinical rotation he or she must be adequately supervised at all times. A licensed medical provider (MD, DO, PA, NP) must be on site and evaluate every patient seen by the student. See the Supervision Policy of the *PA Program Handbook* for additional information.

Unexcused absence is grounds for failure of a rotation or clinical phase didactic course. Every unexcused absence and/or habitual tardiness will be reviewed by the DEE and/or Program Director. Students exhibiting patterns of such behavior may be brought to the PA Student Progression Committee (SPC) for academic review. Action by the SPC may include giving the student a formal warning, placing the student on academic probation, or student dismissal from the program.

For Clinical Phase absences due to:

1. **Personal illness, injury or emergency:** The student MUST submit the time off request in Exxat Prism (including uploading documentation for excused absences) AND call the rotation site **prior** to the start of assigned clinic time on each day of an absence. **Failure to notify both the program (via a time off request in Exxat) and the rotation site will result in an unexcused absence. An unexcused absence will result in the loss of a personal day.** In the event of illness or injury, the student must upload appropriate documentation (i.e., a note from a physician or other qualifying medical professional) with their time off request via Exxat Prism to be granted an excused absence. However, no protected health information or confidential medical information is required to be submitted or documented. Additional coursework or clinical time may be assigned at the discretion of the Director of Experiential Education and/or Program Director. In the event the absence occurs during a call back week, notification and documentation must be submitted to the Director of Experiential Education. Extended absence, even if excused, may require a Leave of Absence (LOA) from the Program, which will alter the student's anticipated graduation date and incur extra tuition expenses. For additional information, please refer to the Leave of Absence section of the *PA Program Student Handbook*.
2. **Personal Days – Three (3):** Students may request three personal days for use during the entire Program's clinical phase. These requests must be submitted via a time off request in the Exxat *Clinical Phase Administrative Course* no later than one week prior to the requested day(s) off. A personal day may not be requested for the first or last day of a rotation. Personal days may be taken in ½ day increments. All personal day requests must be approved by the DEE prior to the absence.
3. **Inclement Weather**

Outside of unforeseen personal illness or family emergency, the student may not plan any absence unless the PA Program DEE or Program Director grants approval in advance. The student should not, under any circumstances, directly ask a preceptor for permission for an absence for any reason.

Students may request to be excused for religious holy days; however, these dates must be discussed and approved by the DEE and/or Program Director prior to the beginning of the clinical phase.

Social Media Standards. *Adapted by the American Medical Association policy on Professionalism in the Use of Social Media.* The Internet has created the ability for students and professionals to communicate and share

information quickly and to reach large groups of people easily. Participating in social networking and other similar Internet opportunities can support ones' personal expression, enable individuals to have a professional presence online, and foster collegiality and camaraderie within a profession. Social networks, blogs, and other forms of communication online also create new challenges to the patient-clinician relationship. PA students and health professionals should weigh a number of considerations when maintaining a presence online:

- Be cognizant of standards of patient privacy and confidentiality that must be maintained in all environments, including online, and refrain from posting identifiable patient information online.
- When using the Internet for social networking, use privacy settings to safeguard personal information and content to the extent possible, but also realize that privacy settings are not absolute and that once on the Internet, content is likely there permanently. Thus, routinely monitor your social media presence to ensure that content posted is accurate and appropriate.
- If interacting with patients on the Internet, PA students and clinicians must maintain appropriate boundaries of the patient-provider relationship in accordance with professional ethical guidelines just, as they would in any other context.
- To maintain appropriate professional boundaries PA students and clinicians should consider separating personal and professional content online.
- When PA students see content posted by fellow PA students that appears unprofessional they have a responsibility to bring that content to the attention of the individual, so that he or she can remove it and/or take other appropriate actions.
- PA students and clinicians must recognize that actions online and content posted may negatively affect their reputations among patients and colleagues, may have consequences for their medical careers, and can undermine public trust in the medical profession.

The following pertains to the students' use of social media that directly relates to the educational process at Austin College's PA Program. The PA Program has a ZERO tolerance for any violation of the items below and will investigate complaints accordingly.

- Students may be held personally liable for proprietary, defamatory, libelous material posted on any form of social media.
- Students are not to use social media during classes and may be asked to leave the classroom if they do so, at the discretion of the faculty member or instructor.
- Students will face disciplinary action (may include program dismissal) for posting material that is defamatory, profane, threatening, harassing, hateful or private information that is humiliating to patients and their families, students, hospital/clinical staff, clinical instructors, faculty, staff.
- Violation of HIPAA policies may result in legal action against the student and dismissal from the program.

Appearance and Attire Policy. Clinical supervisors, preceptors, or PA faculty reserve the right to temporarily dismiss any student from a clinical or educational site who is not appropriately attired. That action may result in requiring further professional, developmental training for the student, and it may also interfere with successfully completing the rotation, graduating on time or completing the program altogether.

Campus Setting:

Clothing should be clean and neat, allowing for freedom of movement without inappropriate exposure. Clothing design and cut must be conservative. In addition, students should follow these guidelines:

- Hair should be neat, clean, and of a professional style that stays out of the face when providing simulated or actual patient care. Males may have beards and/or mustaches; however, these must be kept well-groomed and clean.
- Head coverings: Hats, caps, and other head coverings are not permitted except for medical or religious purposes.
- Fingernails should be short enough so that they do not interfere with performing physical examinations.
- Neither slippers nor pajamas are permitted.
- Tops that expose the torso or are low-cut at the neck are not permitted. Logos on shirts (including sweatshirts) cannot contain profanity or explicit images.
- Shorts/skirts must be long enough to extend past the fingertips of the wearer's fully extended arm.
- All clothes must be without holes or rips.

Lab and Clinical (Rotation) Settings:

In addition to the requirements listed above, the following policies will be in effect:

- Business casual attire
 - Scrubs may only be worn when directed to do so by the preceptor.
 - Hospital-issued scrubs should be donned and returned the same day; students should not attempt to personally launder and reuse.
- The OSHA occupational foot protection standard requires the use of protective footwear when employees are working in areas where there is a danger of foot injuries due to falling or rolling objects, or objects piercing the sole, and where there is a possibility of the employee's feet being exposed to hazards. Shoes must be close-toed; no sandals, flip flops, crocs with holes, or high heels are permitted.
- Artificial nails are not permitted in clinical settings.
- A clean white waist-length laboratory coat, with a PA program-issued patch and College issued name badge, is to always be worn in the clinical setting unless otherwise specified by the clinical site and preceptor.
- Clinical sites may require the removal of jewelry and the covering up of tattoos.
- Strong perfumes, colognes, lotions and/or aftershave lotion should not be worn.

PA Student Identification Policy (A3.06). While at clinical sites, you must clearly identify yourself as a PA student. Students must wear their Austin College issued name tag and a short, white laboratory coat with an Austin College PA Program patch in order to distinguish them from physicians, medical students, and other health professionals. Individual sites may issue and require that students wear an additional institutional identification badge. If this is the case, they must wear the institution's badge and their Austin College issued name tag unless specifically directed otherwise by the clinical site. Students are also expected to introduce themselves as a "Physician Assistant Student." To promote the safety of students, the Austin College name badge will have the student's first name and last initial.

Supervision Policy. Appropriate supervision is fundamental to the role of being a PA student. Without appropriate supervision, the PA student cannot legally or ethically provide patient care. While participating in clinical training experiences, PA students will obtain supervision from a PA, physician, or other licensed health care professional designated by the Program. Information regarding the designated preceptor at clinical training sites can be found in Exxat, the Program's clinical phase data management system.

If a circumstance arises in which a student is asked or expected to perform clinical procedures or to deliver patient care services without adequate or appropriate supervision, the student must politely, but firmly, decline and immediately contact the Director of Experiential Education (DEE).

To protect your personal and professional integrity and to avoid potential legal liability, do not perform any patient care activity if:

- The authorized preceptor or his/her designee is not on the immediate premises
- You have not received adequate instruction and/or are not proficient in skill or knowledgeable about the care you are asked to deliver
- You have reason to believe that such care or procedure may be harmful to the patient
- There is inadequate supervision available at the time you are expected to carry out the assignment
- The care or procedure is self-initiated (i.e., the PA student assumes or decides that a particular service or procedure should be performed)
- The activity is beyond the scope of your role as a PA student

In some settings, especially if there are many patients, you may be pressured to perform services which are inappropriate to your level of training or knowledge. It is much easier to defend why you won't perform a particular task than it is to defend why you endangered a patient's well-being. Don't let good judgment be compromised by the momentary flattery or excitement of doing something you view as challenging. You may face dismissal from the PA Program if you fail to exercise common sense regarding the welfare of the patients you encounter during your clinical training.

