



Search for the Director of Didactic Education
A.T. Still University
College for Health Communities, Central Coast Physician Assistant Program
Santa Maria, CA

THE SEARCH

A.T. Still University of Health Sciences (ATSU) and the newly established College for Healthy Communities (CHC) seek a collaborative, innovative, and student-centered leader to serve as the next Director of Didactic Education (Director) for their Central Coast Physician Assistant (CCPA) Program. This role calls for a visionary leader with a passion for excellence in physician assistant education, a commitment to advancing diversity in the PA workforce, and the leadership skills necessary to navigate the evolving landscape of the physician assistant profession.

The College for Healthy Communities, which houses [the Central Coast Physician Assistant Program](#), is one of the seven colleges and schools at ATSU, and the newest college added in the fulfillment of the university's mission of delivering whole-person healthcare, community-based learning, and integrating both the mind and body in patient care. ATSU is the founding institution of osteopathic healthcare, renowned for its preeminence as a multidisciplinary healthcare educator. The CHC, founded in 2019, to better address the healthcare needs of the underserved, joined with the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) to establish the ATSU CCPA Program. The ATSU CCPA program was founded upon a core institutional value of being a leader in community health and caring for our most vulnerable, underserved populations.

The CCPA Program specifically aims to train physician assistants to serve medically underserved communities with a focus on cultural humility and diversity. The majority of students accepted into the program identify as belonging to historically underrepresented groups, are first-generation college students, and are from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. The program actively recruits Hometown Scholars and Central Coast residents or applicants who have ties to the area. Many of the current faculty at the CHC came to be a part of the important mission of helping to train the underrepresented to serve underserved communities.

Students in the CCPA Program spend one year on the beautiful Santa Maria campus for the didactic phase of their education, and then proceed to the clinical phase, which includes 35 weeks of supervised clinical practice experiences at various medical centers and hospitals across the country that have a focus on

community-based health, a steadfast mission of the program. Current clinical sites include locations in California, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, and Missouri, among others.

The Director will report to the Chair of the program. The successful candidate will be responsible for the strategic leadership, coordination, and guidance of the program's educational enterprise. They will ensure the program's commitment to providing students with an innovative educational experience and will uphold the highest standards of care in healthcare and community service.

ATSU and the College for Healthy Communities has retained Isaacson, Miller, a national executive search firm, to assist with this search. Inquiries, nominations, and applications should be directed to the firm as indicated at the end of this document.

A.T. STILL UNIVERSITY

[ATSU](#) stands as a beacon of innovative academic programs, preparing highly competent professionals within a learning-centered environment. With a proud osteopathic heritage, ATSU emphasizes whole-person healthcare, underscoring the importance of treating each patient as an individual rather than a set of symptoms. The university's mission extends to a focus on community health, interprofessional education, diversity, and serving underserved populations.

Founded in 1892 with the establishment of the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine, ATSU has grown into a multidisciplinary healthcare educator with a rich history of leadership in healthcare education and research. The university operates across three campuses located in Missouri, Arizona, and California, each fostering an environment of excellence in health sciences education.

ATSU offers a wide array of programs, including doctoral degrees in Audiology, Dental Medicine, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Osteopathic Medicine, and various master's programs across its seven prestigious schools and colleges. The university is also home to the Museum of Osteopathic Medicine, which houses over 80,000 artifacts, reflecting its deep roots and ongoing commitment to the osteopathic profession.

With a total enrollment of over 4,000 students, ATSU is a vibrant community of learners and educators. The university prides itself on being the first in whole-person healthcare and continues to lead with its innovative and comprehensive online and residential programs. ATSU's dedication to community health is evident through its partnerships with over 25 community health centers, providing students with real-world experiences that complement their academic learning.

CENTRAL COAST PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAM

In 2019, ATSU partnered with the National Association of Community Health Centers (NACHC) to create the Central Coast Physician Assistant program, designed to educate physician assistants committed to

providing whole-person primary care to underserved communities. The unique 24-month, 105-credit program is based in Santa Maria, California, where students spend their first year completing the didactic phase on campus. The second year involves 35 weeks of supervised clinical practice across various medical centers in the U.S., with a focus on serving in Community Health Centers to prepare students for careers in primary care. The CCPA Program emphasizes engaged scholarship, whole-person healthcare, and critical thinking, fostering a commitment to serving medically underserved populations from the outset.

The [Hometown Scholars program](#) supports ATSU's mission by offering an admissions advantage to applicants endorsed by local CHCs who demonstrate a commitment to returning to practice in their hometown communities. With a prodigious inaugural cohort of 90 students in 2024, the program's vision is to be recognized as a key source of PAs from historically underrepresented groups, providing culturally sensitive care to underserved populations. Its program goals focus on recruiting diverse students, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed for evidence-based, patient-centered care, and preparing them to address the unique needs of marginalized communities with cultural humility and empathy.

THE ROLE

The Director oversees the program's curriculum and is responsible for leading all aspects of the didactic phase of the PA Program, while also teaching courses, engaging in service, and conducting scholarly efforts. The Director promotes a diverse and inclusive environment, as well as collaborative and collegial relationships within the CCPA program and with the broader ATSU administration and external partners. Reporting to the Chair of the program, the Director along with the senior leadership team, oversees an efficient and innovative physician assistant program in California that maintains the highest standards as set forth by all other ATSU schools and ensures the applicable accreditation status with the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA).

