QUARTERLY BITES

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Physician Assistant Department Newsletter

Volume 1 · Issue 001 · Fall 2026

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DEPARTMENT CHAIR MESSAGE

Welcome to Our Inaugural Edition

By Charlene Bolton, EdD, MMS, PA-C



It is my pleasure to welcome you to the inaugural edition of our Physician Assistant Department newsletter.

Our department is more than classrooms, examinations, clinical experiences, and graduation ceremonies. It is a community of students, faculty, staff, alumni, preceptors, and clinical partners united by a common mission: To provide students with educational experiences that equip them with the medical knowledge, clinical and technical skills, clinical reasoning and problem-solving skills, interpersonal skills and professional behaviors essential for delivering high-quality healthcare to all patients.

As a department with four distinct programs—Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers, Jacksonville and Orlando—we recognize that our greatest strength comes not only from what we accomplish individually, but also from what we can achieve together.

Continued on page 2

UPCOMING DATES

THU–FRI, NOV 26–27
Thanksgiving Break

SUN, DEC 6
Winter Break Begins

MON, JAN 4, 2027
Winter Term Begins

FROM THE EDITORIAL STAFF

Welcome to the very first issue of Quarterly Bites. Four campuses, one department, and more stories than a single page can hold. Here's to celebrating every win, big and small, together.

Linda Steward, DMSc, PA-C,
Associate Faculty, Orlando

Diana Zitko,
Administrative and Clinical Support Coordinator, Jacksonville

Anita P. Garbett,
Administrative and Clinical Support Coordinator, Orlando

Marcia L. Miller, BEd, MCPM,
Administrative and Clinical Support Coordinator, Fort Myers

Share your ideas for future editions here.

> **"We share a common purpose and a collective responsibility for advancing educational excellence and student success."**
> — Charlene Bolton, Department Chair

DEPARTMENT CHAIR MESSAGE *Continued from page 1*

This year marked an important step in strengthening that collaboration. In April, we held our Department Retreat, bringing program leaders and their support staff together to reflect on our shared priorities, exchange ideas, and identify opportunities to improve how we work and support one another. Our discussions centered on student success, faculty and staff development, continuous improvement, and building a departmental culture grounded in communication, collaboration, and mutual support.



BUILDING A CULTURE OF CONNECTION

In September, we built upon that momentum with our inaugural Program Directors' Retreat. Over three days, our leadership team engaged in meaningful conversations about leadership styles, team effectiveness, accreditation, program director sustainability, and the responsible use of emerging technologies. These discussions reinforced the importance of leading intentionally, sharing resources, and maintaining a unified vision while respecting the unique needs of each program.

> **"Our greatest strength comes not only from what we accomplish individually, but also from what we can achieve together."**
>
> — Charlene Bolton, Department Chair

Both retreats reminded us that while our programs operate across different campuses, we share a common purpose and a collective responsibility for advancing educational excellence and student success. The relationships we build and the knowledge we share are essential to achieving that purpose.

Through this newsletter, we look forward to celebrating the accomplishments of our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and clinical partners, highlighting innovative practices, and sharing stories that reflect the dedication and commitment found throughout our department.

As we move forward, my hope is that we continue building a department where people feel valued, communication is open, collaboration is intentional, and every member of our community recognizes the important role they play in our success.

Thank you for your continued dedication and contributions. I look forward to celebrating all that we will accomplish together.

Charlene Bolton, EdD, MMS, PA-C

Chair, Physician Assistant Department

CAMPUS NEWS

FORT LAUDERDALE



PROGRAM DIRECTOR
Diana E. Cherkiss, MMS, PA-C

Leading with Intention

By Charlene Bolton, EdD, MMS, PA-C



In September, the department's program directors gathered for the inaugural Program Directors' Retreat. Over three days, they explored leadership styles, team effectiveness, accreditation, program director sustainability, and the responsible use of emerging technologies, underscoring the value of leading with intention and keeping a unified vision while honoring each program's unique needs.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WEEK · SEPTEMBER 21–26

Sharing the Journey

By Rosalyn Rosas, MMS, PA-C

Community Engagement Week brought the KPCAM community together to strengthen connections and advance our mission to the communities we serve. Professor Rosas was invited to co-present a storytelling session with Dr. Prasad, sharing her journey to becoming a Physician Associate. She shared her experiences in the US and the UK, the challenges she overcame, and the opportunities that led her to become academic director of the NSU PA program on the Fort Lauderdale campus.