You have an obligation to exercise good judgment and professionalism in your approach to patient care. Use the above comments to guide you in your decision-making. If you encounter a compromising situation, ALWAYS call the DEE in a timely manner.

Confidentiality Policy. The PA Program reinforces the federal regulations regarding patient confidentiality as described in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Students receive HIPAA training as part of the program, and records of the training are maintained in their student files. PA students must understand the following in regard to confidentiality:

- A PA student will hold in confidence all personal patient information and agency information entrusted to them as per HIPAA guidelines
- Confidential clinical information (written or oral) given to a PA student is considered privileged within the content of the learning site and the enrolled course.
- Students are expressly prohibited from taking photographs or videos of patients without proper preceptor and patient consent. Distribution of photographs, video, or discussion of patient encounter, (even without patient identifying information) via e-mail or on social websites, is considered a significant violation

of both HIPAA standards and program policies and is grounds for referral to the PA SPC and dismissal from the program. Any student with questions regarding appropriate implementation of HIPAA standards or other matters of patient confidentiality should immediately contact DEE for guidance.

- All PA students are required to comply with the terms of HIPAA throughout the program. Failure to comply represents unethical conduct for a PA student. These actions may lead to failure of the course in which the incident occurs or even dismissal from the program.

The American Academy of Physician Associate's *Guidelines for Ethical Conduct for the PA Profession* is a foundational document for the PA profession and can be accessed here: [16-EthicalConduct.pdf \(aapa.org\)](#)

Requirements for Progression & Completion (A3.15b)

To progress to the next semester, a student must satisfactorily complete all academic requirements for the preceding semester. If a student is placed on academic probation at any time during or at the conclusion of a semester, he/she must meet the criteria for good academic standing by the end of the subsequent semester to progress through the program. The PA Student Progress Committee (SPC) regularly conducts a holistic review of each student's performance and makes recommendations for progression in the program. If remediation activities carry over into the subsequent semester, the PA SPC will review student performance at the conclusion of the remediation activity to ensure the student meets criteria for continuation in the program; this review may occur at any time in the subsequent semester and should occur soon after completion of the remediation activities. In order for a student to progress from the pre-clinical phase into the clinical phase, they must also be recommended for continuation by the PA Student Progression Committee and have the Program Director's approval.

To maintain good academic standing the following must be met:

- Maintain a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.75 or above
- Achieve a "Satisfactory" or letter grade of "C" (70%) or better in all pre-clinical and clinical phase courses as stipulated within each course syllabus
- Successfully complete remediation plans as documented on the student's individualized Focused Learning Plan(s)
- Exhibit professional behaviors consistent with clinical practice as a PA as documented in the PA Program Handbook and Clinical Phase Manual
- Display ability to meet Technical Standards of the Program (outlined in this Handbook)

To successfully complete the Pre-clinical Phase of the Program and enter the Clinical Phase, the student must:

- Achieve good academic standing, as described above, prior to the start of the Clinical Phase
- Pass the Core Competency Evaluation at the end of the pre-clinical phase with a score of at least 70% on each component of the assessment after no more than two attempts (second attempt is at the discretion of the PA Program Student Progression Committee). See the Pre-clinical Seminar course syllabus for more details.
- Pay tuition/fees in full
- Submit documentation of an ability to meet the program's technical standards (signed by the student)

- Submit documentation of required screenings/immunization updates and any additional clearances (as per the Clinical Phase Handbook) to Exxat
- Hold current CPR and ACLS certification, not to expire during the clinical phase
- Be recommended for progression by the PA Student Progression Committee

For a student to graduate from the PA program, the student must:

- Meet the time to completion requirement: Successfully complete all coursework according to program defined academic standards in no more than 30 (thirty) months. The coursework is a total of 28.5 credit units, which includes 18.5 credit units of didactic curriculum (pre-clinical and clinical phase combined) and 40 weeks (10 credit units) of supervised clinical practice experiences (clinical rotation)
- Be in good academic standing, as described above
- Demonstrate entry-level competence as a physician assistant per the Program Competencies (Learning Outcomes), assessed through the Summative Program Evaluation, taken within four months of graduation
- Be recommended for graduation by the PA Student Progression Committee and approved by the Program Director
- Have all tuition and fees paid in full

The College reserves the right to dismiss a student at any time for unsatisfactory academic performance, academic dishonesty, or for conduct detrimental to the College, to the welfare of patients, or to the welfare of other students, faculty or staff. The Program also reserves the right to dismiss a student if it is determined that a student's conduct is not consistent with the professional behavior of a future Physician Assistant. Failure to maintain good academic standing may result in dismissal from the program. In addition, a student who does not pay all tuition and fees by the due date may be dismissed from the Program.

Remediation & Deceleration (A3.15c)

Remediation

Student progress is monitored and documented in a manner that promptly identifies deficiencies in knowledge or skills and establishes means for remediation. Remediation is the program defined and applied process for addressing deficiencies in a student's knowledge and skills, such that the correction of these deficiencies is measurable and can be documented. Remediation provides students with opportunities to correct unsatisfactory performance and meet established learning outcomes.

Remediation, in the form of a formalized **Focused Learning Plan (FLP)**, is required in the pre-clinical phase for any failed written examination, skills assessment, or didactic course key assignment. FLPs are required for students in the clinical phase for reasons as outlined in the Remediation section of the Clinical Phase Manual.

FLPs are established to provide the greatest opportunity to achieve success in meeting the learning outcomes of a course or program competencies when an initial attempt has been unsuccessful. The FLP is developed at the discretion of the Course Director, with input from the Director of Student Success as necessary, and must be approved by Director of Student Success before implementation. FLPs are individualized for each student, however for a given deficiency, remediation plans will be developed in a consistent manner. Each plan clearly

documents the nature of the deficiency, the remediation plan, timeline for monitoring and completing the remediation (to include re-assessment) and expected outcomes.

Remediation activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Reading and study assignments
- Written self-reflection exercises
- Written response to selected exam items with reference citations
- Individual skills-training or faculty led tutoring
- Substituting one or more elective rotation(s) for a rotation(s) in a faculty-designated medical discipline
- Additional supervised clinical practice experience including repeating an entire rotation
 - Repeating an entire rotation will necessitate an 11th SCPE, resulting in a delayed graduation and additional tuition/fee expenses.

Students must sign the FLP acknowledging the steps and timeline for completing the plan. The student is responsible for documenting the remediation efforts on the FLP with oversight by the course director. FLP documentation must detail the completed learning activities and faculty must assess and document the student's ability to meet the learning outcome(s) within the designated time frame as outlined on the FLP.

- Each FLP is part of the student's academic record and is stored in the student's file.
- If a student has multiple FLPs in one course, one reassessment covering the combined deficiencies may occur.
- For any given remediation plan, it is the PA SPC that confirms successful/unsuccessful remediation.
- Failure to fulfill all terms of the FLP may result in adverse action including placement on academic probation or dismissal from the program as determined by the PA SPC after holistic review of the student's PA Program academic record.
- Successful completion of a FLP does not alter course grades.
 - Course grades are only altered for remediation activities relating to the Core Competency Evaluation and Summative Program Evaluation. See the corresponding sections below.
- Most students are reassessed during the last week of the semester in which the FLP was developed. However, there may be few instances, such as performance on a key assignment submitted at the end of the semester, that necessitates remediation and reassessment the following semester if the student is in good academic standing otherwise.

Remediation of Core Competency Evaluation Required to Progress to Clinical Phase

The Core Competency Evaluation (CCE) is taken at the end of the pre-clinical phase of training and consists of two sections: a written exam and an objective structured clinical exam (OSCE) that are both comprehensive in nature. This evaluation must be passed (score of at least 70% on each of the two components) to progress into the clinical year. Students earning a grade of less than 70% on any component will be reviewed by the PA SPC. It is at the discretion of the PA Program (by way of PA SPC recommendation and PA Program Director approval) that a student may have ONE attempt to remediate the failed portion(s) of the CCE. If remediation occurs, the student must successfully complete previously failed component(s) of the CCE, earning a maximum score of 70% to pass the PA550 Pre-Clinical Seminar course to be eligible to progress in the program if all other

requirements are met. See the “Requirements for Progression and Completion” for more details. Timing of this remediation process may delay the start of supervised clinical practice experiences and thus delay graduation.

