T228
Factors Influencing Physician Assistant Program Choice among Physician Assistant Applicants

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Background

- Applicants have many program options
  - Location
  - Size
  - Setting
- Applicants also vary
Background- Programs

• Currently 196 accredited programs
• About 8100 graduates last year
• 34.5% of programs in academic health centers
• 17% in schools of medicine
Background- 2014-2015 CASPA Data

- 22,997 total applicants
- 6,874 total matriculates
- Student Quality
  - Overall GPA 3.34
  - Science GPA 3.24
- 71.3% of applicants were female
- 62.4% of applicants age 20-25
- 15.9% of applicants over age 30
Purpose

Determine which factors were most important to applicants when choosing between two or more physician assistant (PA) programs.
Methods

• A survey was created to measure the importance of 34 decision factors
• Factors divided into two categories
  • Program-controlled
  • Non-program controlled
Methods

• Decision factors were rated on a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (least important) to 5 (most important).
• Means and standard deviations were calculated for each of the 34 decision factors.
• Mann-Whitney U test determined whether importance varied between two subgroups (gender, marital status, etc).
Results: Demographics

- 54 programs participated
- 1424 student-surveys completed
- Females: 1030 (72.3%)
- Single: 998 (70.1%)
- No children: 1213 (85.2%)
- Age:
  - 22-24 years of age (34.6%)
  - 25-27 (28.9%)
  - 28-30 (15.4%)
- Didactic year students: 843 (59.6%)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program-controlled Factors</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First-time Pass Rate on the PANCE</td>
<td>4.28</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Interview Experience</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of Faculty and Staff</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree Offered (Certificate, Bachelors, or Master's Degree)</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morale of Faculty and staff</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality and Availability of Clinical Rotation Sites</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of Being Wanted or Recruited</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities (Modern classrooms, labs, technology, workout equipment, etc)</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuition Cost</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Design (Problem-based learning versus lecture-based learning)</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Prerequisites</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length (in years) of Program's Existence</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Clinical Hours Required for Admission</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class Size</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Program</td>
<td>2.97</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Emphasis on Care to the Under-served or Minority Populations</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Specialty or Focus (Primary care, Surgical, etc)</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time of year that the program starts. Example: January v. August start date</td>
<td>2.48</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Requirement of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE)</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-program Controlled Factors</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Reputation</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable Geographical Location</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referral or Positive Feedback from Health Professional, Family, Friends, etc</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical Proximity to Family</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name Recognition</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Outlook for Physician Assistants in the Area</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desirable Location to Live after Training</td>
<td>2.95</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Living</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of In-State Tuition</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recreational Activities in the Area</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather/Climate in the Area</td>
<td>2.23</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Environment for Family and Children</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse or Significant Other’s Program Preference</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Activities in the Area</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic Diversity of the Area</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Results:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top Ten Decision Factors</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Margin</th>
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<tr>
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<td>9 Desirable Geographical Location</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>1.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Positive Referral from Health Professional, Family, Friends, Classmate, etc.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.14</td>
</tr>
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</table>
## Results: Specific Groups

### More Important to Females
- Number of clinical hours required
- Degree offered
- Program specialty
- Curriculum design
- Quality and availability of clinical sites
- Desirable geographical location
- Job outlook in the area
- Referral or positive feedback from others

### More Important to Males
- Spouse or Significant Other’s Preference
Results: Specific Groups

More Important to Married Students

• Desirable geographical location
• Geographical Proximity to Family
• Good Environment for Family and Children
• Cost of Living
• Ethnic Diversity
• Spouse or Significant Other’s Preference

More Important to Single Students

• Number of clinical hours required
## Results: Specific Groups

<table>
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<th>More Important to Students with Children</th>
<th>More Important to Students without Children</th>
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<td>• Desirable geographical location</td>
<td>• Program Reputation</td>
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<td>• First-time pass rate on PANCE</td>
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<td>• Good Environment for Family and Children</td>
<td>• Curriculum Design</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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Results: Specific Groups

More Important to Young Students (19-30)
- Class Size
- Program Reputation
- PANCE Pass-rates

More Important to Older Students (>31)
- Program prerequisites
- Good Environment for Family and Children
- Cost of Living
- Ethnic Diversity
- Spouse or Significant Other’s Preference
Discussion: Implications

1. Prominently display PANCE pass-rates
2. Articulate the quality (3rd) and morale (5th) of faculty and staff
3. Provide a positive interview experience (2nd) and ensure the applicant feels wanted or recruited (8th)
Conclusions

1. When choosing between two or more programs, applicants consider several decision factors.

2. Most important Factors:
   1. First-time PANCE pass rates
   2. Positive interview experience
   3. Quality of faculty and staff
   4. Degree offered
   5. Morale of faculty and staff

3. The top five factors, and seven of the top ten, are factors that are within the program’s control.

4. Understanding the factors that are important to applicants, and modifying program characteristics accordingly, would help a program recruit and retain more applicants.
References

Robohm-Leavitt, C. Session S109 The PA Pipeline. Presented at: Physician Assistant Education Annual Conference; (October, 2014); Philadelphia, PA, United States.


Questions?