Pictured left to right: Rosalyn Rosas, MMS, PA-C, Associate Director and Academic Director; Arkene Levy Johnson, PhD, Associate Dean of Community Affairs; and Samiksha Prasad, PhD, Associate Professor, Medical Education

FACULTY PROMOTION



Diana Cherkiss, MMS, MPH, PA-C

Congratulations on your promotion to Full Professor!

NEW FACULTY



Jean Mahn, MMS, PA-C

Assistant Faculty

Please join us in welcoming Jean Mahn to the Fort Lauderdale PA family. We are delighted to have her on the team!

GOLDEN APPLE AWARD AND PROMOTION



Natalie Covitz, MMS, PA-C

Congratulations on receiving the Class of 2026 Golden Apple and on your promotion to Associate Professor!

CAMPUS NEWS

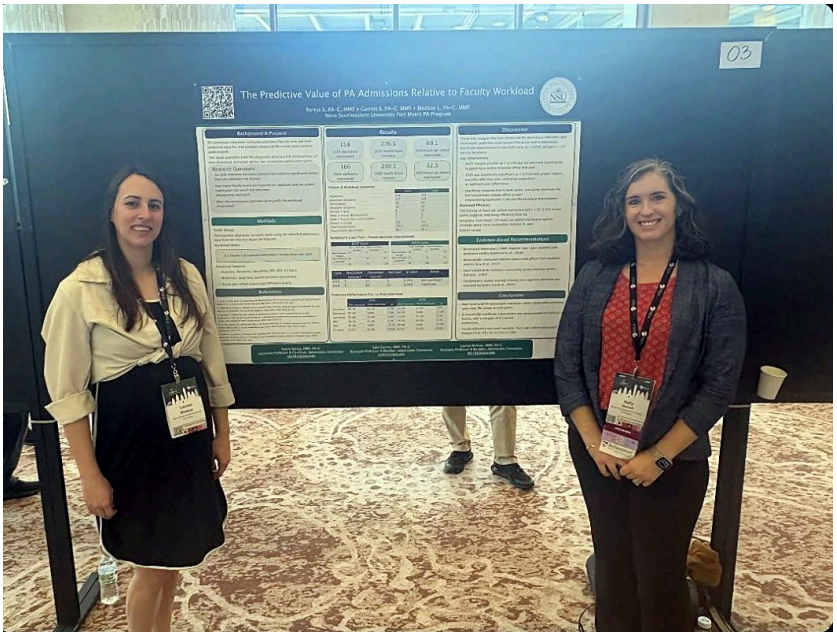
FORT MYERS



PROGRAM DIRECTOR
Charlene Couillard, DHSc, PA-C

Faculty Research Presented at the 2026 PAEA Education Forum

By Sylwia Bareja, MMS, PA-C, Associate Professor; Sally Garrett, MMS, PA-C, Assistant Professor; and Lauren Bledsoe, MMS, PA-C, Assistant Professor



Lauren Bledsoe (left) and Sally Garrett (right) at the 2026 PAEA Education Forum

This two-year study examined the efficiency of the Fort Myers PA admissions process and its impact on faculty workload. Admissions interviews improved decision-making compared with file review alone, while the faculty hours required per additional matriculant decreased by about half.

Based on these findings, the authors recommend structured interviews or multiple mini-interviews, behaviorally anchored rubrics, rater calibration across interview panels, and competency-based scoring. They are continuing to research this topic to gain a better understanding of best admissions practices.

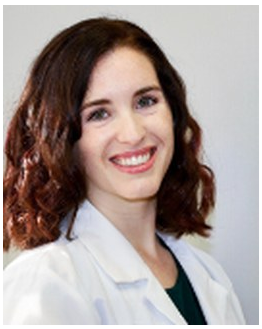
FACULTY PROMOTION



Amanda Schultz, MPH, PA-C

Congratulations on your promotion to Associate Professor!

CLASS OF 2027 GOLDEN APPLE



Sally Garrett, MMS, PA-C

Congratulations on receiving the Class of 2027 Golden Apple!

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



Douglas Burst, MD, PhD

Associate Professor

Please join us in welcoming Dr. Burst to the Fort Myers PA family this year. We are thrilled to have him on the team!