Remediation of the Summative Program Evaluation Required for Graduation

The Summative Program Evaluation (SPE) is taken within four months of graduation and is designed to ensure students meet the program competencies required for graduation. The SPE consists of three sections: a written exam, an objective structured clinical exam (OSCE) utilizing standardized patients, and a practical exam assessing students’ procedural, documentation, and oral case presentation skills. The SPE is comprehensive in nature and students must pass all components to graduate from the program. The PAEA End of Curriculum Exam is used for the written component of this exam.

To pass the SPE, students must achieve all three of the following benchmarks:

- Achieve a scale score of 1450 or higher on the PAEA EOC exam
- Score a 70% on the standardized patient OSCE AND
- Earn a Satisfactory rating on all four components of the practical exam

Students who achieve an EOC exam scale score below 1450, earn a grade of less than 70% on the OSCE component of the SPE OR score an unsuccessful on any component of the practical exam will be reviewed by the PA Student Progression Committee (SPC). It is at the discretion of the PA Program (by way of PA SPC recommendation and PA Program Director approval) that a student may have ONE attempt to remediate the failed portion(s) of the SPE. If remediation occurs, the student must successfully complete the previously failed component(s) of the SPE to pass the PA570 Clinical Seminar course and be eligible to graduate from the program if all other course and program requirements are met. See the “Requirements for Progression and Completion” in the Austin College PA student handbook and the PAED570 Clinical Seminar course syllabus for more details. Timing of this remediation process may delay graduation.

Deceleration

ARC-PA defines deceleration as “the loss of a student from the entering cohort, who remains matriculated in the physician assistant program.”

The PA Program is designed for full-time students who are admitted as a part of a cohort. Due to the nature of the curriculum and academic demands, the PA Program does not offer a part-time option to students. Similarly, it does not offer a reduced educational (course) load. All PA students must take the required course load in its entirety each semester and they must take the courses in the order in which they are throughout the program.

The Austin College PA program does not offer academic deceleration as a component of academic intervention or remediation. Students who have an extended program length due to leave of absence, academic intervention, or remediation must meet the program's time-to-completion requirement (30 months) and are considered part of the cohort they entered the program with.

A student who has previously enrolled, but did not complete the PA program, must reapply. The application will be treated in the same manner as all other applications. In this instance, the applicant will not be considered for advanced placement, regardless of the student’s previous time in the program.

Academic Probation, Withdrawal & Dismissal (A3.15d)

Academic Probation

Academic probation is a status designated by the PA Student Progression Committee (SPC) when a student violates one or more of the established academic standards of the PA Program as outlined in this Handbook. Any student placed on probation will be advised of that action in writing by the Program Director. The deficiencies will be outlined, and the student will be required to acknowledge receipt of this communication. In addition, the student will be advised as to what course of action will be available to him or her to remedy those deficiencies.

Any student meeting criteria for academic probation for two consecutive semesters will undergo a holistic academic record review by the PA SPC and may be dismissed from the program.

Any of the following will result in a student being referred to the PA SPC for consideration of academic probation:

- Earning an end-of-semester cumulative GPA below 2.75
- Unsuccessful completion of a remediation plan (based on performance or expanding beyond the established timeframe)
- Failure to uphold the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct as written in this Handbook
- Failure of one or more components of the Core Competency Evaluation on the first attempt
- Failure of one or more components of the Summative Program Evaluation on the first attempt
- Failure of ONE (1) rotation based on Preceptor Evaluation of Student (*See the Clinical Phase Manual for more information*)
- Failure of ONE (1) SCPE Faculty Evaluation of Student (*See the Clinical Phase Manual for more information*)
- A student failing an EOR examination in the same discipline twice (*See the Clinical Phase Manual for more information*)
- A student failing an EOR on first attempt a second time (in two different core disciplines) (*See the Clinical Phase Manual for more information*)

The program reserves the right to consider students for academic probation for occurrences that are not listed above if there are concerns about the student meeting the academic standards, including those outlined in the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct. Academic probation may be disclosed in any final verifications of training, employment letters, and any letters of reference from the PA Program.

Return to Non-probationary Status

In collaboration with the PA Program Director, the PA SPC will remove a student from probation under the following circumstances:

- Earning a cumulative GPA of 2.75 or higher the next consecutive semester (if applicable) AND
- Meeting the terms as outlined in the student's academic probation letter

Dismissal

Any of the following will result in a student being referred to the PA SPC for consideration of dismissal from the program:

- Earned didactic (non-SCPE) course grade of “F”
- Earned cumulative GPA of less than 2.75 for two consecutive semesters
- Unsuccessful completion of a remediation plan (based on performance or expanding beyond the established timeframe)
- Failure of TWO (2) SCPE courses (clinical rotations) as per *the Clinical Phase Manual*, which describes what constitutes a failure
- Cumulative GPA of less than 2.75 at the end of the pre-clinical phase
- Failure of one or more components of the core competency evaluation (after first or second attempt as per recommendation of the PA SPC)
- Failure of one or more components of the Summative Program Evaluation (after first or second attempt as per recommendation of the PA SPC)
- Failure to uphold the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct as written in this Handbook
- Failure to meet the Technical Standards of the program as written in this Handbook

The program reserves the right to consider students for dismissal for occurrences that are not listed above if there are concerns about the student meeting the academic standards, including those outlined in the PA Program Academic Code of Student Conduct.

Withdrawal

Students who have made the decision to withdraw from the PA program must first meet with either their Academic Coach or the PA Program Director. Students must withdraw from the entire program and cannot withdraw from individual courses. There are two categories of withdrawal from Austin College: College Withdrawal and Medical Withdrawal. The PA Program Director will assist the student in determining which of the two process below are applicable.

College Withdrawal

- Students seeking to withdraw from the college are referred to the Registrar’s Office to receive a withdrawal form in person or by email: registrar@austincollege.edu.
- Students will be instructed to schedule an appointment with the Director of the Center for Student Success and Access Services
 - Exit Counseling will occur and help determine the *Effective Date of Withdrawal*.
- The student will then meet with Financial Aid for signature of the withdrawal form, followed by the Business Office for signature
- The student will then return the form to the Registrar’s Office who will process and get VPAA’s signature
- The Registrar’s Office will send official withdrawal notification to the PA Program Director

Medical Withdrawal

- Students seeking a medical withdrawal (WM) are referred to the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) academicaffairs@austincollege.edu.
- Medical documentation is submitted to the VPAA for review. If the review supports a medical withdrawal, the VPAA will complete the Medical Withdrawal Form. For privacy purposes, the medical documentation is not attached to the form, only verified that it was reviewed by the VPAA.
- The form is sent to the Registrar's Office for further processing.
- A WM will be assigned as the current course grades. If faculty members turn in regular letter grades or incompletes, the WM will replace those grades
- The student will be withdrawn from all PA program courses and, therefore, must also complete the regular withdrawal form. Once completed, the form and official withdrawal notification will be sent to the PA Program Director
- The student will not be required to meet with the Director of the Center for Student Success and Access Services

Student Appeal: Academic Standing (A3.15g)

Decisions regarding violations of academic integrity, academic probation, and dismissal made by the PA Program Student Progression Committee (SPC) can be appealed, in writing, to the Vice President of Academic Affairs.

A student who chooses to appeal the decision of the PA Program Student Progression Committee (SPC) must present the appeal in writing to the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) within thirty (30) days of the SPC's notification to the student of the committee's decision. Written statements from both the student and the Chair of the SPC are obtained prior to the VPAA's consideration. After reviewing all available pertinent information, the VPAA will notify the PA Program Director and student of the appeal decision. The VPAA will communicate the decision to the PA Program Director and student within 14 days of receiving the involved parties' written statements. This decision is final and cannot be appealed.

It is at the determination of the PA program SPC if the student may continue with ongoing course work or be given a mandatory leave of absence while a case is on appeal.

Health Screening & Immunizations (A3.07)

Each student must meet the PA program's health screening and immunization requirements prior to matriculation and before entering the clinical phase of training. The PA Program contracts a third-party service (EXXAT) to record and certify each matriculants' health screening and immunization status.

Student health records are confidential and must not be accessible to or reviewed by the PA Program faculty or staff except for immunization and screening results, which may be maintained and released with written permission from the student. This written consent allows the following:

- EXXAT to release information regarding immunizations, tuberculosis screenings, drug screenings, and background checks to the PA Program

- PA Program to release information regarding immunizations, tuberculosis screenings, drug screenings, and background checks via EXXAT with clinical sites.

