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Xavier University and Ochsner Health System Receives Full Accreditation for
Physician Assistant Program

NEW ORLEANS – Xavier University of Louisiana, in partnership with Ochsner Health, has received national
accreditation from the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) for its
Physician Assistant (PA) Program. The PA Program started the accreditation process in 2019. The recent
accreditation makes Xavier one of four colleges in Louisiana, one of two in New Orleans, and one of only seven
Historically Black Colleges and Universities in the nation to offer the program.
The American Academy of PAs estimates there are more than 168,300 PAs in the United States today, and
according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demand for physician assistants is projected to grow 37 percent
from 2016 to 2026. Currently, Ochsner has more than 180 PAs working across its health system. ARC-PA is the
accrediting agency that protects the interests of the public and PA profession by defining the standards for PA
education and evaluating PA educational programs within the territorial United States to ensure their compliance
with those standards. The process has three different stages: initial, provisional, and final.
“Xavier is committed to producing exceptional servant leaders who positively impact the communities they serve,
and the full accreditation of its Physician Assistant program is an example of that commitment,” said Marguerite
Giguette, Ph.D., Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs of Xavier University of Louisiana. “Our
students are trained to fight inequity and disparity, and we are proud of their progress as they live out the
university’s mission to promote a more just and humane society. We are proud to continue deepening the
partnership between Xavier and Ochsner Health, especially as we embark on the journey to open the Xavier µv]ÀŒ•šÇ[�uÞPRR`ƒ�a ��à
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Following three semesters of classroom instruction, the PA students complete approximately 2,000 hours of
hands-on clinical experience through 11 rotations at various Ochsner facilities. Students work and study with
healthcare professionals across multiple specialties, including Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, Pediatrics,
General Surgery, Emergency Medicine, Behavioral Health and Women’s Health.
Founding Physician Assistant Program Director Varsha Castro Gusman (’06), PA-C, oversees the program and
serves as an instructor, mentor, and advisor to students. Gusman, a Xavier alumna, has been a practicing Ochsner
Health PA in Neuro Critical Care for over 11 years.
“This is a milestone celebration for both Xavier and Ochsner Health. The legacy that we have created will greatly
impact the health of the diverse communities that we serve. We have the potential to diversify the PA profession
and make a direct impact by eliminating health disparities in our communities. I firmly believe that we will
become a national leader in the advancement of PA education and become one of the top PA programs in the
country,” said Gusman.
For more information about the Xavier University and Ochsner Physician Assistant program, visit
http://www.xula.edu/physician-assistant-program or call 504-520-5119. For more information about Ochsner
Academics, visit education.ochsner.org or call 504-842-1205.

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About Xavier University of Louisiana
On the cusp of celebrating its first 100 years of service, Xavier University of Louisiana remains America’s only historically Black
and Catholic University and is ranked among the top HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation.
Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier has historically produced more African American students
who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier’s College of
Pharmacy is among the country’s top producers of African American pharmacists.
Established almost a century ago in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for
African Americans and Native Americans to receive a quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in nearly
every industry, including the arts, sciences, business, education, pharmacy, and political science. More recent additions in
STEM-based master’s programs and undergraduate options in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science,
neuroscience, and genetics, have provided Xavier students (3,181students) an unbeatable experience of traditional classroom
study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities, and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty and experts in their fields to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula
provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls,
developing all who choose to learn at the institution into the next generation of leaders and agents of positive change. Blessed
with a mission to promote a more just and humane society, Xavier is leading the way to a brighter future for all. For more
information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit www.XULA.edu or contact the Marketing and Communications
Department at (504) 520-5214 or XULANews@XULA.edu.

About Ochsner Health
Ochsner Health is the leading nonprofit healthcare provider in the Gulf South, delivering expert care at its 46 hospitals and
more than 370 health and urgent care centers. For 13 consecutive years, U.S. News & World Report has recognized Ochsner as
the No. 1 hospital in Louisiana. Additionally, Ochsner Children’s has been recognized as the No. 1 hospital for kids in Louisiana
for three consecutive years. Ochsner inspires healthier lives and stronger communities through a combination of standard-setting expertise, quality and connection not found anywhere else in the region. In 2023, Ochsner Health cared for more than
1.5 million people from every state in the nation and 65 countries. Ochsner’s workforce includes more than 38,000 dedicated
team members and over 4,700 employed and affiliated physicians. To learn more about how Ochsner empowers people to get
well and stay well, visit https://www.ochsner.org/. Media Contact pr@ochsner.org.