

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

WITH SHANNON IJAMS, MPAS, PA-C



“PA school is challenging, but the impact you can make makes it worth every moment.”

I grew up one state north of Oklahoma, in Wichita, Kansas. I was drawn to science and healthcare from a young age, mostly because of positive exposures to family in medicine and dentistry. Following college at Kansas State University, I packed my car and headed to Chicago. It was there that my interest in medicine was confirmed. I worked as a physical therapy aide in an inpatient setting where I had the opportunity to interact with physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech therapists, physicians, physician assistants (PAs), and social workers, among others. The unique knowledge and skill set each of these clinicians brought was inspiring! I knew then that I was drawn to a career in healthcare that involved interdisciplinary collaboration. Determining the specific route to that goal was less clear. I explored each of these professions in-depth, which included numerous discussions with co-workers, and LOTS of coffee.

Even though I had familiarity with the PA profession from a close family friend, observing the PAs in the hospital engage with patients helped me decide that the PA profession was an excellent fit for me. I particularly loved the potential for lateral mobility and the collaborative

nature of the profession. I packed up my car once again and returned to the Land of Oz where I began my PA training at Wichita State University. I always feel inclined to share with applicants that I was initially on the waitlist at WSU so I only had a few days' notice before diving into PA school. I'm so grateful that I didn't allow the late acceptance deter me from what has become a wonderful career! For many current applicants, receiving an acceptance letter can take several attempts, but perseverance is valued.

After PA school, I worked at the Tulsa VA Outpatient Clinic. It was an honor both providing medical care for veterans, as well as hearing the stories from their time serving our country. I later joined the faculty of the newly developing PA program, at OU-TU SCM. I knew right away during my faculty interview that the OU-TU SCM was a special place. The commitment to providing excellent care to all members of our community was evident. My clinical experiences have informed my teaching in many ways, and inform the program as a whole through my current role as PA Program Director. In addition, I participated in the development of a curriculum for PA students on substance use disorders, which is an issue that impacts the health of Oklahoma in significant ways. I also coordinate a clinical experience called Community Impact where students visit various community agencies that are valuable resources for our patient population, including the Tulsa Day Center, Mental Health Association of Oklahoma, and The Little Light House.

I strongly encourage students from diverse backgrounds to pursue PA school. We know the value of educating providers that are passionate about returning to their communities, especially tribal, rural, and underrepresented communities. Gaining exposure to the healthcare needs of your community and committing to meet those needs play a large role in making PA school a goal that can be achieved! Without a doubt, PA school is challenging, but the impact you can make makes it worth every moment.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

WITH JAZMINE MANNS, MPH, PA-2



"If you work hard and pursue it against the odds, it is achievable!"

not feel like I was helping anyone. After a while I knew I wanted to go back to school and started to explore my options, that is when I learned about the Masters of Public Health degree at OU-Tulsa and ways I could work to implement changes into healthcare. While in the program I expressed my educational course to professors who urged me to continue to pursue being a PA so I decided reapply.

I think having an MPH has been beneficial to me because it continually challenges me to think about health as more than just a diagnosis. The manner in which the information was presented during my MPH covered patient health experiences in perspectives that most may not take into account such as the epidemiology of chronic conditions, how the structure of society effects healthcare and the ways that you should intervene to make changes in patient outcomes. I think the number one thing that I can apply to my patients is to "meet them where they are at" when treating them meaning take their life and situation into account, not just what I want them to do. I believe that it is important to have compassion, perseverance and patience in order to become a successful PA. I say that because the journey to get into PA school is not easy and once accepted the program is quite rigorous and intense at times. I wholeheartedly believe that if someone is passionate about caring for patients, they will reap the benefits and rewards that come along with being PA and excel in their career. I chose OU-TU SCM due to its close proximity to my home life and family. But the thing that I believe sets our program apart from others is how it integrates community medicine into our clerkships and rotations. I think that our interactions with the MD students are very important and give us the advantage of experiencing what it will be like to work with our soon to be colleagues.

For students who are underrepresented but are interested in becoming a PA the advice I would give is just go for it! We need you in healthcare! And your future patients need you too! I can relate to those who believe that going to PA or medical school is not attainable because they don't see many people who look like them, or people who come from where they are from in this field but if we continue let that hold us back from pursuing our dream that will always be the case and others in generations to come will continue to have those same thoughts since we didn't step outside of our comfort zone. If you work hard and pursue it against the odds it is achievable, just don't give up!