Required Forms

All students are required to submit the Austin College PA Student Health Forms to the Health Services office before matriculating into the PA program. **These forms will NOT be accepted directly by the PA Program.** Failure to complete and turn in forms as described below will result in the inability to matriculate into the AC PA Program.

The following items comprise the PA Student Health Forms and required for new students:

- Disability Accommodations Form
- Health Services Authorization Form
- PA Student Physical Examination Form
- Health Insurance Waiver/Enrollment Instructions

Immunization forms, the PA Student Physical Examination Form, background check, and drug screening documentation must be submitted to EXXAT. Note that students will be submitting the PA Student Physical Examination form to BOTH AC Health Services and Exxat.

The physical examination must be performed by a licensed health care provider. No faculty or staff member of the PA program will have access to the information contained in this form; it is held confidentially by Health Services and Exxat. The PA program will only receive notification from Exxat that the student has been cleared to participate in the PA program plan of study.

Immunizations

The PA program follows the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) current immunizations guidelines for healthcare workers in establishing its requirements for students to participate in supervised patient care activities. It is the sole responsibility of the student to complete and submit all of the correct requirements/documentation before the due date(s) and to never let any of those requirements/documentation expire. Student noncompliance with immunizations at any time while enrolled in the program may result in a delayed graduation or an inability to complete the clinical phase of training, resulting in dismissal. Concerns regarding the below vaccination requirements need to be addressed with the Program Director.

Proof of each of the following must be dated and signed by a healthcare professional prior to submitting to the third-party tracking service (EXXAT).

- **Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR)**
 - The student must provide documentation of two MMR vaccines given at least 28 days apart or a positive titer showing immunity.
 - If students do not have two documented doses of MMR they need to be serologically tested for immunity. If the student has a negative titer, the student will need to repeat the two-shot series.

- **Diphtheria/Tetanus/Pertussis**
 - The student must provide documentation of a single Tdap vaccination. Students who do not have documentation of a previously received dose of Tdap need to receive a dose of Tdap before matriculation.
 - All students are required to receive Td boosters every 10 years thereafter.
- **Varicella (Chicken Pox)**
 - The student must provide evidence of varicella immunity in one of the following ways:
 - Documentation of two doses of varicella vaccine given at least 28 days apart
 - Laboratory evidence of immunity through a qualitative titer
 - If the student has a negative titer, the student will need to get two doses of varicella vaccine, four weeks apart.
- **Hepatitis B**
 - The student must provide documentation of vaccination (3-dose series of Recombivax HB or Engerix-B OR 2-dose series of Heplisav-B) by submitting a quantitative antibody titer proving immunity.
 - If the titer is negative or the student has not previously been vaccinated for Hepatitis B, the student must receive the series and undergo antibody titer testing one month after the final dose of the repeated series.
 - Students receiving the Hepatitis B series may matriculate into the program with the first dose marked complete, but the student must remain in compliance and get the subsequent doses as per their provider's recommendation. The series must not extend beyond six (6) months in total. Students who continue to have a negative titer after two rounds of a Hep B series are considered "non-responders."
 - An 'In-progress' designation within Exxat will be considered temporarily as complete by the program if the student is in the process of completing their HepB vaccination series.
- **TB Screening**
 - All students must have a two-step PPD skin test (TST) or TB blood test (i.e., QuantiFERON Gold or T-SPOT.TB) prior to matriculation into the program.
 - The CDC has updated its TB screening guidelines for healthcare workers to state that after initial screening, "an annual TB test is not recommended unless there is a known exposure or ongoing transmission."
 - Students may need to repeat TB screening while enrolled in the program on an annual basis if required by clinical training sites.
 - CDC guidelines will be followed in the setting of known TB exposure during clinical training.
 - All students with positive TB tests (TST or TB blood test) should receive a symptom evaluation and chest x-ray to rule out TB disease. Additional workup may be needed based on these results. The local health department should be notified immediately if TB disease is suspected.
 - If the chest x-ray is positive, the student will not be allowed to matriculate or continue in the program until treated and cleared by an infectious disease specialist.

- If a student previously had a BCG vaccine or was born outside of the U.S., a PPD skin test is not acceptable. These students must complete an IGRA test (QuantiFERON Gold, TSpot) instead.
- Individuals with a prior history of positive TB test need to provide documentation of a normal chest x-ray, complete a TB symptom checklist, and be cleared by an infectious disease specialist before they begin the PA Program. Repeat chest x-ray is not required unless they are symptomatic.
- **Influenza**
 - All students are required to undergo influenza vaccination during the first fall of enrollment by October 15th.
 - Students will need a second vaccination prior to October 15th of the clinical phase.
 - If the student wants to request an exemption, they must request the Texas Department of State Health Services form electronically at <httpswwwco-request.dshs.texas.gov/>. The form is mailed from DSHS to the student, and it may take up to two weeks to receive the form. The DSHS form must be completed, notarized, and submitted to the Director of Health Services and a copy must be uploaded to EXXAT Approve. It is the student's responsibility to complete the DSHS form and have it notarized.
- **Meningococcal**
 - All students matriculating into the program who are younger than 22 years of age need to submit proof of a must provide documentation of a single MCV4 (Menactra, Menveo, MenQuadfi or MenACWY) vaccination received at 16 years of age or older. Students who do not have documentation of this vaccination within the specified time frame must receive a dose of MCV4 before matriculation.
 - Meningococcal B vaccinations are strongly recommended for all students but are not required.
- **Polio**
 - The student must provide documentation of last Polio booster
 - If the student wants to request an exemption, they must request the Texas Department of State Health Services form electronically at <httpswwwco-request.dshs.texas.gov/>. The form is mailed from DSHS to the student, and it may take up to two weeks to receive the form. The DSHS form must be completed, notarized, and submitted to the Director of Health Services and a copy must be uploaded to EXXAT Approve. It is the student's responsibility to complete the DSHS form and have it notarized.
- **Hepatitis A**
 - The student must provide documentation of vaccination (3-dose series of Twinrix OR 2-dose series of HAVRIX or VAQTA) OR by submitting a quantitative antibody titer proving immunity.
 - If the titer is negative/low/equivocal or the student has not previously been vaccinated for Hepatitis A, the student must receive the vaccine.
 - Students receiving the Hepatitis A series may matriculate into the program with the first dose marked complete, but the student must remain in compliance and get the subsequent dose as per their provider's recommendation. The series must not extend

beyond six (6) months in total. Students who continue to have a negative titer after 6 doses are considered “non-responders.”

- An 'In-progress' designation within Exxat will be considered temporarily as complete by the program if the student
 - If the student wants to request an exemption, they must request the Texas Department of State Health Services form electronically at <https://www.co-request.dshs.texas.gov/>. The form is mailed from DSHS to the student, and it may take up to two weeks to receive the form. The DSHS form must be completed, notarized, and submitted to the Director of Health Services and a copy must be uploaded to EXXAT Approve. It is the student’s responsibility to complete the DSHS form and have it notarized
- **COVID vaccination**
 - All students are strongly encouraged to be vaccinated against COVID-19. Please submit documentation of receiving either a one dose-approved or two-dose approved COVID vaccination. The program may have difficulty placing unvaccinated students in clinical settings based on clinical site requirements. For this reason, unvaccinated students may experience a delay in graduation.

Please note that clinical sites may require additional vaccinations and documentation of titers for certain infectious diseases such as hepatitis C. The program will communicate additional requirements to students in advance. Students who do not meet the above criteria may not be able to meet the requirements for graduation based on clinical site expectations.

If students participate in international curricular activities, the program will follow CDC guidelines and require vaccinations and/or prophylaxis based on the region of travel.

Background Checks

Due to growing nationwide concerns regarding the suitability of today's healthcare professionals, many hospitals, healthcare systems, clinics, and physician offices require disclosure of an individual’s criminal history. In addition, many state statutes also require disclosure of an individual's criminal history in order to apply for certain health professional certificates, registrations, and licenses.

The existence of a criminal history may subject an individual to denial of an initial application for a license to practice in a clinical setting or result in the revocation or suspension of an existing license. In response to this growing trend, Austin College requires all PA students to submit to a criminal background check. It is the policy of the College that **all accepted PA students must submit to a criminal background check prior to matriculation**. In addition, students who remain enrolled must submit to a criminal background check as needed to remain eligible to participate in clinical rotations.

