



CRASH COURSE: ACCREDITATION STATUS

DISCLAIMER

These are not the official stances of Grand Valley State University, Grand Valley State University's Pre-PA club, or the ARC-PA. These stances are based on student interpretation. Each student/applicant should do their own further research to determine their stance on each status.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

Introduction

04

Accreditation- Continued

06

Accreditation- Provisional

08

Accreditation- Probation

10

Accreditation- Withdrawn

12

Accreditation- Administrative
Probation

14

Conclusion

15

Sources



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INTRODUCTION

Are you starting to research PA schools and can't understand all of the accreditation terms? The GVSU Pre-PA club wants to help! In this article, you will learn about what each status entails and what it means for the program and students. The goal is to assist you, the PA applicant, at gaining a deeper understanding of the accreditation status. In the following guide, you will see a pattern for each section. The title of each section represents an accreditation status. The bold print that follows represents the ARC-PA definition. The remaining regular font is the interpretation of that standard by the author.

WHO GIVES THE ACCREDITATION STATUS?

The ARC-PA stands for the Accreditation Review Committee on Education for the Physician Assistant. This commission is responsible for the development of standards and the evaluation of programs ability to meet these standards. The goal of the agency is to protect the interest of the public and the PA profession by ensuring accredited programs meet the standard set forth.

Furthermore, the profession has set the requirement that a graduate PA can only sit for the National Board Examination (the Physician Assistant National Certification Examination) if they have graduated from an accredited program.



ACCREDITATION- CONTINUED

The ARC-PA defines this status as “Accreditation-Continued is granted 1) when a currently accredited program is in compliance with the Standards, 2) in the case of a program holding Accreditation-Probation when the program has demonstrated that it is once again in compliance with the Standards, or 3) when a program holding Accreditation-Provisional demonstrates compliance with the Standards after completion of the provisional review process” (ARCPA, 2025). That’s a lot of information about one status! Let’s break it down. There are 3 ways to obtain this status:

The first is when a program which already has this status still maintains the ARC-PA standards, and is still providing a quality education to its students. This is the best a school can do! This shows that the school is overall maintaining the standards of the ARC-PA.

The second is when a program on probation shows that they are maintaining the standards of the ARC-PA, and have plans to continue this. In essence, they have fixed whatever may have caused them to go on probation in the first place. This is a good thing! This proves the program is committed to providing their students with a quality education and wants their program to thrive.

The third is when a newer school (one in the provisional stage- not older than 5 years) has graduated at least one cohort of students, and has shown evidence proving they provide a quality education that is in line with the standards of the ARC-PA. This means the school has reached the end of their provisional stage, and is now fully accredited with the ARC-PA. This is the best a newer program can do, and shows that they want to be a good program for us students.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STUDENTS?

Accreditation- Continued is the best status when looking at schools. Try to find out when they were last reviewed, and find out when their next reaccreditation review is. Ultimately, this is the shining gold star when looking for your future PA school regarding accreditation. This shows you are likely to get a good education, and to be confident in your school!

MOVING FORWARD

Look into when these schools last became continued. It is always nice to know when they will be reviewed next, and don't hesitate to contact the school and ask these questions. Feel confident in applying to these schools when it comes to accreditation status!

ACCREDITATION- PROVISIONAL

The ARC-PA defines this status as “an accreditation status granted when the plans and resource allocation, if fully implemented as planned, of a proposed program that has not yet enrolled students appear to demonstrate the program’s ability to meet the ARC-PA Standards or when a program holding accreditation-provisional status appears to demonstrate continued progress in complying with the Standards as it prepares for the graduation of the first class (cohort) of students” (ARCPA, 2025). This status has two parts:

The first part of this status is when a school is planning to start their program and has not enrolled any students. By receiving this accreditation, it gives the school the green light to move forward with enrolling students. The ARC-PA deems this school ready to matriculate students and confident it will maintain their standards.

The second part of this status is when a newer program (less than 5 years old) that already has enrolled students is still maintaining the ARC-PA standards of a PA education. This is the best status a newer program can have. Think of it as the Pre-Accreditation- Continued status. In essence, they are waiting to graduate their first cohort of students and apply for their reaccreditation and receive their continued status.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STUDENTS?

There are two different lenses to take into consideration when looking at these schools. Do they have students, or will you be in the first cohort of this program? If they already have students, you know they are still maintaining ARC-PA standards even after their program has started. If they don't have any current students, you will be in the first cohort of this program. You will be making history attending this program, but also expect that you **may** experience some bumps in the road while attending this program. These programs have a set plan in place for you to flourish, but any new program may experience adjustments as they start.

Attending a provisional school can absolutely be a great experience for you, but also be mindful that they are newer schools! Every new school has its quirks that they may try to adjust, but be confident in knowing that they want to make it the best program for you.

MOVING FORWARD

Before applying to these schools, you need to ask yourself if you are okay with attending a newer program. Do you want to experience potential changes, or do you want to attend an already established program? There is nothing wrong with applying to these schools, but be mindful of what you want from a program! If you are okay with a newer program, absolutely apply to these schools. They have met ARC-PA standards for a quality PA education, and you will hopefully get a great education! It all comes down to your personal preferences.

