



The Office of Professional Studies in the Health Sciences

The Office of Professional Studies in the Health Sciences offers a treasure trove of courses, certificate programs, and advanced degrees for students desiring to achieve a career in medicine or the health sciences. Also like a treasure trove, the Office of Professional Studies can often be hidden – in this case, behind the better-known M.D. and Ph.D. programs. The office deserves to shine in its own right; it provides a wide array of nationally recognized programs that meet a real need in the health sciences industry. It also continues to grow in response to these new opportunities, acting as a trendsetter in the field.

The Office of Professional Studies traces its origins to the Interdepartmental Medical Science program, introduced at Hahnemann Medical College in 1981. This program was created by the chair of physiology, Professor Van Angelakos, to fortify scientific coursework for post-baccalaureates who wanted to enter medical school but did not possess the best academic record. Gerald Soslau, Ph.D., professor of biochemistry and molecular biology and current vice dean of the office, was there at the beginning, teaching biochemistry to that first class.



Gerald Soslau, Ph.D.

From its modest origins, the office has grown into 19 successful programs with over 700 students currently enrolled. While each program has its own strengths, a few are highlighted here.

The Office of Professional Studies is organized into two areas: graduate premedical programs and professional programs. The eight premedical programs prepare students for a wide array of professional schools: medical, dental, optometry, chiropractic, podiatric, and veterinary.



The premedical programs appeal to students who may not have a hard-science background or who may have faltered academically for various reasons. Laura Mangano, M.Ed., who directs several programs in the office, says one of their assets is that they are “willing to accept students with academic flaws. It doesn’t mean they’re not going to be great clinicians.” While other schools may dismiss the candidate who is a career-changer, or who had a poor semester, the Office of Professional Studies focuses on other attributes. “We look at the applications holistically when reviewing a file,” relates Mangano. She asks, “Is this somebody I would want as a physician? Are they going into medicine for the

right reasons?" By shifting their focus, they are able to attract some really good people who might not otherwise

become physicians.

The Interdepartmental Medical Science (IMS) program is the office's most popular. Dr. Soslau explains that these students take 70 percent of the same courses as first-year medical students and are graded on a par with the med students. "All the medical schools in the United States know that a student who comes from the program who has better than a B average, they're already in the top half of a medical school class," he says. "If they achieve B's or better, then 90 percent of them get into medical school. It's been very, very successful through the years."

The Drexel Pathway to Medical School (DPMS) limits the size of its classes to allow for small group instruction during a summer enrichment component. Soslau explains that this program is for "underserved lower-socioeconomic students who, by the nature of where they've come from in life, have less of an opportunity to be exposed to an education where they can really excel; or they had to work full-time and go to school. These students are interviewed by the medical school admissions office and offered a conditional acceptance to the College of Medicine. If they meet the academic requirements in this one-year program, they keep their seat in our medical school and start classes in August."

The Interdisciplinary Health Sciences (IHS) program is for students whose undergraduate background in the hard sciences and/or the MCAT is weak. As is the case with the other post-baccalaureate programs, after earning their one-year certificate, students can return for a second year to work toward their master's degrees. The IHS program introduces students to "a very broad spectrum of coursework along with a rigorous seminar program they have to participate in," Soslau says. "We have people from all walks of life in the health sciences. They get exposed to what the profession is all about."

IHS has some overlap with the office's other area of study: professional programs. Citing pathologists' assistants, Soslau says, "They are extremely important people in healthcare – you just don't see them. You don't know that they exist; the same for the histotechnologists who have to prepare the slide. These are professions students are unaware of and that they get introduced to as well."

Some of the professional programs introduce students to the health sciences; others offer advanced education for those already in the field. Eleven certificate or degree-granting programs are housed under this banner. They range from the nationally recognized Master of Laboratory Animal Science (MLAS) to popular online clinical research programs for busy professionals.

Mangano explains that the professional studies programs offer terminal master's degrees not requiring original research. This contrasts with graduate work in the Office of Biomedical Graduate Studies, for which students are required to author a thesis to graduate. The option to pursue a non-research-based master's has wide appeal to those wanting to gain entry into medical or other health professions programs.

Several of these programs are unique in that they are the only accredited upper-level certificate or degree-granting programs of their kind in the nation. The MLAS, the Master of Science in Pathologists' Assistant (PathA) program, and the Master of Science in Histotechnology program belong in this category. Students who graduate from these programs tend to gain employment. "Our students have been accepted to the top veterinary medical schools in the nation," Soslau says of the MLAS program. Likewise, as the PathA program enters its new accrediting phase, the accrediting agency has identified it "as one of the top programs in the nation," Soslau reveals.

Other programs are national forerunners in their respective fields. The Master of Forensic Science (MFS) program was the first master's of its kind at an allopathic medical school. Soslau states that it is the "only program that has a clinical forensic medicine concentration taught by clinicians." Similarly, the office offers the only master's programs in the nation in criminalistic science and veterinary medical science.

For such a number and variety of nationally recognized programs to exist in a single department is rather significant. It reveals the academic rigor of the course load, as well as the office's innovative nature. The Office of Professional Studies is continually seeking out what is *next* in the health sciences professions, where the greatest demand for trained professionals will be. For instance, Mangano says that with the popularity of the *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* television series, more people were introduced to – and became interested in pursuing – careers in forensic science. In response to this demand, the office now offers its two master's-level forensic programs.

The professional demand is certainly there for these well-trained students. Soslau observes that students in the PathA and Histotechnology programs "get hired before they even [graduate]." There are "thousands of jobs in hospitals across the United States that are [waiting] for these people."

Rather than rest on its laurels, the office continues to discern what professional demands may lie ahead in the health sciences. They are developing new academic courses, such as forensic veterinary, industrial hygiene, and healthcare advocacy programs, to meet an increasing need in the field.

Besides this ability to recognize and then provide educational opportunities, Mangano identifies another great strength of the office. "The staff that we have are very caring," she says. "They're here to help the students in any way possible. They're very involved." This also means aiding students enrolled in programs through the College of Medicine's Sacramento campus.

Soslau says that most people "don't think of all these programs coming out of a medical school, but they're all health related. They all draw upon the energies related to the health sciences. It's very diverse and is obviously going to be beneficial to society in a whole host of different aspects of life."