The results of background checks are reviewed by the PA Program Director to determine whether there is a record of misdemeanor and/or felony conviction(s). A record of criminal activity will not automatically disqualify a student from enrollment or continued enrollment. The College will consider such factors as (but not limited to) the nature of the crime, the age of the individual at the time the crime was committed, length of time since the criminal activity, any fines, sanctions or convictions, the nature of the PA program and the relatedness of

the conviction, and whether the College will be able to provide appropriate professional clinical training to the student.

If the nature of a student's results suggests that their criminal history may negatively impact the student's ability to progress successfully through the program, the PA Program Director will present the results to the PA Student Progression Committee (SPC), keeping the student's identity confidential. It is the SPC that will determine if the student will be allowed to matriculate into the program or be denied admission. This decision can be appealed, in writing, to the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) within seven (7) days after notification of the SPC's decision by the PA program to the student. The VPAA's decision is final and cannot be appealed.

Students who are permitted to matriculate with a positive criminal background check are required to sign a waiver stating their understanding of the possible negative impact of their background check on their education and post-graduate licensure.

Failure to disclose criminal activity or material misrepresentation of information by an incoming student is deemed to be falsification of the application and may result in denial of admission, matriculation and/or dismissal from the PA program. Failure to disclose criminal activity or material misrepresentation of information by an enrolled student is deemed to be a violation of the PA Program Academic Student Code of Conduct and may result in dismissal from the program. Incoming and enrolled students must disclose any criminal activity, including misdemeanor or felony charges/convictions to the PA Program Director.

All fees associated with background checks are the responsibility of the student.

Drug Screening

It is the policy of the College that **all accepted PA students must submit to a urine drug screen (UDS) prior to matriculation**. The offer of admission may be revoked if a matriculating student declines the urine drug screen or has a positive urine drug screen (outside of the setting of prescribed medications).

In addition to the UDS prior to matriculation, students must submit to a UDS prior to starting the clinical phase of training. Students may need to submit to additional screenings as needed to remain eligible to participate in clinical rotations. For example, some clinical training sites require a UDS within 30 days of starting a clinical rotation.

A student may be dismissed from the program if the student either declines the UDS or has a positive urine drug screen (outside of the setting of prescribed medications). If a UDS is positive, the PA Program Director will present the findings to the Student Progression Committee (SPC), keeping the student's identity confidential. It is the SPC that will determine if the student will be allowed to matriculate or continue in the program. This decision can be appealed, in writing, to the Vice President of Academic Affairs (VPAA) within seven (7) days after notification of the SPC's decision by the PA program to the student. The VPAA's decision is final and cannot be appealed.

All fees associated with urine drug screens are the responsibility of the student (matriculating and enrolled).

Access and Referral to Student Services (A3.10)

The PA Program is committed to the success and well-being of all students and recognizes the importance of timely access to services addressing personal issues which may impact progress in the PA program. To expedite access to services, students do NOT need the prior approval of the PA faculty to access the below services. Students do need to provide documentation (without personal health information) to the program for any missed classroom/exam time as per the attendance and missed exam policies outlined in this Handbook.

Medical Emergencies

In the case of an urgent or emergent medical need, students should pursue medical services emergently regardless of program activities. Although faculty are not permitted to provide healthcare to students, they may assist students in the case of a true emergency. In case of medical emergency call 911.

Student Health Services

Student Health is located in the Adams Center where a Registered Nurse operates a clinic for immediate assistance. There is no charge to see the nurse. Over-the-counter medications are dispensed as necessary. Unless otherwise posted, medical clinics are from 12-1p.m. several days during the week. Up to date clinic hours can be found on the Health Services web site.

A calendar of physician appointments is also posted on the Health Services web site, including Women's Health and Dermatology clinics. The Business Office will bill students for doctor visits. Fees vary for specialty clinics and whether prescription medication is dispensed at a doctor's visit. Students must pay for any laboratory, x-rays, or other outpatient services ordered.

Telehealth Available for All Students

As a supplement to our Student Health Center and Counseling Services, Austin College now has access to an extensive online program featuring 24/7 on-demand counseling, urgent medical care, therapy and psychiatry all at no cost to the student. Whether you want to make a quick visit between classes, after dinner, or while on clinical rotations, visiting home, or on vacation, all students can obtain on-demand virtual visits with a health professional on their smartphone, tablet, or computer. Services provided by Academic LiveCare. Use **ALC** as the Service Key. When prompted for payment use the Coupon Code **ALCROOS** to waive payment. Academic LiveCare can also be accessed by calling (866)349-5575.

Counseling Services

In addition to the counseling services available through Academic LiveCare, services are available to all enrolled students through the Adams Center on campus. The contact number for the Adams center is at 903-813-2247. An additional phone number for counseling services is 903-813-2451. Here, short-term counseling approaches are utilized, and students may be referred to community resources, should medication consultation be indicated or when issues require treatment approaches beyond those offered by the Counseling Staff. Counseling is provided by appointment, and six free sessions are available to enrolled students per semester.

Self-help materials are available at Adams Center and on the counseling services website.

In addition to the counseling services, there are other resources that can help students with their mental wellbeing:

- Crisis counseling is available to EVERYONE 24/7
Just text 741741 and someone will be there to help with your stress & anxiety.
- National suicide and crisis lifeline: **988**
 - A national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Center for Student Success and Access Services

The Center for Student Success and Access Services (CSSAS) is dedicated to helping students with the resources they need to achieve academic and personal success. All services of the CSSAS are free and include support for study skills, time management, academic writing, test taking skills, resume writing, and interviewing skills. In addition, the CSSAS supports the academic success of students with disabilities. The CSSAS can be reached at cssas@austincollege.edu or 903-813-2454.

Disability Services. Students with disabilities are an integral part of the Austin College PA Program's rich diversity. The College is committed to providing services and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities including those with mobility, visual, speech, hearing impairments; chronic illnesses; learning differences; psychological disabilities; and temporary disabilities to the extent that such accommodation does not impose an undue hardship on the conduct of its business. Students with disabilities have rights that are protected under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). It is the policy of the Austin College PA Program to ensure that no qualified student with a disability is excluded from participation in educational programming or subjected to discrimination. The Deputy Title IX Coordinator and Compliance Officer is the Section 504 and Americans with Disabilities Compliance Act (ADA) Coordinator.

It is the responsibility of the student to register with and provide verification of academic accommodation needs to the Director of the CSSAS as soon as possible. After being granted reasonable academic accommodations by the CSSAS, the student must also contact the PA Program director in a timely manner to arrange for the implementation of these accommodations. For further information regarding disability services or to register for assistance, please contact the Academic Skills Center at 903-813-2454 or visit their office at WCC 211. Please see the [Austin College Disability Services Handbook](#) for more information.

For additional information or questions about accommodations, please contact Access Services at asc@austincollege.edu.

Student Health Insurance

Each student is required to have health insurance while at the College. Additionally, every student is required to enroll or waive the Student Healthcare plan electronically at this website: <https://www2.academichealthplans.com/school/2351.html>. If students do not waive the plan, they will be automatically enrolled and billed for the policy through the Business Office.

Austin College has made a Student Medical Health Care plan available to students. Students may choose health care insurance through Austin College or may choose their own comparable plan. Evidence of acceptable non-college Health insurance coverage must be provided prior to program matriculation. Non-college insurance plans must provide coverage comparable to that offered by the College. Short term or catastrophic coverage is not deemed comparable and cannot be an acceptable health insurance plan. Students who have Medicaid may consider buying additional insurance coverage if they are required to go to an out of state clinical rotation.

Students may be responsible for any costs entailed in treating injuries, exposures and/or illness during matriculation in the PA Program. Each student should carefully evaluate his/her health insurance policy, including coverage and copay to fully understand all potential costs that may be incurred. Students can contact Health Services at health@austincollege.edu for additional information.

Leave of Absence (LOA)

The PA program is a cohort program and, as such, each student's timely progression through the program is essential for the scaffolding of new knowledge and skills and the refinement of clinical decision-making abilities. The plan of study is designed to be completed in 24 months of continuous study and must be completed in no more than 30 months. The time limitation to LOAs (consecutive days away from the program) reflects the nature of course progression in a cohort program, the importance of timely acquisition of knowledge, and the scaffolding of learning.

Given the pace of the curriculum, students in the didactic phase of the program may take up to a **two-week** LOA (with Program Director approval) without the need to withdraw from courses. If a student requires a longer LOA in the didactic phase, the student will be required to withdraw from coursework and may apply for readmission. Readmission is at the sole discretion of the PA Program Admissions Committee. No advanced standing will be granted if the student is readmitted.

