

General Physicians Assistant Program Information:

What is physician assistant school? These are programs that provide accelerated medical training necessary for assisting physicians in many medical environments. Physician assistants (PA) perform many of the same procedures as doctors, but usually require a MD or DO to be present (at least in the building). If PAs perform similar procedures compared to physicians, why become a PA instead of a MD or DO? The primary reason why people pursue this career path is it has substantially less liability compared to either a MD or DO but still affords the capability to serve the community in the medical environment. Furthermore, becoming a physician assistant requires substantially less time compared to becoming a DO or and MD. Many students do not realize that becoming a physician requires 11 to 16 years of training after completion of high school. Conversely, the time required to complete the training to become a physician assistant is approximately 6 years following graduation from high school. Therefore, the decreased liability combined with the shorter training period appeal to many people who wish to enter the health care industry.

Many students have the common misconception that it is easier to get into PA school compared to medical school. The reality of the situation is that competition for admission for PA schools is more stringent compared to many medical schools. Many students apply for these positions and competition for the limited number of slots is excessively fierce. As such, the student should carefully evaluate why they wish to pursue PA school before pursuing these programs.

Prerequisite course work for (PA) programs is extremely variable and it is not possible to recommend a universal general curriculum. The standardized test required by PA programs also varies. Some schools require the GRE, others accept either the GRE or the MCAT, still others require the TOEFL (if necessary), and some schools do not require a standardized test of any kind. Therefore, it is the student's responsibility to obtain information concerning admission requirements for all PA programs of interest. Information for many programs across the nation is available at the web site for the centralized application service (https://portal.caspaonline.org/caspa2006/ins_programs.htm). While this service provides information for many PA programs, it does not encompass all programs available.

Although it is not possible to recommend a "universal curriculum" that satisfies the coursework required for application to PA school, many programs require the following courses.

- General Biology I and II (BIOL196/197 with laboratories)
- General Chemistry I and II (CHEM121/122 with laboratories)
- General Physics I (PHYS151 with laboratory)
- Organic Chemistry I and II (CHEM241/242 with laboratories)

Students must realize that these courses **DO NOT SATISFY** the minimum requirements for **ANY PROGRAM**. These are simply courses that you can register for while you conduct your research and compile a list of all courses required by all programs you intend to pursue.

Preparing for PA school requires a substantial amount of planning. Many programs require up to 2000 hours of clinical experience. Students interested in such programs need to begin acquiring

experience very early in their undergraduate education. Failure to do so results in delay of the application process and necessitates taking a year off following completion of the baccalaureate degree.

Getting Ready for Physician Assistant School:

As stated previously, requirements for admission to PA school are extremely variable between schools. Not only do prerequisite courses vary, the type of standardized test accepted (if any at all) is also extremely variable. One aspect of constancy is the requirement for work experience and PA schools expect plenty of it! Some programs require at least 2000 hours of service and/or work experience in the clinical setting before considering the application complete. As such, gaining admission into PA school often requires much more extensive planning than gaining admission into medical school.

Although it is not possible to recommend a "general curriculum" to prepare for PA school, this web site attempts to provide advice and information that may be helpful. The information below provide very general suggestions as well as links to web sites that may be beneficial to getting ready to apply. As always, the intent of this web site is to assist the student and it remains the student's responsibility to obtain information concerning specific requirements for specific PA schools.

Freshman Year:

As with any pre-professional degree plan, it is prudent for the student to take either the SAT or the ACT. Although it is currently not required for admission, this is important as the College of Sciences use these scores to place students in the appropriate Math and English courses. In addition to the standardized test, prospective students should take the Chemistry placement test to determine eligibility for enrollment in CHE121 (General Chemistry I). The Chemistry Department posts information concerning how to take this placement test at <http://www.unlv.edu/Colleges/Sciences/Chemistry/Placement/>. The student can obtain information concerning taking the Biology placement test by visiting the Biology Department Office located in WHI 101.

Why take the placement test? Without taking these exams, the student cannot enroll in the General Biology, General Chemistry, or English courses required for admission to any professional school. Instead, the student will spend at least the first semester (if not the entire freshman year) simply satisfying prerequisite course work required to take the prerequisite course work required by professional schools. If the student fails to take the placement tests, this usually results in the delay of acceptance to PA school by at least a year, unless the student compensates by either taking classes during the summer or having multiple semesters with exceptionally heavy course loads (19 credit hours or more).

In addition to taking the placement test, it is prudent for the student to investigate all PA schools of interest. Since the prerequisite course work varies greatly between schools, the student must identify all course work required for all schools he or she plans to apply to. The student must organize this information into a comprehensive list and check off each prerequisite when

completed. Failure to do so may result in the inability to apply to all schools of interest. Many PA schools in the United States provide prerequisite information at <http://secure.caspaonline.org/>. While many PA schools post information at this site, it does not represent all PA programs in the United States.

Finally, the student must obtain information about service/work experience required. Many programs require at least 2000 hours of service and/or work in the clinical environment before considering the student's application. The student must acquire substantial experience either during the summer months and/or conduct service while enrolled during the fall and spring semesters. If programs of interest require work/service, the student must carefully document all experience acquired. Acquaint yourself with your supervisor and any professionals in the work environment. This is essential for securing letters of recommendation required for the application process.

Sophomore Year:

Consult the prerequisite checklist compiled during the freshman year and register for relevant course work required by programs of interest. Continue to acquire necessary service and/or work experience required. Be sure to acquaint yourself with your supervisor. This assists with securing letters of recommendation required for the application process.

Junior Year:

Consult the list compiled during the freshman year and register for course work required by programs of interest. Initiate the application process for all programs of interest. The student must investigate when programs of interest begin to accept applications and what each program requires for completion of the application. Complete and submit the application as early as possible. Many programs participate in the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants located at <https://secure.caspaonline.org>. For participating programs, the student initiates the application process by registering and completing the on-line application form. For programs that do not participate in this program, the student should request an application and instructions from the program of interest. Do not procrastinate and submit the application just before the deadline provided by any of the programs. This substantially reduces the probability of gaining acceptance into any program. If the PA school requires letters of reference, request them from your supervisors and professors and provide the supervisors with information concerning where to send them and who to address them to. If the PA school requires an evaluation from the pre-health committee, schedule a meeting as early as possible. The evaluation can be the rate-limiting step for completion of the application. The committee requires three letters of recommendation, a personal statement regarding interest in PA school, a resume summarizing relevant experience, and a list of PA programs the student intends to apply to.

If the student requires additional hours of work/service experience, he or she should complete this prior to submitting applications to the programs of interest. Although some programs allow completion of service/work requirements following the application process, many expect completion prior to considering the student for acceptance to the program. In the event that the

program allows completion of experience after the application process, the student will impress such committees if all service requirements are met upon submission of the application.

The student must determine if any program of interest requires a standardized test. As stated earlier, standardized test requirements vary widely between programs. If the MCAT, GRE, and/or TOEFL is/are required, programs will not consider the applicant prior to submission of the relevant scores. Links to requirements for many, but not all PA schools and preparation courses for standardized tests are provided below.

Kaplan Review: <http://www.kaptest.com>

Princeton Review: <http://www.princetonreview.com>

Central Application Service for Physician Assistants: <http://secure.caspaonline.org/>

GRE Examination: <http://www.gre.org/>

MCAT Information: <http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/>

TOEFL Examination: <http://www.ets.org/toefl/>

Senior Year:

Complete all prerequisites required by programs applied to. The student should also complete all service/or work requirements if deficiencies still exist. If no deficiencies exist, use this year for personal enrichment and enjoy your senior year of college.