

**ON-SITE REVIEW TEAM'S FINDINGS RELATED TO THE  
EVALUATIVE CRITERIA FOR ACCREDITATION OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS  
FOR THE PREPARATION OF PHYSICAL THERAPIST ASSISTANTS**

**AN OVERVIEW OF THE QUALITY OF THE  
PHYSICAL THERAPY EDUCATION PROGRAM**

The on-site review team presents a summary of their findings related to the Evaluative Criteria as a whole. Use additional sheets if necessary.

**OVERVIEW:**

Black Hawk College was founded as Moline Community College in 1946. It was started as a part of Moline High School to accommodate World War II veterans seeking higher education. Moline Community College was organized into three divisions -- Moline Cooperative Extension of the University of Illinois, the Terminal Course Division for career training, and the Adult Education Division for personal enrichment. The College continued to offer transfer, career, and adult education classes, and in 1961 it became Black Hawk College -- the first county-wide junior college in Illinois. The College expanded as neighboring school districts petitioned to join the College district. In 1965, with the passage of "The Illinois Public Junior College Act," Black Hawk College became part of the state's system of higher education, committed to offering traditional liberal arts, occupational, and adult education courses at its campus in Moline.

Black Hawk College operates within Illinois Community College District #503, an area encompassing 2,200 square miles in nine counties of northwestern Illinois (Bureau, Henderson, Henry, Stark, Whiteside, Knox, Marshall, Mercer, Rock Island). In addition to full-service campuses in Moline and Kewanee, the College owns the Outreach Center, the Technology Center in Rock Island, the Community Education Center in Kewanee and leases space at the Illinois Employment and Training Center in Moline. The College serves nearly 20,000 credit and non-credit students in 56 degree and 48 occupational certificate programs. Black Hawk serves more people than any other institution of higher education in the Quad-Cities area.

**SECTION 1: ORGANIZATION**

Black Hawk College is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Its most recent reaffirmation was in 2003. The PTA program received its initial accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education in 1989.

Policies, procedures, and practices are nondiscriminatory and protect or provide the rights and privileges of privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, due process, and safety for all individuals associated with the program. The college's Affirmative Action statement is not consistent in all publications. No evidence was found that documented how and when undated PTA policies and procedures were reviewed or approved by the college administration.

The PTA program is part of the Allied Health and HPE department. Until this year, nursing was part of this department as well. An organizational chart representing the placement of the PTA program in the college hierarchy was presented to the team. This chart did not reflect the current status of the PTA program.

A review of the facilities available to faculty and staff indicated that student confidentiality would be appropriately maintained. Informed consent documentation appeared in program handbooks. While students were advised that background checks and drug screens may be required by clinical facilities, no

evidence was presented of a policy or procedure should a student have an unsatisfactory response to these checks.

The team was provided with a policy titled "PTA Program Complaint: Policy and Procedure" which states that the complainant contacts college or program via web-site or phone. There is also a complaint form titled "Black Hawk College Physical Therapist Assistant Program Complaint Policy", but there is no indication of how the public or members of the program become aware of the document.

The self-study document contains a chart which states the program director is to annually submit the following reports: Annual Accreditation Report, Class Graduation Rate, Employment Rates, and PTA Licensing Examination Rate. While there is no policy or procedure that explicitly provides this information, the job description of the PTA Program Coordinator includes the following general responsibilities: "Prepares the program for APTA accreditation and then maintains it..."

There is no other policy or procedure that explicitly states how the institution facilitates compliance with PTA accreditation policies and procedures.

The PTA program admits 24 students annually. Contractually, up to four of those students may be admitted under a cooperative agreement with the Eastern Iowa Community College District (EICCD), with those students paying in-state tuition. In meetings with first year and second year students, it was evident that more than four students from the EICCD were admitted under this agreement. Discussions with administrators, faculty, student services staff, and students revealed confusion as to the implementation of this agreement.