During the clinical phase of the program, students may take one consecutive LOA for a duration of up to **six (6) months** (with an exception that if the student was granted a LOA in the pre-clinical phase, this time is deducted). If a clinical phase student needs time away from the program that extends beyond six months, the student must withdraw from the program and will be eligible to apply for readmission. Readmission is at the sole discretion of the PA Program Admissions Committee. No advanced standing will be granted if the student is readmitted.

A formal written request for any LOA must be submitted to and approved by the Program Director. A leave of absence cannot be granted for academic reasons (i.e. to keep the student from failing) and is typically only granted in the setting of significant illness, injury, childbearing, or catastrophic life event.

Assessment Policy

Testing dates and assignment deadlines are absolute. Course Directors set deadlines for papers, written and practical examinations. Students are expected to understand and be responsible for the following PA Program policies related to academic assessments.

Exam Tardiness

Students will not be permitted to enter the classroom to take an exam after another student has completed the exam and left the classroom. Time allocated for assessments will not be extended if a student arrives late. If the student believes that the tardiness resulted from an unforeseen event, the student has two choices:

- Proceed to the testing site and complete the assessment in the remaining time allotted if no student has yet finished the exam and left the classroom
- Inform the Course Director as soon as possible about their tardiness for determination as to whether it constitutes as excused instance if another student has already finished the exam and left the classroom
 - See missed exam policy

Missed Exam Policy: Pre-clinical Phase

- If a student misses a scheduled examination due to an unanticipated catastrophic life event, the student or his/her designee is required to promptly notify the Program. The Course Director, in conjunction with the Director of Didactic Education and/or Program Director, will determine accommodations to be made regarding a make-up examination.
- If a student misses a scheduled examination due to an illness, the student is required to promptly notify the Program.
 - If the student has documentation from a healthcare provider confirming a recent visit, the Course Director, in conjunction with the Director of Didactic Education and/or Program Director, will determine accommodations to be made regarding a make-up examination.
 - In the event of an illness or other obstacle that precludes a student from taking an exam that is not formally documented by a healthcare professional, this will be classified as an unexcused absence. The course director, in conjunction with the Director of Didactic Education and/or the Program Director, will determine when a makeup examination will be administered.
 - In the setting of an unexcused exam, a makeup exam may be allowed. The highest grade a student can earn on any unexcused missed exam is a 65%
 - Only one makeup examination for an unexcused missed exam will be granted during the pre-clinical phase. Any additional unexcused missed exams will result in a grade of 0 (zero).
 - See Clinical Phase Manual for information regarding missed End of Rotation Exams.

During Assessments

During an assessment, only assessment materials (individual marker board, erasable marker, and if necessary, an approved calculator) and computers are permitted on student desks. All other items (e.g., cell phones, graphing calculators, other electronic devices including smartwatches, wallets, purses, notebooks, paper, and textbooks) are prohibited. Students must leave personal items along the perimeter of the classroom room (e.g., backpacks, purses, hats, etc.) at least five minutes prior to the official exam start time. All phones, smartwatches, etc. should be in silent mode. Students are not allowed to access their materials — including phones — until all students have completed the assessment.

Most assessments, other than practical exams, will be administered on a computer. Students who browse the web or look at any other resources during an assessment will be in violation of the Academic Integrity Policy. Reproduction of assessment items, in any manner (i.e., written, verbal, or electronic), for the purpose of sharing or distribution is cheating and is also a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.

Restroom breaks will be permitted at the discretion of the exam proctor only if an assessment exceeds 90 minutes. Only one student will be allowed to use the restroom at a time. Proctors reserve the right to accompany any student who leaves the assessment room for a restroom break.

Failure to abide by the above policies and procedures during assessments may result in a range of consequences, from the student being asked to leave the assessment room with a recorded zero to being presented to the Student Progression Committee.

Late Assignments

There will be an 8% deduction each day from the final grade for any assignment that is late for the first 3 (days) calendar days. Assignments will not be accepted thereafter and will be graded as a 0 (zero).

There may be instances when extensions are predetermined given a student's formal documentation of accommodations from the CSSAS. In these cases, the same deductions described in this section will apply with consideration to the extended due date.

Grade Disagreements

When a student disagrees with a course director over a course grade where the academic integrity of the student is not in question, the student should first discuss the concern with the course director to resolve the difference. Concerns should be related to mathematical calculation or reporting error. If resolution does not occur, the concern may be referred by either party to the PA Program Director who will determine whether a calculation or reporting error occurred. If an error occurs, the Program Director will facilitate a correction in collaboration with the course director. If a program faculty member recognizes an error in validating an assessment resulting in inaccurate grades (which should be a rare occurrence), a program faculty member may change grades to give credit for correct work by changing posted grades in the positive, but not in the negative. PA faculty members, including the Program Director, will not change grades for any other reason.

Students may appeal grades outside of calculation or reporting errors to the Program Director. If a substantive error affecting grade validity is identified, the Student Progress Committee will meet to consider an exception to academic policies, which is granted only under exceptional circumstances.

Closed Meeting Policy

All students enrolled in Austin College's PA Program are considered graduate students. As such, the College holds the student accountable for his/her actions and decisions. During the student's enrollment any and all required meetings with faculty committees, faculty, or College administrators, are closed to only the involved student. All invited or voluntary formal or informal meetings, telephone discussions, or conference calls with faculty committees, faculty or College administrators are closed to only the involved student.

Student Employment Policies (A3.04, A3.05)

Working for the PA Program

Students cannot be required to work for the PA program, nor can they serve as instructional faculty, clinical or administrative staff.

PA students may have extensive clinical backgrounds but are never allowed to substitute for, or function as, instructional faculty or clinical staff. Students with specific prior knowledge, experiences, and skills may share their knowledge and skills in didactic and hands-on learning sessions with direct faculty oversight, however, such students are not to be the primary instructor or instructor of record for any component of the curriculum. (A3.05)

Employment while enrolled as a PA student

Because of the pace and rigor of the Austin College PA Program, students are strongly discouraged from working while in the program. PA education is considered among the most difficult graduate education experiences. Students who are employed during enrollment may struggle significantly and jeopardize their academic success. (A3.15e)

The following guidelines have been established to help the students in the event they are considering employment during their enrollment in the PA Program:

1. Employment while enrolled is strongly discouraged
2. Students who are employed or are considering employment should make this known to their academic coach.
3. Students who are working and find themselves in academic difficulty will be advised to consider terminating that work.
4. Coursework and all required program activities will not be changed to conform to student employment. Your education must remain your primary responsibility when balancing work and school.

Student Soliciting Clinical Rotations (A3.03)

PA students are not required to provide or solicit clinical sites or preceptors.

Students may make suggestions to principal faculty for sites and preceptors. Student suggested sites and preceptors will be reviewed and evaluated for educational suitability by the program's principal faculty. It is at the PA Program's sole discretion to approve clinical sites and preceptors for use as supervised clinical practice experiences for individual students.

Faculty as Healthcare Providers to Students (A3.09)

The Austin College PA Program faculty members (principal faculty, medical director, and program director) may not serve as health care providers to students while enrolled in the PA program. The PA Program faculty can assist in referring students to a health care provider in the community and provide supportive measures in case of emergencies but cannot serve directly as the student's health care provider.

Academic Coaching

The PA Program Academic Coaching program was developed to support student success in the program. Upon entry into the PA program, students in each cohort are assigned to an academic team, consisting of approximately six students, with a principal faculty member serving as the team's coach. The academic team is the student's first "family" in the program, and the academic coach serves an important role in advising, counseling, and mentoring students through successes and challenges. Coaches listen to students' reflections, track academic progress, assist students in creating academic and professional goals, and support students in meeting their goals. The coaching program is essential for fostering academic success, maintaining clear and effective communication, and supporting a cohesive, collaborative, and professional culture among faculty and students, particularly when they may be geographically separated during the clinical phase of the program.

Goals of academic coaching

- Establish academic teams with faculty and student leadership to facilitate group communication and student support.
- Create a sense of community and connection both within academic teams and among the entire PA cohort.
- Maintain timely and up-to-date awareness of academic performance and non-academic concerns of individual students.
- Support students in celebrating successes, overcoming challenges, and creating and achieving academic and professional goals.
- Role model professional behaviors, including collaboration and communication.
- Connect students with supports and services at Austin College and within their own communities.