CAMPUS NEWS

JACKSONVILLE



PROGRAM DIRECTOR
Racheal McInnis, DHSc, MSN, MPAS, PA-C

COMMUNITY IMPACT DAY

A Pressure Check on Community Health

By Hughie G. Griffenkranz, MPAS, PA-C, Clinical Director

Community Impact Day was a community outreach event where volunteer physician assistant students provided complimentary blood pressure screenings to attendees, sponsored by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, Alpha Beta Eta Omega Chapter. The event aimed to promote preventive health care and increase community awareness of cardiovascular health.



Pictured from left to right: Class of 2028 first-year students Sanjana Sahoo, Ann Hitpas, My Nguyen and Ricky Balmir, along with faculty facilitator Professor Griffenkranz

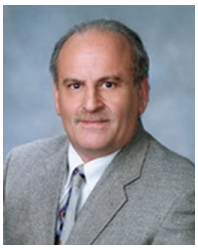
Faculty Publication in JAAPA



Stacie Gopal, DMS, MPAS, PA-C, CHC, the Medical Director for the NSU Jacksonville PA Program, recently published an article in *JAAPA* titled "Bridging the BRCA1/2 Variant Previvor Gap in Health Care." The article highlights important considerations in caring for individuals who carry BRCA1/2 genetic variants and emphasizes opportunities to improve awareness, risk assessment, and patient support.

Congratulations to Dr. Gopal on this scholarly achievement and her continued contributions to advancing healthcare education and patient care.

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT



Dr. Hugh Rappa

Dr. Rappa was featured by the Associazione Alumni UNIPD, the official Alumni Association of the University of Padua. The feature highlights his career in academic medicine and his enduring connection to one of the world's oldest and most prestigious universities.

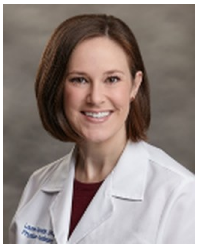
FACULTY PROMOTION



Megan Finck, MMS, PA-C

Megan has been promoted to Associate Professor. Her commitment to student success, academic excellence, and advancement of the PA profession continues to make a lasting impact on our program and community.

CLASS OF 2026 FACULTY OF THE YEAR AWARD



Lauren Reynolds, MSPAS, PA-C

The Class of 2026 selected Professor Lauren Reynolds as Faculty of the Year in recognition of her dedication, mentorship, and unwavering support. Her commitment to student success and passion for teaching have made a lasting impact on the graduating class.

CAMPUS NEWS

ORLANDO



PROGRAM DIRECTOR
Stacy Laack Valentine, DMSc, PA-C

Happy PA Week!



Back row, left to right: Daniel Garcia, Cyle Conley, Zavier Jobe, Program Director Stacy Laack Valentine, Jacob Slater, Thomas Neumier and Adrian Chu. Front row, left to right: Emily Sanz, Carolina Sarmiento-Gomez, Sofia Castano, Vianna Quach, Rachel Wren and Thendral Nagarajan.

The Orlando Class of 2028 celebrated National PA Week together with Program Director Stacy Laack Valentine. The week honors the PA profession and the important role PAs play in patient care, and it was a fitting moment for our first-year students to celebrate the career they are working toward.

Paying It Forward to Future PAs

Members of the Class of 2028 spoke with students from the UCF pre-PA program during an open Q&A session for prospective PA students, sharing their experiences and answering questions about the path to PA school.



Pictured left to right: Gianna Sanchez, Ryan Mejia, Elijah Persing, Matthew Focht, Jahzmin White and Daniel Garcia

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

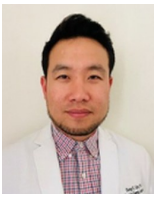


Jorge Muniz, DMSc, MMS, PA-C

Assistant Professor – Physician Assistant

Congratulations to Dr. Muniz on completing his Doctor of Medical Science degree this September!

GOLDEN APPLE AWARD AND PROMOTION



Sung Kim, MMS, PA-C



Linda Steward, DMSc, PA-C

Congratulations on your promotions to Associate Professor!

Special congratulations as well to Sung Kim, awarded the Class of 2027 Golden Apple at the White Coat Ceremony, and Linda Steward, awarded the Class of 2026 Golden Apple at the graduation ceremony.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Anita P. Garbett

Administrative and Clinical Support Coordinator

Please join us in welcoming Anita to the Orlando PA program team. We are delighted to have Anita on board!

NEXT ISSUE Look for the next edition of Quarterly Bites on April 2, 2027.