While there is a selection process for the program, the team was provided with no evidence that students were aware of the weighting of the different selection criteria, and no evidence was presented that the selection procedure had been reviewed by administration. No evidence was provided that a policy exists for reviewing and revising the selection process. The team observed some discrepancies in documentation concerning the selection calendar. A discussion with members of the advising staff and college registrar revealed that these individuals were not fully aware of these items either.

While the program is described as being a five semester curriculum, the selection process is heavily weighted in favor of individuals who have completed most or all of their general education courses, especially Anatomy and Physiology I and II. Students only receive this information when they contact the program office. In meetings with the two current classes, it was determined that only one student was fully following the curriculum as outlined in the college catalog.

All faculty members are provided with the opportunity to participate in governance and program planning. Non-tenured faculty members are not expected to participate in college committees.

## **SECTION 2: RESOURCES**

Section 2 is an overview of resources of the physical therapist assistant program. The program has procured adequate resources as determined through interviews and observations during the on-site visit. One of the strongest assets is the combination of faculty members employed in the program. Students and graduates have noted enthusiastically that the depth of variety in the teaching styles of the faculty has been a great strength of the overall program. Each faculty member has his/her own methods, but the diversity is effective when looking at the faculty as a whole.

A second strength of this program is the student body. Both student cohorts verified during interviews that, although the curriculum is strenuous, they are willing to put in extra time afforded on weekends and

out-of-class time to prepare for exams and skills tests. Students admitted into the program tend to come with strong academic credentials.

The classroom/lab area is well supplied with a dedicated room and sufficient technology available to enrich the learning experiences. The fairly new technology allows for added use of PowerPoint presentations and an overhead document camera to view smaller or more intricate items more effectively. Numerous new muscle and other anatomic models allow students more access to hands-on learning experiences. Additional wheelchairs have allowed for added student opportunities for practicing skills.

The team noted there are line items in the budget where allocated dollars have diminished over the past several years, specifically in the area of continuing education. College administration reported that additional budgetary monies are available to support and maintain necessary operations of the PTA program when requested.

Throughout the interview process, the team noted that the program is well supported with a wide variety evident in the depth and breadth of clinical education choices. Graduates and employers demonstrate strong support of the physical therapist assistant program by offering clinical placements.

The program enjoys a very strong and positive reputation in the region, as described by employers, clinical instructors and graduates. Students are routinely recruited by area employers upon graduation, an indication that speaks to the appreciation of the clinical community for the quality of graduates from the Black Hawk College PTA program.

### **SECTION 3: CURRICULUM**

The PTA curriculum at Black Hawk College is classified as an integrated two-year program composed of 72 total credit hours of general education and technical courses designed to be completed in 5 total academic semesters. The program incorporates 120 hours of integrated and 480 hours of post-didactic clinical education experiences located in a variety of settings. Sequencing of required courses in the program includes integrating 31-credit hours of general education during the first four academic semesters along with 41-credit hours of PTA technical courses. Although the program is structured as an integrated 2-year curriculum, the team noted that the majority of applicants are encouraged to complete all general education credits prior to matriculating into the PTA program. This was verified during interviews with program faculty, students, and alumni, and by reviewing the PTA admissions criteria and instructions as currently posted on the college web-site.

Upon matriculation, students who successfully complete the program are eligible to sit for the National PTA Board examination. The program is designed to initially expose students to basic science content including Anatomy & Physiology I & II, followed by kinesiology, pathology, with a progressive integration of more PTA related technical hands-on skills needed to become competent practitioners. Clinical education experiences are integrated during the second and third semesters of the program followed by two 6-week full time affiliations scheduled during the final summer session of the program.

The comprehensive curriculum plan has been in place a minimum of fourteen years with little revision. The only addition occurred with a general education requirement that added an option for students to take an Introduction to Computers course in place of a math requirement if desired. Program faculty indicated that they have opportunity to propose curricular changes at any time, but no significant changes have been proposed over the past several years.

Expectations for student performance in the technical phase of the PTA program are clearly articulated through various source documents including course syllabi, the PTA Student Manual, the PTA Clinical

Education Manual, and ongoing communications between program faculty and students. Students interviewed during the on-site visit were aware of content presented in the PTA Student Manual.