Roles and responsibilities

The Academic Coaching Program is administered by the Director of Student Success (DSS) and overseen by the PA Program Director. The coaching relationship requires active participation and commitment of both Academic Coaches and Students. The DSS and Program Director work closely with faculty coaches to track academic progress, monitor non-academic concerns, and address student issues. The DSS works with the Program Director, academic coaches, course directors, and students to provide timely support for urgent and emergent student issues when they arise. Academic Coaches meet with each member of their team individually at least once each semester. Students are encouraged to reach out to their academic coach, or any other program faculty member, for academic support at any time.

Safety and Security (A1.02g)

To ensure a safe environment for study and work, faculty and staff have the responsibility to make safety their concern. Austin College will:

- Establish and maintain a healthy and safe environment for study and work and for sanctioned activities of students, faculty, staff, and visitors
- Ensure equipment and furniture is safe and in good working order
- Address and report unsafe conditions

- Ensure safety procedures are in place, understood, and practiced
- Protect facilities to the maximum extent feasible
- Comply with applicable laws, regulations, and relevant published standards and practices for the workplace
- Consider the health and safety of students, faculty, staff, and visitors in the design, operation, construction, modification, or renovation of buildings and facilities
- Provide periodic training and safety exercises for the campus community
- Maintain an active Safety Committee for the purpose of ensuring the safety of the college community
- Utilize AC Alert, an emergency notification system provided to all Austin College students, faculty, and staff to help facilitate emergency communication by voicemail, email, and/or text messages
- Publish an annual safety and fire report that is available to the campus community

The PA Program instructional site (PAIS) is comprised of 13,000 square feet of space leased in the Gateway Village property located in Denison, TX. The PAIS is an approximately 12-minute drive from the Austin College campus in Sherman, TX. Gateway Village is patrolled by a private security company, Allied Universal. An on-site security officer is present from 7am – 4pm Monday through Friday. To contact the building’s security in a non-emergency situation, please call (903) 357-7255. In the event of an emergency always call 911.

In addition to the security provided at the PA Program instructional site, Austin College has a Campus Police department that patrols the campus in Sherman, TX. Given the campus’s proximity to the PAIS and the resources the campus provides, it is anticipated that students will spend time in both locations and, thus, will need to be aware of the security services provided by Campus Police.

The purpose of Campus Police is to promote an environment of safety and security for the educational process at Austin College. Campus Police is charged with the responsibility of protecting life and property and preserving peace within the Austin College community. The officers of this department enforce all rules and regulations of the College as well as local, state and federal laws. They are commissioned Texas peace officers under the supervision of the Chief of Campus Police and serve as liaisons between local, state and federal law enforcement agencies.

Duties include the patrol/prevention of crime, on-campus escorts, vehicle/bicycle registration, firearm registration and storage, the payment of parking violations, etc. During the nighttime hours, Campus Police provides escort service across the Sherman campus, should you find yourself in a situation or where you do not feel comfortable walking alone. There are blue light emergency phones located strategically around the Sherman campus for use in any emergency. While all Emergency Phones have one button operation to call directly to Campus Police, some have keypads and serve as Courtesy Phones, with the capability to dial other campus extensions as well.

Police can be reached from off campus at (903)-813-2555. In an emergency, always call 911. Officers of the Campus Police Department, 24 Hours a day, enforce parking Rules and Regulations at the Sherman Campus.

A copy of the complete parking rules and regulations is available at the Campus Police office.

In addition to the above, measures taken to ensure the safety of PA program students, faculty, and staff include the following:

- ID readers are installed at all doors that allow limited access to the PAIS
- Security cameras monitor the building space external to the PAIS
- PA students may access the PAIS while the on-site security officer is present outside of class hours
 - During off hours (when the on-site security officer is NOT present), the card readers will not allow PA students access to the PAIS
 - Students may access study space, the campus library, and other campus resources in Sherman during these off hours

The security and personal safety of students in both the didactic and clinical settings are priorities for the PA program and College. Campus police will provide instruction to PA students in safety and security best practices at the beginning of both the pre-clinical and clinical phases of the program. Clinical sites may be evaluated for safety and security by program faculty at site visits (virtually and in-person), via phone conversations with preceptors, and through student evaluation of clinical sites. Also, clinical site staff are asked to provide an orientation to students completing rotations in which hazards, exposures, and emergency responses are reviewed.

Allegation of Student Mistreatment Policy (A3.15f)

The Austin College PA Program is dedicated to maintaining a positive environment in which students can pursue educational and professional activities in an inclusive, humane, respectful culture. Mistreatment is considered destructive of the principles that guide the mission, values, and goals of the program. The PA Program defines mistreatment as a student being treated unfairly or used in a capacity that is not considered reasonable. When assessing behavior that might represent mistreatment, students are expected to consider the conditions, circumstances, and environment surrounding such behavior.

Procedure: When mistreatment is believed to have occurred, the initial step is to report the concern. All members of the program are encouraged to report incidents of mistreatment. Those who wish to report a concern are advised to seek out any faculty member in the PA Program, including either the Program Director or Medical Director, to discuss an allegation of mistreatment. Informal resolution will be the initial step in attempting to resolve concerns of mistreatment. Students who experience mistreatment on a clinical rotation should reach out to the Director of Experiential Education as soon as possible.

If attempts at informal resolution are not successful, the student(s) can submit a formal complaint to the Chief Human Resource Officer. The process for submitting a formal complaint can be found in the Austin College Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy (JP 8 Section of the Operational Guide).

Student Grievances (A1.02j)

Non-discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy

Section III Judicial Policies and Procedures JP 8 Austin College Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation Policy applies to all Austin College students. Purpose is to create an educational and working environment that

provides all members of the Austin College community equal access to College activities and programs. In accordance with federal and state law, Austin College prohibits unlawful discrimination, harassment, and retaliation on the basis of age, race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, national origin, ethnic origin, disability, predisposing genetic information, covered veteran status, and any other basis protected by law. This policy provides information regarding Austin College's prohibition on non-sexual misconduct: discrimination, harassment, and retaliation. This policy explains how the College will respond once it receives a Report or receives a Formal Complaint of prohibited conduct. The processes described herein are tailored to address unacceptable behavior in a manner consistent with the College's values and status as a private institution of higher education, while meeting the legal obligations of Title VI, Title VII, and other applicable Federal and State laws and regulations. Basic fairness and reasonable expectations are strictly defined by the processes described in this policy.

A copy of the JP8 policy in its entirety can be found on the Policies and Procedures tab of the PA Program website ([PAprogram.austincollege.edu](https://paprogram.austincollege.edu)) or by following this link:

<https://paprogram.austincollege.edu/student-grievances-and-allegations-of-harassment/>

Sexual Misconduct Policy

The Section III Judicial Policies and Procedures JP 9 Austin College Sexual Misconduct Policy applies to all Austin College students. A copy of the JP9 policy in its entirety can be found on the Policies and Procedures tab of the PA Program website ([PAprogram.austincollege.edu](https://paprogram.austincollege.edu)) or by following this link:

<https://paprogram.austincollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/JP-9-Sexual-Misconduct-1.pdf>

Student Exposure to Hazards (A3.08)

Students will be exposed to inherent risks while participating in clinical training including possible exposure to blood, tissue or other body or laboratory fluids. The PA Program utilizes guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to address student exposure to infectious and environmental hazards. The Program will provide appropriate training to students on infectious and environmental hazards prior to any educational activities that would place students at risk. This policy on infectious and environmental hazards will address methods of prevention; procedures after exposure; financial responsibility; and program participation following exposure.

Methods of prevention

Standard precautions are taught and implemented to protect healthcare professionals and reduce the risk of exposure to bloodborne pathogens and hazardous substances from both recognized and unrecognized sources. These precautions apply to all patient care, laboratory, and clinical training experiences. All faculty and students must utilize Standards Precautions in activities that present exposure to bloodborne pathogens and hazardous substances. Failure to do so may be grounds for disciplinary action. Students must avoid direct contact with blood, bodily fluids, secretions, excretions, mucous membranes, non-intact skin, and possibly contaminated items. Students should also avoid direct contact with sharps and dispose of them in designated puncture-resistant containers directly after use to avoid injury.

