



PA-Specific Post-Professional Doctoral Program Needs Assessment

James R. Kilgore, DMSc, PhD, PA-C¹, Robert E. McKenna, DMSc, MPH, PA-C², Melissa Murfin, PharmD, BCACP, PA-C³, Noël Smith⁴

- 1) AAPA Commission on Research and Strategic Initiatives; University of Lynchburg, Lynchburg, Virginia
- 2) AAPA Commission on Research and Strategic Initiatives; Marshall B. Ketchum University, Fullerton, California
- 3) AAPA Commission on Research and Strategic Initiatives; Ithaca College, Ithaca, New York
- 4) Senior Director, PA & Industry Research & Analysis; AAPA, Alexandria, Virginia



INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

There are currently 30 PA-specific post-professional doctorate programs, nearly all which include a scholarly component.^{1,2} While most programs encourage students to present or publish their findings, few provide avenues for these activities. Additionally, very few programs encourage students to apply for outside funding, resulting in limited student presentations or publications in peer-reviewed journals. This may contribute to low levels of publication among doctorly trained PAs,³ and PA educators.⁴

PURPOSE / OBJECTIVES

1. To conduct outreach to post-professional PA doctoral programs to identify opportunities for collaboration and support doctoral candidates by sharing ideas for potential research projects, AAPA research resources, and other opportunities for networking and mentorship.
2. Learn about the research components of the programs and potential resources AAPA can provide.

MATERIAL & METHODS

A survey developed by AAPA Commission on Research and Strategic Initiatives (RSI) was sent to each program director of a post-professional doctoral PA program to gather insights and data for this study.

The survey instrument contained both open and close ended questions that were self-reported responses from the program directors.

Descriptive statistics were used to generating visual representations such as bar graphs, pie charts, or histograms for quick insights.

References

- 1 Martin AER, Kayingo G. Doctoral education for physician assistants/associates: trends and characteristics in the U.S. BMC Med Educ. 2025;25(1):2. Published 2025 Jan 2. doi:10.1186/s12909-024-08606-5
- 2 McKenna RE, Hooker RS. The PA postprofessional doctorate. JAAPA. 2025;38(2). DOI:10.1097/01.JAA.0000000000000201. In press.
- 3 Kilgore JR, Colletti T, Rolfs J, et al. Characteristics and career effect on PA graduates of a doctor of medical science program. JAAPA. 2024;38(1). DOI:10.1097/01.JAA.0000000000000170
- 4 Roberts AL, Rizzolo D, Bruza-Augatis M, Frias-Sarmiento D. An Update on Scholarly Productivity for Physician Assistant/Associate Faculty. J Physician Assist Educ 2025;36(1):74–79. DOI 10.1097/JPA.0000000000000641.

Suggested Resources for Programs

Program Directors Said	AAPA Currently Has
Methodology and How Tos	
Help with methodology, statistical analyses, and scientific writing. Research webinars, trainings for faculty research advisors	CME webinars Curated resources online
Tools	
Data set acquisition	AAPA data, CME webinars on other data
Software access/subscription discounts	None at this time
Networking	
Likeminded research contacts and support. Ongoing professional development and networking aimed at DMSc students.	Research Connections Academy of Doctoral PAs
Mentorship	
Research mentoring during and after their program Help/support with application of the project to their clinical practice.	None at this time
Other	
More data pertaining to PA doctoral programs would be helpful in several aspects.	None at this time

Suggested Resources for Students

Program Directors Said	AAPA Currently Has
Methodology and How Tos	
Help with methodology, statistical analyses, and scientific and medical writing. Reference guidelines Staff support to assist with data analysis	CME webinars Curated resources online
Tools	
Access to data, access to AAPA data specifically	AAPA data, CME webinars on other data
Journal access through AAPA	None at this time
Networking	
Likeminded research contacts and support. Ongoing professional development and networking aimed at DMSc students.	Research Connections Association of Doctoral PAs
Mentorship	
Research mentoring during and after their program	None at this time
Funding	
Scholarships to disseminate their work Research fellowships	CME stipend and conference registration Research Fellowship, PAF Fellowships, Small Research Grants

RESULTS

1. Received responses from 24/28 program directors for an 86% response rate.
2. All programs require a research or capstone project.
3. Most programs encourage students to present or publish their findings, but few programs provide an avenue for presentations or publications.
4. Very few programs encourage students to apply for outside funding and only 3% of students receive funding
5. A notable number of programs indicated their students neither presented their findings nor published their results in peer reviewed journals
6. Programs support opportunities for student publications.

DISCUSSION

Although all programs surveyed include a scholarly project, relatively few of these projects are published or presented. The AAPA has several resources that may be used to address this issue. The Program Directors' responses for suggested resources for both programs and students were broken down into the following categories: Methodology and How Tos, Tools, Networking, Mentorship and Other.

Resources the AAPA provide includes:

1. Salary Report and other research publications.
2. Research events at AAPA conferences.
3. Fellowship and grant funding.
4. Research requests, support and partnerships.
5. Research resources.
6. Patient centered outcomes research (PCOR).

SUMMARY / CONCLUSION

Based upon the described needed resources for programs and students the AAPA offers methodology guides, research-related CME, data set acquisition, and networking opportunities. Networking includes research connections, quarterly sessions, conference events, and specific discussion groups. Funding opportunities include research fellowships and yearly grants.