ACCREDITATION- PROBATION

The ARC-PA defines this status as “when a program holding an accreditation status of Accreditation – Provisional or Accreditation – Continued does not, in the judgment of the ARC-PA, meet the Standards or when the capability of the program to provide an acceptable educational experience for its students is threatened” (ARCPA, 2025).

Let's break this down. Probation status can be given to any previous status, provisional or continued. This happens when a program has failed to demonstrate compliance with ARC-PA standards and can put their students' education at risk. The ARC-PA grants them this status and provides them with specific examples on how to meet those standards. It is then up to the program to make those changes in a timely manner before their next visit from the ARC-PA. This status can initially last no longer than two years, but if the school proves they are making substantial changes and need more time to achieve these goals, they can be granted an extension of this status.

Once the ARC-PA conducts their reaccreditation review, they will grant the programs with either Accreditation- Continued or Accreditation- Withdrawn. In essence, this means that they either passed or failed their review. This is a time for readjustment and change for these programs, and the ARC-PA wants each program to succeed.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STUDENTS?

Let's be clear: you can absolutely still apply to schools that are on probation. Quite frankly, it is very common for programs to go on probation at least once in their history. This is not necessarily a bad thing, it just means that programs need to adjust and modify their practices as time and medicine continues to evolve.

Applying to schools that are on probation is not a bad thing. It actually can show that schools care enough about their students that they want to provide them with a quality education and are willing to make the necessary changes to achieve that goal. Be mindful of this status, and do your research as to why these programs are on probation. Oftentimes, they can be small adjustments that they need to tweak to make their program stronger.

MOVING FORWARD

Don't be afraid to reach out to schools individually and gain information about their current status. A good program will be transparent with you and provide you with information as to how they want to improve. As I said before, probation does not mean a school is terrible. It just means that they have things to improve on! Try not to be too harsh towards schools on probation. More often than not they are trying even harder to make their program the best it can be.

ACCREDITATION- WITHDRAWN

The ARC-PA defines this status as “an established program is determined no longer to be in compliance with the Standards and is no longer capable of providing an acceptable educational experience for its students, or when the program has failed to comply with ARC-PA accreditation requirements, actions or procedures,” (ARCPA, 2025).

This happens only after the program shows no signs of reaching the standards written by the ARC-PA. Let's be clear: it takes a lot for a program to reach this level. Typically, if a school truly wants to continue their PA program, the school will make all of the necessary changes needed to be made and have a clear plan moving forward. As unfortunate as it is, sometimes the school just doesn't have the proper resources or willingness to change their program in order to succeed.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STUDENTS?

This is not a school you can apply to or attend. The school will make it very clear that you cannot apply here, and will be removed from CASPA. This is not something that you need to worry about on CASPA, and not something you need to stress over. Be sure to make note of all your desired schools that are on probation, and know that their accreditation status can change. If you make a list of possible schools early in your undergrad, be sure to double check their status before moving forward with your application.

MOVING FORWARD

As I said before, you cannot apply here. If you see a desired school has a withdrawn status, you need to remove it off your list. This gives you an opportunity to research other schools, and maybe you can find your new dream program in the process!

ACCREDITATION- ADMINISTRATIVE PROBATION

The ARC-PA defines this status as “a program has not complied with an administrative requirement, such as failure to pay fees or submit required reports,” (ARCPA, 2025).

This type of probation status does not deal with the educational aspect of their program, but rather concerns in the administrative process. This status is granted when administration fails to provide all necessary documentation/payments to the ARC-PA, meaning they cannot move forward with the accreditation process. Think of it as not providing a future employer your resume. You cannot move forward through the employment process if the employer has nothing to understand your qualifications. Without proper documentation, the ARC-PA cannot justly grant an appropriate status to the program. The school must provide everything the ARC-PA requires in order for them to move forward.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR STUDENTS?

This type of probation is not based on academics. This could mean the school could have a very strong program, but has not demonstrated compliance with certain administrative aspects of the program. Now as this could sound like a “not bad probation,” be mindful as this can raise a few red flags. Schools that want their program to succeed will make sure every piece of documentation is submitted, and not leave any openings for failure to comply. You have to think, “do I want to go to a school that could possibly overlook something important like this?” It is all up to personal preference.

MOVING FORWARD

Reach out to programs if this is an area of concern for you! Have an open conversation, and decide if this is a dealbreaker for you. You can still apply to these schools, but as I mentioned prior, it is all up to personal preference. This is also a temporary status and can be fixed sooner rather than later.

CONCLUSION

As daunting as all of the accreditation statuses may sound, my recommendation to you is to familiarize yourself with each one! It is important to do your own research about each school, and find what you prefer from a school. The most common statuses you will see are continued, probation, and provisional. Know what each one means, and always refer back to this article. If you have any questions regarding status, reach out to each program and ask! Each program is required to post on their website not only their current accreditation status, but also their accreditation history. Most schools will be open with you regarding questions. Remember, they want you there!

Be confident in your knowledge about accreditation. If you are ever feeling lost, refer back to this article or do your own research! Hearing different wordings of definitions can be helpful in understanding each one better, and is something very helpful in the long run.

Remember, you got this! Any program is lucky to have YOU there. They want you there, and you are worthy of attending! Good luck, future PA-S!

SOURCES



"Arc-PA." ARCPA, www.arc-pa.org/ .