

In what ways does the Department of Physician Assistant Studies reflect and advance the mission of the College?

Feedback was solicited from faculty and staff regarding the Department's incorporation of the goals and vision of the college mission into daily operations. One of the very first comments when this question was posed revolved around the fact that we believe that the PA Department is a "Poster Child" for the mission. We transform students into professionals, we teach them to serve the underserved and we help them become critical thinkers, questioning information along the way. Learning to care for others and make decisions about the appropriate way to care for an individual or group of people requires interaction with people and cannot be confined to the classroom. Augsburg is the perfect place for the PA profession as it clearly embodies the need to use experience and the community as teachers. We also discussed the fact that it may be easier to define what we do that "doesn't" reflect the mission.

One example of how we embody the mission of the college is how the faculty, staff and students responded with the recent death of one of the student's 14 month-old son. Through very tragic events, a first year student had to endure the death of her son. The immediate response of her fellow first year students was to reach out to faculty to help them all handle such a situation. The response by the PA faculty and staff showed the students how to care for one another. Classes were cancelled so all students in the academic phase, faculty and staff were able to attend the wake and funeral. Students were encouraged to seek assistance from the counseling center and campus ministry. By providing the opportunity for all faculty, staff and students to attend to the emotional well being of the one student also provided opportunities for all of us to care for one another. Through some very tragic circumstances, we were able to provide an opportunity to work on caring and compassion, something that cannot be taught well in a classroom setting. Additionally, many faculty, staff and administration members from the Augsburg community at large showed support for this student, showering the student with care and compassion. Long after she graduates from this institution, she will remember most how we cared for her and not necessarily what we taught in the classroom. This is the mission of the college.

Specific feedback relating to the mission statements listed here:

The way we are based in the liberal arts...

- Reading lists, movies, and activities such as visiting the art museum are incorporated into our course curriculum.
- Twelve of the 26 second year class traveled to Nicaragua this summer to participate in interdisciplinary courses with MAL students. Another five PA students joined a course in Namibia offered by the nursing department.
- Our ethics and professional issues courses incorporate aspects of helping students become "effective, informed and ethical citizens of the world".
- Special Populations and Geriatric units are good examples of teaching students how to grapple with what it means to be human and to care for others.
- The PA faculty is an interdisciplinary group of faculty, representing physicians, physician assistants, pharmacists and dieticians.

The way we are shaped by the faith and values of the Christian church...

- We deliberately encourage a wide variety of professions to come to speak to the students, from various professions (including traditional and non-traditional medicine), racial groups, ethnicities, and under-represented groups of people.

- The practice of medicine changes on a regular basis and because of that, we encourage our students to “think.” The students need to understand that what one believes to be true and appropriate to treat a specific illness may not be the most correct or appropriate in the future. So we need to help engage the students in lively discussion and argument to teach them to question what they know and prepare them for a lifetime of learning.
- Respect of others is critical and we try to teach students to respect the value and opinion of others even if they don’t happen to agree with the value.
- The one negative or contrary opinion we discussed was related to the fact that as a professional school, we have limitations with regard to diversity in that we need to comply with professional standards. We need to be mindful that only certain people are “called” (have a vocation) to be a health care provider. So while we strive for diversity in every sense of the word, we are limited in reality at times in who we can educate in the profession. We continue to work with that and look for opportunities to be successful.

The way we are shaped by the context of a vital metropolitan setting...

- Our community senior’s project (where students are assigned to interact from February through December with a senior citizen from the neighborhood in a non-medical setting to see first-hand the challenges that they face) is a clear example of our commitment to the community in which we work and learn.
- PA Day community projects convey our continued commitment to the greater community.
- The clinical phase of the curriculum is clear evidence of learning from a vital metropolitan area. We carry that further to require students to learn to work with a rural metropolitan area to fully appreciate the scope of medical care in Minnesota.
- The clinical phase transition course pairs a student with a current health care provider in the area, for their final semester in the academic phase, to help the student make the transition from classroom to clinic.

The way we are shaped by an intentionally diverse campus community...

- We encourage diversity by visiting college and high school campuses as much as possible, encouraging young people to consider careers in health care.
- A high school curriculum project has been developed to attract students from the community to think about the PA profession as they consider their vocation. Students are invited in the summer as a group to spend 2-3 hours learning about the PA profession with hands-on experiences. The high school curriculum particularly targets schools with a diverse student population.