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Teresa Thetford has been named department chair and founding program director of the developing physician assistant (PA) program at Sacred Heart University. She will work closely with the dean of the College of Health Professions on development, accreditation, and implementation of the new program.

Thetford recently moved to Connecticut from California. She was the assistant dean for Inter-professional Health Studies and founding PA program director at Marshall B. Ketchum University, where she successfully developed the first PA program in Orange County, Calif. Prior to that, she was an assistant professor at the Yale School of Medicine PA program.

A PA, Thetford explains, is a graduate of an accredited PA educational program and nationally certified and state-licensed to practice medicine with the supervision of a physician. PAs perform physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret lab tests, perform procedures and assist in surgery. PAs are allowed to practice and prescribe medications in every U.S. state.

SHU’s master’s of physician assistant studies (MPAS) will be the first offering of the College of Health Professions in Stamford and will be located on the campus of Stamford Hospital.

“I’m very excited to develop and implement the PA program at SHU, which is much needed in southern Connecticut,” Thetford says. “University administration and my associates at the College of Health Professions have been welcoming and helpful. Our program will provide improved access to quality health care, student involvement in community outreach events and continued leadership in health-care education. We are currently starting the PA program accreditation process and anticipate the first class of PA students to begin in the fall of 2016.”

The SHU program, Thetford explains, is being developed in response to an expected shortage of physicians and health-care providers in the next 10 years and beyond. “An MPAS degree will complement other Sacred Heart University programs such as exercise science and nutrition, healthcare informatics, nursing, occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language pathology and will prepare individuals to practice in a variety of health care settings,” she noted.

Thetford has a Doctor of Health Science degree in leadership and organizational behavior and a master’s degree in education and leadership from A.T. Still University. She also has a bachelor’s degree in
physician assistant studies from the University of Southern California and an associate's degree in registered nursing from Riverside Community College in California. She resides in Middletown.