THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL
SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Allied Health Sciences
Physician Assistant Studies

O 919-962-8008

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321 South Columbia Street | Chapel Hill, NC 27599-7121
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TITLE OF POLICY
Student-Faculty Professional Communication Policy

PURPOSE AND SCOPE
The purpose of this policy is to specify communication standards for how students interact with PA program faculty, instructors, and preceptors both verbally and in writing. This policy applies in both the pre-clinical and clinical years.

RESPONSIBLE PARTY AND REVIEW CYCLE
This policy will be reviewed in even-numbered years as needed by the Program Manager, and the Program Faculty elevating any policy amendments to the Program Director for approval.

ARC-PA STANDARD(S) ADDRESSED
B2.04: The program curriculum *must* include instruction in interpersonal and communication skills that result in the effective exchange of information and collaboration with patients, their families and other health professionals.
B2.10: The curriculum *must* prepare students to work collaboratively in *interprofessional* patient centered teams. Instruction *must*: a) include content on the roles and responsibilities of various health care professionals, b) emphasize the team approach to patient centered care beyond the traditional physician-PA team approach, and c) include application of these principles in *interprofessional* teams.
B2.17e: The curriculum *must* include instruction about the PA profession to include the PA relationship with the physician and other health care providers
B2.19c: The curriculum *must* include instruction in professional conduct

DEFINITION
N/A

POLICY
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC) Master of Health Sciences Physician Assistant Studies Program (MHSPAS) has established and approved the following communication standards for students regarding how they interact with program faculty, program instructors, preceptors, and other professionals with whom they routinely interact as part of their educational experience. These standards apply to both verbal and written communication:

Pre-Clinical Year
- Students will be expected to address program faculty as "Professor" in all educational settings (e.g classroom, advising, ceremonies, meetings).
- Program faculty with doctoral degrees may request that students refer to them as "Doctor."
- The program director will be referred to as "Doctor" unless she or he specifies "Professor" based either on preference or nature of terminal degree.
- Program faculty who prefer to be addressed by their first name must specify that this applies only to them.

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- Students will refer to instructors as either "Doctor" or "Professor" depending on the instructor's preference or the nature of the terminal degree. (Students will be responsible for consulting syllabi to ascertain the nature of a professor's terminal degree.)
- If the instructor is a Physician Assistant (PA) or Nurse Practitioner (NP), the student will address the instructor as "Professor".
- Instructors may specify that they should be called by their preferred common name, and students should comply with this if this is the standard for this instructor.
- Students should understand that there will be heterogeneity in how instructors expect to be addressed; however, when in doubt, students should default to a formal, professional title.

Clinical Year
- Physicians must always be referred to as "Doctor." This includes interns, residents, fellow, and attendings.
- Even if a physician requests to be called by their first name, the student should default to using "Doctor" and should never refer to a physician by their first name in front of a patient or family.
- When referring to a physician in a professional setting with that physician absent, the student will maintain the use of "Doctor" with other health professionals.
- The same professional courtesy of referring to physicians as "Doctors" is also expected to be extended to other health professionals with doctoral degrees (e.g. pharmacists, psychologists).
- When interacting with Program Faculty in clinical spaces, the student will continue to refer to the faculty member as "Professor" (or "Doctor" if that is their preference).
- When working with advanced practice practitioners (PAs or NPs) in the clinical setting, the student will ascertain what is that practitioner's naming preference. (e.g. Mr., Mrs., Ms., first name)
- When referring to a PA or NP in front of patients or families, the student will be careful to emphasize their status as a provider in the health care team.

Outside of the Curricular Environment
- Students will address institutional professionals by their formal title (e.g. "Doctor" or "Professor") as the default.

PROCEDURES

Failure to appropriately address faculty, instructors, preceptors, or other institutional professionals according to the stipulations of this policy may result in a warning or disciplinary action according to UNC Physician Assistant Program policies pertaining to professionalism.

PUBLISHED

- UNC PA Program Policies and Procedures web page: https://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/unc-pa/students/policies-proceedures/
- UNC PA Program Student Handbook pp. 22

HISTORY OF APPROVAL AND UPDATES

Initial approval by Program Director, 23 September 2021