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## U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy to Speak at Inaugural Xavier University | Ochsner Health Physician Assistant Program Class of 2022 Commencement

**NEW ORLEANS, La.** –Xavier University of Louisiana and Ochsner Health will celebrate their inaugural Physician Assistant (PA) Program Class of 2022 with a closing ceremony at Xavier’s University Center on Thursday, May 5, 2022, at 5:30 pm and a commencement at Xavier’s Convocation Center on Saturday, May 7, 2022, at 10:00 am. The 28-month, full-time graduate program, which leads to a master’s degree in health sciences, began in 2020 and is comprised of three semesters of classroom instruction followed by 16 months of clinical training within Ochsner Health.

U.S. Senator Bill Cassidy, M.D., will serve as the commencement speaker. Dr. Cassidy, a gastroenterologist, is the senior U.S. senator from Louisiana and serves on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) committee, among others. Prior to serving in Congress, Dr. Cassidy worked in Louisiana’s charity hospital system for over 25 years and co-founded the Greater Baton Rouge Community Clinic, providing free health care to uninsured and underinsured patients. While serving in Congress, he has authored and passed legislation to lower the cost of prescription drugs and to increase health care price and medical billing transparency.

“At Xavier University of Louisiana, we educate the next generation of changemakers and industry leaders who are instilled with our mission to promote a more just and humane society through their service,” said **Dr. Reynold Verret, President of Xavier University of Louisiana**. “As a top producer of Black and brown talent in the health sciences, we are honored to gift these fine graduates, our inaugural class of the Physician Assistant Program at Xavier, and their talents to the world.”

Commonly known as a PA, a physician assistant is a licensed and trained healthcare professional trained in general medicine who works in collaboration with a physician. The American Academy of PAs estimates there are more than 150,000 PAs in the United States today and, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the demand for physician assistants is projected to grow 31 percent from 2020 to 2030, much faster than the average for all occupations. About 12,200 openings for physician assistants are projected each year, on average, over the decade.

In this inaugural Xavier and Ochsner PA Program class, 37 physician assistants are expected to graduate. Xavier is one of four universities in Louisiana and just one of four HBCUs in the nation to offer a PA program.

“The partnership between Xavier and Ochsner is key to advancing diversity in healthcare and promoting a healthier Louisiana,” said **Dr. Anne McCall, Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic Affairs at Xavier**. “Xavier creates opportunities for the communities we serve and we are grateful to Ochsner for partnering with us to implement this important program.”

In 2020, Ochsner, Xavier and state leaders announced the 10-year vision Healthy State by 2030, a collaborative effort among public and private entities to lift Louisiana off the bottom of national health rankings by focusing on diversity in healthcare, health equity and partnerships that advance public health goals.

“At Ochsner, we are committed to diversity and excellence when training the next generation of healthcare providers,” said [Leonardo Seoane, M.D., FACP](#), **Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer, Ochsner Health**. “By collaborating and partnering with Xavier on this new PA program, we can train more healthcare professionals here in Louisiana. It is our hope that this new pipeline of physician assistants will make meaningful impact on the health of our state by positioning us to better advocate for patients, reduce disparities in access to health care, and advance the prevention of chronic disease.”

The long-standing relationship between Ochsner and Xavier dates to the early 1980s, when Ochsner and Xavier’s College of Pharmacy established an affiliation agreement to provide educational experiences to pharmacy students. Since then, the partnership has expanded with several shared programs and collaborations between the HBCU and the hospital system. These include the Ochsner Xavier Institute for Health Equity & Research, the Xavier Genetic Counseling Program, the Xavier Medical Laboratory Science Program, and the Xavier Speech-Language Pathology Program.

Of the more than 500 applications received, 40 aspiring PAs were accepted for this inaugural class. According to the 2020 Statistical Profile of Physician Assistants published by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA), just 3.3% of PAs are African American. Xavier University’s inaugural graduating PA class is comprised of 13% African Americans and a total of 64% minority students. Fifty-six percent are Louisiana residents.

For more information about the Xavier University and Ochsner Physician Assistant program, visit <http://www.xula.edu/physician-assistant-program> or call 504-520-5119. For more information about Ochsner Academics, visit [education.ochsner.org](http://education.ochsner.org) or call 504.842.1205.

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### **About Ochsner Health**

[Ochsner Health](#) is an integrated healthcare system with a mission to Serve, Heal, Lead, Educate and Innovate. Celebrating 80 years in 2022, it leads nationally in cancer care, cardiology, neurosciences, liver and heart transplants and pediatrics, among other areas. Ochsner is consistently named both the top hospital and top children’s hospital in Louisiana by U.S. News & World Report. The not-for-profit organization is inspiring healthier lives and stronger communities. Its focus is on preventing diseases and providing patient-centered care that is accessible, affordable, convenient and effective. Ochsner Health pioneers new treatments, deploys emerging technologies and performs groundbreaking research, including over 700 clinical studies. It has more than 34,000 employees and over 4,500 employed and affiliated physicians in over 90 medical specialties and subspecialties. It operates 40 hospitals and more than 300 health and urgent care centers across Louisiana, Mississippi and the Gulf South; and its cutting-edge Connected Health digital medicine program is caring for patients beyond its walls. In 2021, Ochsner Health treated more than 1 million people from every state and 75 countries. As Louisiana’s top healthcare educator, Ochsner Health and its partners educate thousands of healthcare professionals annually. To learn more, visit <https://www.ochsner.org/>.

### **About Xavier University of Louisiana**

About Xavier University of Louisiana Xavier University of Louisiana, America’s only historically Black and Catholic University, is ranked among the top three HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities) in the nation. Recognized as a national leader in STEM and health sciences, Xavier produces more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Additionally, Xavier’s College of Pharmacy is also among the top producers of African American pharmacists in the country. Established in 1925 by Saint Katharine Drexel and the Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament as a place for African American and

*Native Americans to receive quality education, Xavier has since expanded its programs in art, business, education, biological sciences, chemistry, pharmacy and political science. More recent additions in robotics, bioinformatics, engineering, data science, neuroscience and genetics, in addition to new STEM-based master's programs, have provided Xavier students (2815 undergraduates and 787 graduates) an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities and life experiences. Xavier students collaborate with world-renowned faculty, who are experts in their fields, to produce award-winning research and notable work. The winning Xavier formula provides students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls, thereby facilitating a more just and humane society for all. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana, visit us online at [www.xula.edu](http://www.xula.edu) or contact Regi Reyes at (504) 520-5240 or [rreyes@xula.edu](mailto:rreyes@xula.edu).*