The responsibilities of the Director of Didactic Education will include, but will not necessarily be limited to the following:

- Collaborate as a member of the programmatic leadership team, consisting of the Program Chair, Associate Program Director, Director of Clinical Education, and Medical Director to achieve a shared vision for becoming recognized as the principal source of PAs from historically underrepresented groups providing culturally humble care to medically underserved communities.
- Lead and manage the ongoing design, development, and implementation of an innovative curricular model emphasizing blended learning.
- Lead and support the dynamic team of didactic faculty to educate a highly diverse student body selected for their commitment to the CCPA mission using a holistic admissions process.
- Responsible for the development and oversight of a comprehensive assessment strategy for the didactic phase of the program.
- Ensure students are adequately prepared to achieve programmatic benchmarks for the PACKRAT and PANCE.

- Oversee student academic progression, retention, and completion strategies.
- Ensure ongoing compliance with ARC-PA accreditation standards and best practices in contemporary physician assistant didactic education.
- Develop and deliver academic courses as assigned.
- Participate in the holistic student admissions process.
- Conduct and disseminate scholarship.
- Serve on departmental, college, and university committees as assigned.
- Engage in community and professional service.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The incoming Director will face a range of opportunities and challenges, including:

Ensure all programming related to didactic education meets ARC-PA accreditation standards.

While the CCPA Program obtained preliminary accreditation in 2021, the Director will play a crucial role within the program's continued efforts of successfully completing its first full accreditation process. The Director will oversee the academic curriculum and ensure it aligns with accreditation standards. They will work closely with the faculty to evaluate course content, teaching methods, and student outcomes, ensuring that the program meets the rigorous educational and professional benchmarks set by accrediting bodies. Furthermore, this role involves staying informed about national healthcare trends that impact PA education and working with the Program Director to strategically plan for necessary changes. Their leadership would be instrumental in establishing a strong foundation for the program's future.

Developing and mentoring a diverse and exceptional faculty and staff.

A key aspect of the Director's leadership will be the implementation of retention and mentorship programs that not only help faculty and staff excel in their current positions but also prepare them for future leadership roles. By aligning these initiatives with the university's core values—such as professionalism, accountability, and lifelong learning—the Director will ensure an energetic, engaged academic environment that encourages long-term commitment and satisfaction among faculty and staff, while continually enhancing the institution's reputation for excellence. Furthermore, through a steadfast commitment to inclusivity, the Director will foster a workplace culture that values each individual's contributions, promoting a supportive and collaborative environment where professional growth thrives.

Promoting a collaborative and collegial atmosphere within the program.

The Director will play a crucial role in fostering a collaborative and collegial culture within the program and across the university. This entails creating an environment where faculty, staff, and students are encouraged to collaborate, share knowledge, and support each other's professional and academic growth. By cultivating strong relationships, the Director will enhance the program's ability to innovate and adapt to the evolving landscape of the physician assistant profession and healthcare delivery.

In addition to internal interactions, promoting collaboration also involves engaging with other departments and schools within the university. The Director will be expected to promote shared learning opportunities and encourage community service projects that enhance the learners' experience. These efforts will not only enrich the educational experience but also contribute to a cohesive university community where diverse perspectives are valued. By championing interdisciplinary engagement, the Director will ensure that the ATSU CCPA program is at the forefront of physician assistant education while making a positive impact on public health.

Enhancing academic productivity that upholds teaching excellence.

The CCPA Program is committed to upholding diversity and whole-person healthcare, while also striving for academic excellence and innovative educational practices. The incoming Director will have the important responsibility of fostering a culture that values exceptional teaching and learning experiences. This includes encouraging faculty to pursue innovative teaching methods, incorporating advanced technologies into the curriculum, and ensuring that the program remains at the forefront of healthcare education.

QUALIFICATIONS AND EXPERIENCE

The successful candidate for the Director of Didactic Education of the ATSU CCPA Program will possess:

- Prior academic experience commensurate with appointment at the rank of associate or full professor.
- Leadership experience in the design, development, and implementation of didactic education programs.
- Experience in the successful recruitment and development of faculty to be high-quality educators.
- Substantial previous clinical experience.
- Effective communication and collaboration skills.
- Skilled in working with a variety of different student learning styles and collaborating with faculty colleagues.
- Ability to perform duties autonomously with minimal supervision and maintain confidentiality.
- Licensure in, or eligibility for, licensure in California as a PA.
- Current NCCPA Certification is preferred.

COMPENSATION AND LOCATION



The anticipated salary range for this position at the assistant professor level is \$97,800 to \$144,200; at the associate professor level is \$109,000 to \$161,000; and the full professor level is \$134,600 to \$199,400. ATSU CCPA Program is nestled in the Santa Maria Valley. Santa Maria Valley offers a blend of farm-fresh food, award-winning wineries, and diverse outdoor experiences, making it a great destination for those seeking a relaxed lifestyle. The region's year-round mild weather supports everything from grape growing to endless outdoor adventures like birdwatching, hiking, biking, and golf. The famous Foxen Canyon Wine Trail and Tepusquet Road provide scenic routes for cyclists, while local parks like Los Flores Ranch and Preisker Park offer beautiful spaces for families and nature lovers to explore.

For more information, please visit: <https://santamariavalley.com/>

To Apply

ATSU CCPA has retained Isaacson, Miller - a national executive search firm - to assist the Search Committee for the Director of Didactic Education in its identification and review of candidates. Applications, including a cover letter and resume, should be submitted online:

<https://www.imsearch.com/open-searches/still-university-college-healthy-communities/director-didactic-education>

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