Procedures after possible exposure to blood-borne pathogen(s) or needle stick

The following outlines the procedure to follow in the event of possible exposure to blood-borne pathogen(s) or a needle stick occurs:

- Act as quickly as possible.
- Wash the site of exposure thoroughly with soap and water (or water only for mucous membranes).
- Notify your preceptor at your rotation AND, if applicable, the nursing supervisor who should request source-person clinical information and blood work (e.g., HBsAG, HCV antibody, HIV) unless HIV, HBV and HCV status is already known.
- You may be required to complete an incident report.
 - Do NOT fill out a workman's comp or employee health claim
- It is very important to report all exposures and get follow-up care promptly
 - This follow-up care begins with you going to the nearest emergency department.
 - After being seen emergently by a healthcare professional, follow up with your primary care provider is recommended to determine if you need post-exposure prophylaxis. If you do not have a PCP, contact Health Services at Austin College at 903.813.2247
 - **Needlestick Insurance:** See the Exxat Clinical Phase Administrative Course for your needle stick insurance information and processes for submitting a claim. This needle-stick insurance is an incidence-only policy provided to you by the program and is in addition to your regular health insurance. You should use your health insurance when seen initially for the needlestick or in the event of other exposures. See the Student Health Insurance section in this document for more information.
- Notify the PA Program (by contacting the Director of Experiential Education or Program Director) as soon as possible, no later than the next business day, if the exposure occurs off campus.
- The faculty member must complete the PA Program Incident Report document for tracking purposes and notify the Program Director, if not already notified.

Chemical hazard exposure

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) devised the Hazard Communication Standard (HCS) to ensure that information about chemical and toxic substance hazards in the workplace and associated protective measures are disseminated to workers via Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS).

Hazardous Chemicals: any chemical classified as a health hazard or simple asphyxiate in accord with the Hazard Communication Standard.

Students exposed to chemical hazards in classroom laboratories must notify Program Faculty immediately during pre-clinical phase, or their Clinical Preceptor followed by the Director of Experiential Education if the exposure occurs during clinical phase. Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) must be readily available wherever chemicals are used. The student is responsible for identifying the location of the MSDS information sheets as part of their orientation to each clinic/hospital site where they are rotating. Post-exposure care is dictated by the type of chemical exposure.

Students are strongly recommended to have an evaluation performed by a healthcare provider following any chemical exposure. The protocols set forth at clinical sites should be followed and students should follow the directions given to them by their preceptor.

Financial responsibility

For any exposure or injuries that may occur as part of training in the PA Program, please note that the payment for medical evaluation, treatment, and care is the sole responsibility of the student and their insurance carrier.

Program participation following exposure

Following an accidental exposure or needlestick injury, the PA Program Director will determine on an individual basis if the student can continue participation in PA Program activities.

Student Lockers

The PA Program provides lockers for students to store learning materials and items related to their studies. Lockers are managed to ensure responsible use of property and for the health and safety of individuals on campus. The Program is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged personal property. Lockers are to be used at the student's own risk.

- All lockers are property of the Program and are subject to College policies.
- Students must use their own combination lock.
- Flammable materials, dangerous chemicals, explosives or weapons of any kind are strictly prohibited inside lockers. Illegal or controlled substances such as drugs or alcohol are also strictly prohibited.
- Perishable items are not to be stored in lockers.
- Students are not permitted to affix anything to the interior or exterior of the lockers.
- Upon assignment and during use, students are held responsible to report any damage or needed repairs to a PA program administrative coordinator.
- The Program reserves the right to open a locker with or without the consent of the student, whether they are present or not, to whom the locker in instances where locker procedures are being abused or in the case of an emergency. This may include cutting off the lock if the student is not present or not willing to open the locker.
- All lockers not cleaned out on the last day of the pre-clinical phase will be vacated. Students will be contacted via email. If there is no response in one week, items will be disposed of. The Program is not responsible for lost or missing items, either before or after clearance of a locker.

Computer/Internet Access

A laptop computer with reliable internet access is required for the Program. Additional medical applications may be recommended as part of individual courses. Recommendations for minimum computer requirements are provided to students prior to matriculation.

Communication with Faculty and Staff

Communication with faculty and staff is accomplished through meetings, assigned Austin College e-mail, telephone (including voicemail message). Meetings should be arranged during any posted office hours or by appointment. Students are expected to schedule meetings during non-class hours. Students can typically expect

to receive a response to emails within 48 hours (excluding weekends). In turn, students are expected to respond to faculty and staff emails within 48 hours as well.

Minors/Visitors

Minors nor visitors are allowed in the PA instructional space unless approved by the Program Director. No animals other than certified service animals are allowed on campus grounds.

Transportation and Housing

Students are required to secure their own reliable transportation to the PA Program instruction site, on or off campus patient encounters, simulation exercises, and clinical rotations. Some of the clinical rotation experiences in the clinical phase may require travel to sites outside of the greater Sherman area. Students are responsible for all costs associated with these clinical rotations, including but not limited to travel, parking, and living expenses.

PA Program Accreditation

The ARC-PA has granted Accreditation-Provisional status to the Austin College Physician Assistant Program sponsored by Austin College. Accreditation-Provisional is an accreditation status granted when the plans and resource allocation, if fully implemented as planned, of a proposed program that has not yet enrolled students appear to demonstrate the program's ability to meet the ARC-PA Standards or when a program holding Accreditation-Provisional status appears to demonstrate continued progress in complying with the Standards as it prepares for the graduation of the first class (cohort) of students. Accreditation-Provisional does not ensure any subsequent accreditation status. It is limited to no more than five years from matriculation of the first class.

The program's accreditation history can be viewed on the ARC-PA website at <https://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation-history-austin-college/>.

Tuition and Fee Refunds and Procedures (A1.02k)

This policy applies to students who formally withdraw, via submission of the Austin College Application for Withdrawal form, from the Austin College PA Program after depositing and considers the resources Austin College commits to when planning for students in the program.

Students who withdraw from the College will receive tuition and fee credit based on the timing of their withdrawal as depicted in the schedule below. Please refer to the PA Program billing periods in the *PA Program Student Handbook* for specific dates.

Tuition and Experiential Learning Fee Refund Schedule

Time Period	Amount Credited
Prior to the first day of the billing period	100%
During First week of the billing period	80%
Second week of the billing period	75%
Third week of the billing period	50%

Fourth week of the billing period	25%
After fourth week of the billing period	0%

All tuition and fee credits are determined by the Austin College Business Office. Note that the Experiential Education fee is billed at the beginning of the first billing period for each academic year (50% billed at the start of the first billing period of academic year one and the remaining 50% at the start of the first billing period of academic year two. Therefore, only students withdrawing during these two billing periods will have a fee credit. Withdrawals during any other billing period will consist of a tuition credit only.

Any refund made to the student will come only after federal, state, and Austin College financial aid programs are reimbursed according to financial aid refund policies. The policies are available in print from the Financial Aid Office. Federal law requires that any Title IV aid refund be paid back first to Federal Direct Loan Programs. Refund checks are mailed to the student’s home address as noted on the Austin College Application for Withdrawal.

PA Program Billing Periods for Academic Years 2024-2025 and 2025-2026

<u>Summer 2024:</u>	Monday, June 3, 2024 – Friday, August 23, 2024
<u>Fall 2024:</u>	Monday, September 2, 2024 – Friday, December 13, 2024
<u>Spring 2025:</u>	Monday, January 6, 2025 - Friday, May 16, 2025
<u>Summer 2025:</u>	Monday, May 26, 2025 - Friday, August 22, 2025
<u>Fall 2025:</u>	Monday, August 25, 2025 - Friday, December 19, 2025
<u>Spring 2026:</u>	Monday, January 5, 2026 - Friday, May 15, 2026

Teaching Out Policy

A decision to close an educational program, site, or the entire institution will only be made after thoughtful planning and careful consultation with all affected constituencies and after thorough consideration of alternative actions and in compliance with the by-laws and charter of the institution.

Should such a decision ever come under consideration, communication efforts will be devoted to fully informing stakeholders about the conditions compelling consideration of a decision of such magnitude. All available information relevant to the consideration will be shared during these communications. It should be noted that those most directly affected by such a decision are current students and faculty. Prospective students and faculty are significantly affected as well. These stakeholders should receive timely and sensitive attention and involvement in such considerations. The final decision on such actions rests with Austin College’s Board of Trustees.

If Austin College decides to close an educational program, site, or the entire institution, it must consider the following options:

1. The institution teaches out currently enrolled students; no longer admits students to programs; and terminates the program, the operations of a site, or the operations of an institution after students

have graduated. The institution will submit a teach-out plan to all applicable accrediting bodies for approval.

2. If the institution enters into a contractual teach-out agreement for another institution to teach out the educational programs or program, the teach-out agreement will be submitted to all applicable accrediting bodies for approval in advance

Best practices in closing an educational program, site, or entire institution, as published by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges must be followed to make a good faith effort to assist affected students, faculty, and administrative and support staff so that they experience a minimal amount of disruption in the pursuit of their course of study or professional careers.