



Key Competencies & Essential Skills and Abilities for learners in the Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS) Program

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Contact:	Manager, Physician Assistant Studies 306-966-4252

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to outline the essential skills and abilities required for the Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS) program at the University of Saskatchewan. The MPAS program is dedicated to training skilled and compassionate Physician Assistants (PAs) capable of meeting the healthcare needs of diverse communities. The role of PAs is integral to the collaborative healthcare team, enhancing the delivery of high-quality care. PAs are clinicians who practice under the supervision of a licensed physician. They are highly skilled and can work in any clinical setting, including on multidisciplinary health teams. The education of PAs encompasses extensive general medical training, with a strong emphasis on versatility and teamwork, preparing graduates to practice in a wide range of medical settings and specialties, thereby improving healthcare access and quality.

The practice of medicine as a PA demands intelligence, sound judgment, intellectual honesty, and appropriate interpersonal skills, as well as the capacity to manage emergencies swiftly and effectively. Graduates must demonstrate respect for themselves and others, uphold the confidentiality and privilege inherent in-patient communication, and consistently prioritize patient care above all else.

The essential abilities and characteristics outlined in these essential skills and abilities ensure that candidates for admission, promotion, and graduation possess the physical and cognitive abilities and the mental and emotional stability required to complete the program and fully engage in all aspects of medical model of training. These standards aim to prepare graduates to become competent and compassionate PAs who meet all necessary **College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan (CPSS)** licensure requirements and are ready to enter clinical practice.

The MPAS program encourages applications from all individuals, including those who may require reasonable accessibility measures to complete the training. The program adheres to university policies and applicable laws, ensuring that no qualified individual is excluded from participation based on disability, religion, family status, or other protected characteristics. However, the use of an intermediary that would require a learner to rely on another individual's power of observation and/or communication is not considered a reasonable accommodation.

Key Competencies and Essential Skills and Abilities

The Essential Skills and Abilities are categorized into six key areas: Observation, Communication, Motor Skills, Intellectual-Conceptual Abilities, and Behavioral and Social Attributes, and Professionalism. These are the skills, behaviours, and abilities that are essential to inhabit and exhibit to find success in the program. These standards are aligned with MPAS Program Level Outcomes and the key competencies outlined by the **Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA)**.

Observation

Learners must possess adequate sensory abilities to observe in various settings, including classrooms, laboratories, and clinical environments. Essential observational skills include:

- Functional vision, hearing, and tactile sensation.
- The ability to conduct physical examinations, including inspection, auscultation, and palpation.
- Observing and interpreting demonstrations, experiments, and patient conditions accurately.

Communication

Effective communication skills are crucial for PA learners to interact with patients, families, and healthcare team members. These skills include:

- Proficiency in spoken and written English.
- The ability to elicit and convey information effectively and sensitively.
- Accurately documenting patient information in medical records.
- Interpreting and responding to non-verbal cues.
- Recognizing and addressing personal biases, underlying beliefs and values, assumptions, and stereotypes that inhibit opportunity in the work and learning environment.

Motor Skills

Learners must demonstrate sufficient motor functions to perform diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. These include:

- Conducting physical examinations using techniques such as palpation, auscultation, and percussion.
- Providing emergency and general patient care, such as performing CPR, suturing, and inserting intravenous lines.
- Participating actively in all didactic and clinical activities that require motor skills.

Intellectual-Conceptual, Integrative, and Quantitative Abilities

Intellectual abilities are essential for problem-solving and clinical decision-making. Learners must have the capacity to:

- Measure, calculate, reason, analyze, and synthesize information.
- Understand and apply complex medical knowledge.
- Solve clinical problems efficiently and effectively within limited time frames.
- Comprehend three-dimensional spatial relationships.
- Contribute to learning environments that embrace equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

Behavioral and Social Attributes

PA learners must exhibit emotional stability, ethical behavior, and professionalism. These attributes include:

- Emotional health necessary for the full utilization of intellectual abilities and the exercise of good judgment.
- The ability to develop effective and compassionate relationships with patients and colleagues.
- Integrity, empathy, flexibility, and interpersonal skills.
- Adaptability to changing environments and the capacity to function effectively under stress.
- Supporting the inclusion of perspectives and voices of underrepresented groups in discussion and decision-making.
- Contributing to learning environments that are free of discrimination and harassment.

Professionalism

PA learners must consistently exhibit professionalism, characterized by integrity, honesty, empathy, compassion, fairness, respect for others, and dedication. Learners are expected to take responsibility for their actions and behaviors. Essential elements of professionalism include:

- **Responsibility:** Promptly completing all assignments and responsibilities related to the training program, as well as the diagnosis and care of patients.
- **Interpersonal Relationships:** Developing mature, sensitive, and effective relationships with patients, their families, and all members of healthcare teams.
- **Emotional Resilience:** Tolerating the physical, emotional, and mental demands of the program and functioning effectively under academic stress.
- **Adaptability:** Adapting to changing environments and functioning effectively in the face of uncertainties inherent in-patient care.
- **Ethical Behavior:** Demonstrating the emotional health required for full utilization of intellectual abilities, maintaining ethical standards, and showing respect for patient confidentiality and privilege.

Learners are also expected to adhere to the ethical and professional guidelines outlined in the **College of Medicine's Guiding Principles of Professionalism**. This policy underscores the importance of professionalism in medical practice and education, emphasizing the need for learners to embody these values throughout their training and professional careers.

References

Content adapted with permission from technical standards of Marquette University and Yale University's Physician Associate Programs, and the competencies outlined by the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA).