FORM 1

COVER SHEET
NEW DEGREE PROGRAM PLANNING NOTIFICATION OF INTENT
(PLANNING NOI)

Program Information

Program Name: MEDEX Northwest Physician Assistant Program

Institution Name: University of Washington

Degree Granting Unit: School of Medicine
(e.g. College of Arts and Science)

Degree: Master of Clinical Health Services *(e.g. B.S. Chemistry)* Level: Master *(e.g. Bachelor)* Type: Clinical Health Services *(e.g. Science)*

Major: Physician Assistant *(e.g. Chemistry)* CIP Code: 51.0912

Minor: N/A
(if required for major)

Concentration(s): N/A
(if applicable)

Proposed Start Date: June 2009

Projected Enrollment (FTE) in Year One: 80 *(# FTE)* At Full Enrollment by Year: 2009 *(# FTE)*: 80

Proposed New Funding: N/A

Funding Source: ☐ State FTE ☐ Self Support ☒ Other: Continue self-sustaining status as previously

Mode of Delivery

Single Campus Delivery _____
(enter locations)

Off-site _____
(enter locations)

Distance Learning: Some distance learning via online and videoconference delivery may be incorporated. Clinical training takes place throughout the Pacific Northwest service region of the UW School of Medicine.

☒ Other: MEDEX maintains three training sites: Seattle (UW main campus), Yakima and Spokane WA

Substantive Statement of Need

Attach Sheet

Contact Information (Academic Department Representative)

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Endorsement by Chief Academic Officer

Date 9/18/2006

Substantive Statement of Need

MEDEX Northwest, the University of Washington's physician assistant (PA) training program, was established in 1969 as a collaborative project of the University of Washington (UW) and the Washington State Medical Association. PAs are defined by the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) as "health care professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision."[1] As a part of the UW School of Medicine, MEDEX shares the medical school's mission to train health care providers who will practice primary care in rural and medically underserved areas within the state of Washington as well as in the school's Pacific Northwest service region. In response to the evolving needs and expectations of PA students and employers, the first Bachelor in Clinical Health Services degree was awarded in 1989 to MEDEX students eligible for matriculation into the UW. (A certificate is currently awarded to MEDEX program graduates who do not meet UW enrollment criteria.) Approximately 40 years after the physician assistant profession was established, expectations for training and degree levels have once again shifted significantly. In order to keep pace with the national norm for PA education, MEDEX Northwest must now make the transition to a master's degree level.

These changing expectations have been observed locally as well. Prospective applicants who hold bachelor's degrees must weigh their desire to attend the nationally acclaimed MEDEX program against their desire to earn a master's degree through PA study. Growing numbers of these applicants regretfully train elsewhere in order to earned advanced degrees. The Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board has also recently noted "that all fields are becoming more complex and require workers prepared with higher levels of education than in the past."[2] The needs assessment goes on to recommend increases in graduate-level preparation for individuals in several professions including health care.

The PA profession has repeatedly debated the benefits and detriments of the shift toward granting master's degrees. National meetings of the AAPA and the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA, formerly named the Association of Physician Assistant Programs) over the past several years have included intense discussion on awarding master's degrees and possibly requiring them for entry into practice. A task force charged to investigate this question concluded in 2000 "that PA education in accredited programs is conducted at the graduate level and recommends that PA programs grant students a credential reflective of this level of curriculum."[3] There are currently 136 PA programs in the US. Of these, only 3 (2%) offer an associate degree, and 19 (14%) a baccalaureate degree as their highest academic credential. This number of purely undergraduate programs is dropping rapidly, particularly as specific states have adopted or are considering adopting legislation either encouraging or mandating graduate degrees for PA licensure.

The Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant is the national body responsible for accrediting physician assistant programs in the US. In the introduction to their *Accreditation Standards*, which all PA programs must meet, the commission "encourages sponsoring institutions to recognize the evolution of the profession as one that requires a graduate level of curricular intensity. Institutions that sponsor PA programs are also encouraged to incorporate this higher level of academic rigor into their programs and acknowledge it with an

appropriate degree."[4] MEDEX Northwest participated in its most recent re-accreditation process in 2004, and earned accreditation for the maximum possible period of 7 years.

As increasing numbers of PA programs have offered master's degrees, the national PA educators' association (PAEA), has convened a commission to review the content of graduate-level PA training, which has been viewed as inconsistently implemented across PA programs. Initial recommendations from this commission include standards of academic rigor comparable to similar types of graduate programs, course content that assumes that students "function at a higher cognitive level" and an overall program curriculum that requires students to develop "knowledge and skills beyond the baccalaureate degree."[5] In recent years, MEDEX has adopted new curriculum as well as increasingly rigorous standards in existing coursework that meet many of the parameters of the commission's report.

MEDEX Northwest proposes the conversion of the current certificate and bachelor's-degree PA program to a fully graduate-level, master's degree–granting program beginning with the class entering in the 2009-2010 academic year. In addition to the courses that have already been adjusted to meet graduate-level expectations, new coursework will be developed to better prepare MEDEX graduates to both utilize and contribute to the advanced knowledge base[5] of the PA profession. Such additions to the curriculum would include statistics, research methods and topics on health care policy and administration. A capstone project linked to the primary care preceptorship in the clinical phase of training will allow students to apply their education to practical situations. Students would select from four initial focus areas in their graduate PA study: rural health, primary care, specialty practice and health care policy and administration. A Master of Clinical Health Services degree will be awarded upon completion of 26–27 months of study and clinical placements.

References

1. American Academy of Physician Assistants. Information about PAs and the PA Profession. Available at: http://www.aapa.org/geninfo1.html. Accessed 18 September 2006.
2. State and Regional Needs Assessment Workgroup. *State and Regional Needs Assessment Report.* rev. ed. [Feb. 2006] Olympia WA: Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board; 2006. Available at: http://www.hecb.wa.gov/research/index.asp. Accessed 18 September 2006.
3. Degree Task Force. *Association of Physician Assistant Programs Degree Task Force Final Paper.* Alexandria VA: Association of Physician Assistant Programs; 2000. Available at: http://www.paeaonline.org. Accessed 18 September 2006.
4. Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant. *Accreditation Standards for Physician Assistant Education.* 3rd ed. Duluth GA: Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant; 2006. Available at: http://www.arc-pa.org/Standards/standards.html. Accessed 18 September 2006.
5. Joslin VH, Cook PA, Ballweg R, et al. Value added: graduate-level education in physician assistant programs. *The Journal of Physician Assistant Education.* 2006;17(2):16–30.