UNM ANESTHESIOLOGY | MSA PROGRAM NEWSLETTER

The Central Line

Summer 2025

Letter from Program Director

Celebrating One Year of Excellence: The UNM MSA Program Journey

This marks the first full year of the UNM MSA program—a milestone worth celebrating and reflecting upon. What began as departmental discussions has transformed into a groundbreaking educational program. The journey from concept to full operation happened remarkably quickly, and looking back at this timeline reveals just how much has been accomplished:

August 2021: The MSA program began as serious discussions among Anesthesiology and CCM department leadership & members, moving beyond informal conversations to focused planning sessions about program feasibility and structure.

January 2022: Initial program formation took shape as community input and stakeholder buy-in was gathered for the program's creation and design. In the Spring of 2022, the Anesthesiology and Critical Care department submitted initial program plans to the University of New Mexico.

May 2022: The University of New Mexico submitted its letter of intent to the NM Higher Education Department for the proposal of a Master of Science Degree in Anesthesia in May 2022, launching the program's journey through nine university approvals—a process that concluded with final UNM Board of Regents approval in December 2022.

July 2023: UNM received final state approval from the New Mexico Legislative Finance Committee, completing the last of three required state committee reviews.

November 2023: The UNM MSA program was granted initial accreditation from CAAHEP.

August 2024: The Class of 2026 began their inaugural semester, making history as our first cohort.

August 2025: This marks the first full year of the UNM MSA program.

In just four years, an idea has evolved into a fully functioning program with phenomenal educational opportunities, a one-of-a-kind curriculum that pushes traditional learning boundaries, and faculty whose passion shows in every planned unit.

As this newsletter marks our one-year milestone, read through its pages to hear from the faculty and students who have brought this idea to life.

Cassie Langhals, EdD, CAA
Program Director, Master of Science in Anesthesia

Class of 2026 Wraps Up First Year!

With two semesters under their belt starting the summer semester, the UNM MSA Class of 2026 has finished the final stretch of their first year! With one more didactic semester to go, this class will soon start their year long external clinical rotations. But, for now, celebration is in order because they are officially second years!

As they progress through their final didactic semester this fall, we would like to highlight the new changes soon to come, including new faculty, new classes, a new critical care tower for everyone to explore, but probably the most exciting change is the introduction of the new cohort: The UNM MSA Class of 2027!

Looking back to last year to when the class of 2026 started, it is clear we have come such along way and have experienced so much. Although there is still a lot to learn, we are gratefulto have made it to this point and to be able to soon pass on some wisdom to our new cohortmentees. With that, our first year has come to an end; cheers to becoming second-years!

A Year of Educational Innovation & Clinical Experience

Our inaugural year has showcased a curriculum that truly redefines anesthesia education, blending cutting-edge learning methodologies with exceptional clinical training and community collaboration.

Curriculum Highlights

From the classroom to the operating room, our program has embraced innovative teaching approaches. Students have engaged in workshop-style classes, relay races for case setups, problem-based learning groups, Jeopardy games, and presentations that have showcased their growing expertise. Our groundbreaking OSCE design has taken assessment to new levels, incorporating pre-operative patient encounters, pediatric assessments with department families, and trauma simulations with professional actors. Students have completed comprehensive pre-anesthetic plans and benefitted from reflective learning through recorded session reviews.

Central to our hands-on learning approach has been high-fidelity simulation in the UNM BATCAVE, designed by ASPD Joe Surman and enhanced by CAA co-instructors who participate in each simulation session. Students have developed proficiency across every aspect of anesthetic care, beginning with comprehensive anesthesia machine checkouts and progressing through each step of an anesthetic from induction to emergence. Scenarios have ranged from routine cases to equipment failures, increased patient disease states, high-risk procedures, and emergency situations. These immersive experiences have taught students to safely improve their didactic recall, refine skills and techniques, and apply real-life learning through phenomenal small group-focused debriefing sessions that reinforce learning and build confidence for clinical encounters.

Under ADPD Kate Novinc's leadership, our three-semester Equipment and Monitoring curriculum has provided students with comprehensive, hands-on experience blending foundational principles with advanced clinical instrumentation. Students explore the full architecture of anesthesia systems—from machine anatomy and vaporizers to breathing circuits, ventilators, and checkout procedures. Learning expands to encompass ASA monitoring standards, capnography, SPO_2, temperature monitoring, noninvasive and invasive blood pressure techniques, EKG interpretation, neuromuscular monitoring, and advanced concepts including ICP monitoring, PAC, echo, ECMO, and fire safety.

The experiential learning has been enriched through vendor-led sessions featuring cutting-edge devices, field trips to Clinical Engineering to examine disassembled equipment, special guest lectures from department faculty and peer presentations where students demonstrate monitoring tools to classmates.

Throughout all three semesters, our students have been active participants in shaping an innovative, collaborative learning environment that emphasizes vigilance, safety, and comprehensive anesthesia practice spanning foundational principles to advanced clinical applications.

A Year of Educational Innovation & Clinical Experience

Mentorship and Clinical Excellence

The MSA program has benefitted from a robust support system that includes fifteen exceptional UNM CAAs who serve as dedicated 1:1 mentors, paired individually with MSA students to provide personalized guidance throughout their 28-month educational journey. In the clinical setting, a dynamic group of 25 first-year clinical preceptor CAAs have demonstrated remarkable patience and expertise, attending multiple trainings and meeting students where they are to build upon their didactic and simulation knowledge.