The team noted that PTA course syllabi were inconsistent with content related to student grading expectations. For example, although students interviewed during the visit were aware of the PTA program's policy on grade remediation, the policy was inconsistently found in course syllabi. In addition, the clinical education course syllabi did not clearly articulate how faculty members utilize documented competency criteria to determine a final grade.

Student learning in the PTA program is assessed through a variety of mechanisms including written, oral, and laboratory practical and comprehensive examinations. Although the program has integrated Bloom's taxonomy into the overall curriculum, it was noted that a majority of course and embedded unit objectives were stated at the low end of Bloom's cognitive domain. This was noted by a review of multiple objectives written at the levels of knowledge and comprehension. In addition, a review of sample test questions from various courses also indicated that student assessment of learning was based on minimal use of case-based scenarios and incorporation of higher level critical thinking skills. The program faculty, current students, and recent graduates, however, indicated that changes have been implemented over the past several semesters to include test questions that better reflect the type of questions used on the National PTA Board examination. This addition was perceived as a positive change to facilitate an improvement in first-time pass rates on Board exams.

Finally, feedback from currently enrolled students, alumni, employers and clinical instructors indicated that the PTA program director and ACCE are easily accessible and provide excellent leadership skills to facilitate the ongoing success of program goals and mission. In addition, the PTA program is well designed to promote the acquisition of both clinical and technical skills required for entry-level PTA practice in a variety of patient care environments. Employers and alumni of the program verified that the Black Hawk College PTA program has been successful in producing graduates who are clinically competent and exhibit exemplary professional behaviors to meet societal needs.

#### **SECTION 4: PROGRAM ASSESSMENT**

The PTA program at Black Hawk College has developed a comprehensive programmatic assessment grid that incorporates a variety of proposed data collection mechanisms to address all Evaluative Criteria for Accreditation in Section 4. The assessment plan includes a listing of data to be collected for ongoing assessment including clinical education assessment forms, student surveys, graduation rates, employment rates, National Board exam pass rates, and employer and graduate surveys. The grid outlines a plan for faculty to discuss all data in relation to potential programmatic change and is clearly documented to include measureable outcomes with thresholds. The PTA assessment grid was initially developed as a more formalized plan in the fall of 2007. A review of on-site materials indicated that, although some data collection was evident, a formal and comprehensive assessment of data from all available sources has not been conducted.

The team was informed that, although PTA graduate and employer surveys were used to collect data every three years, survey return rates have been poor. The low return rates have limited the predictive value of collected data to be of little utility to judge program performance and offer suggested changes. In addition, the program to date has not completed a formal data collection or assessment of outcomes as outlined on the PTA assessment grid. The only noted programmatic changes implemented over the past couple of years was the addition of a National PTA Board exam review course and inclusion of additional test questions in select PTA courses that more closely represent the type of questions used on the PTA National Board exam. Those additions to the program stemmed from a concern related to observation of historically low first-time pass rates by graduates on the PTA National Board exam.

Finally, the on-site team was provided a template of the institutional assessment process entitled, "Black Hawk College Student Learning Plan". The college assessment process indicates data is to be collected from associate degree programs at Black Hawk College through department "Unit Plans". A review of the 2008 PTA Unit Plan indicated that the only component of assessment being reported to the institution by the program was how program faculty would acquire training and preparation to achieve a successful re-accreditation status for the PTA program. The director of the program indicated that the only other data being reported to the institution for assessment purposes included graduation rates, employment rates, PTA Board exam scores, and the annual PTA Accreditation Report. Based on this information, the team was unable to determine how data from the comprehensive PTA assessment grid was integrated with the process of overall institutional assessment.

**INSTITUTION COMMENTS:**

This institution's administration and PTA program faculty appreciate the time and thorough effort the on-site review team put forth during their stay. The comments are deemed accurate and will be addressed by the program and institution. We are very proud of the program and our graduate outcomes and look forward to improving in all areas. We understand this is an on-going process of assessment and action that ultimately provides a great learning environment and allows the program and institution to accomplish the goals and objectives set forth for our students and graduates.