Early Clinical Integration

Our students began clinical rotations in their 8th week of the MSA program—a remarkable early start that required careful coordination and planning. Behind the scenes, ACPD Kim Kopacz has dedicated countless hours to finding and scheduling optimal clinical experiences that match students with phenomenal preceptors. Students have gained diverse exposure across multiple sites including the Outpatient Surgery Center, Sandoval Regional Medical Center (Level 3 trauma center), and UNM Main Hospital (the state's only Level 1 trauma center). The extraordinary dedication of our clinical preceptors has provided incredible educational learning opportunities in these demanding environments, with students enhancing their learning through personal reflections and goal-setting on their month-long clinical rotations.

Outstanding Clinical Achievements

As our Class of 2026 enters their fourth semester, their clinical accomplishments speak volumes about the quality of opportunities they have had and training they have received:

- 6,833 clinical hours (averaging 488 hours per student)
- 2,470 anesthetic cases (averging 176 cases per student)
- 55.4% of patients with ASA classification III or greater
- 1,047 intubations
- 409 IV placements
- 196 LMA placements

A Year of Educational Innovation & Clinical Experience

Community Connection

Our "Take Your Loved One to Work" event that was hosted by the MSA program in June exemplified how the MSA students have embraced their role as healthcare educators, creating engaging activities for all ages—from teddy bear hospitals and mock ORs for children to ultrasound training and high-fidelity simulation experiences for adults in our BATCAVE simulation center.

Collaborative Excellence

This program's success reflects extraordinary teamwork across multiple levels, from our MSA Advisory Committee and department leadership to our diverse faculty and administrative team. Under the leadership of Program Director Dr. Cassie Langhals (EdD), Medical Director Dr. Sally Fortner (MD) and MSA Assistant Program Directors Kate Novinc, Joe Surman, and Kim Kopacz, the program has flourished with exceptional administrative support from Cayla Carr-Paiz and James Mascherini-Watson. External expertise from Dr. Douglas Binder (EMS), Dr. James Niforatos (JD, MD), Dr. Donna Mitchell (MD), and Fredy Mendieta Rodriguez combined with internal faculty excellence from Dr. Terra Wubbenhorst (MD), Dr. Christine Orser (MD), Justin Auch, Justin Sona, and Amy Ertler, alongside simulation co-instructors and guest lecturers from our Anesthesiology MD/DO faculty.

Together, we've created a program that pushes the boundaries of traditional learning while maintaining the highest standards of clinical education and community engagement.

AAAA Respresentation

Introducing the Class of 2026 AAAA representative: Alexandria Forrester.

“Hi! My name’s Alexandria, but you can call me Alex, and I’m from Albuquerque, NM. In my free time I like running and volunteering at the city animal shelter. I am very excited about being elected as the AAAA representative for our class! This will give me an opportunity to be a voice for our class at a higher level, as well as allowing me to integrate activities and ideas from AAAA into our class. My role includes being able to vote in elections and share new ideas to other cohorts from different schools. Currently, the other representatives and I have had two meetings thus far, and we have discussed ideas for the annual conference next year, representative elections, and fundraiser suggestions. While I am in this position for the remainder of the program, I would like to get involved in expanding CAA legislation to other states in the southwest. This is something I am interested in advocating for and learning about outside of the program as well.”

Introducing the Class of 2026 AAAA legislative member: Jacqueline Agyeman.

My name is Jacqueline Agyeman. I was born and raised in Ghana, West Africa, before relocating to the United Kingdom in my teenage years. It was there that I pursued my interest in healthcare, attending pharmacy school and becoming a pharmacist. Beyond my professional path, I am passionate about fashion and social media—two worlds I love to blend. Social media has become my outlet not only for showcasing my love for fashion, but also for engaging with the AA school community and inspiring others along the way. I have always wanted to contribute to the AA community in some shape or form and so it is an honor to be a legislative member of the AAAA as this opportunity will offer me the platform to make an impact in the AA community. Serving in this capacity excites me—not only because it aligns with my long-held aspirations, but also because it allows me to actively champion the voices and concerns of our community. Looking ahead, my primary goal is to continue spreading awareness of the AA profession, ensuring its value and opportunities are recognized both within and beyond our community. I am eager to contribute thoughtfully to legislative conversations that shape the future of the AA field, advocating for initiatives and policies that uplift and protect our members. Additionally, I hope to inspire and mentor Pre-AA students—sharing my own journey in the hopes that it encourages them to pursue their aspirations with confidence and purpose.

Take Your Loved One To Work Day - the Cohort Perspective

After many weeks of planning various events for four different age groups (0-4, 5-7, 8-12, 13+) the class of '26 executed their first out of school event - Take Your Loved One to Work Day! This was a special day for us because we were able to showcase our learning up to this point by being able to teach others through various fun activities. For example, the 0-4 group had work stations where the kids were able to learn how to put on ASA standard monitors and put their teddy bear to sleep with an AMBU bag and chapstick, while the 13+ group went to the BATCAVE to experience a more hands-on simulated workshop with our high-fidelity mannikins, by being able to practice skills from bag-masking to intubation.

Overall, our class was grateful for all the families and kids who showed up and participated enthusiastically with us because hearing the words, "Thank You, it was better than we expected!" was all we needed to know that we did a good job. So thank you to everyone who came and made the first "take your loved one to work day" such a blast; we truly appreciate it. Until next year, when the new class of '27 will showcase their own wonderful workshops!

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