



Pre-Physician Assistant

Physician Assistants (PA) are health care professionals licensed to practice medicine with physician supervision. As part of their comprehensive responsibilities, PAs conduct physical exams, diagnose and treat illnesses, order and interpret tests, counsel on preventive health care, assist in surgery, and write prescriptions. Within the physician-PA relationship, physician assistant exercise autonomy in medical decision making and provide a broad range of diagnostic and therapeutic services. A PA's practice may also include education, research, and administrative services. PA education includes training in patient assessment, including interviewing, history-taking, physical examination, presentation and documentation of clinical findings, differential diagnoses, development and implementation of treatment, and medical management plans. Physician assistants are educated as generalists in medicine; all programs emphasize primary care. Physician assistants are trained in the areas of family medicine, general internal medicine, pediatrics, geriatrics, women's health, general surgery, psychiatry, and emergency medicine. They must be willing to continue studying throughout their career to keep up with medical advances.

There are many entry pathways into the physician assistant profession. Most programs will be 3 years in length and award a master's degree. There are 170 accredited physician assistant programs in the United States, and are located at medical schools, medical centers, hospitals, two- and four-year colleges and universities, and in the armed forces. More than 100 PA programs offered the Master's degree option and most applicants to PA programs already possess a bachelor's degree at the time of entry.

Taking the Right Classes

Academic preparation for PA Programs begins with selecting courses that meet the requirements as an undergraduate in college. Although each PA program independently decides upon its own prerequisite requirements, most schools will require the courses listed below. Note: various medical schools require some additional courses. For the most accurate list of courses required by individual schools, check with the school's admissions site.

Requirements for Most U.S. Physician Assistant Schools

1 year of English	ENGL G100 + 110
1 year of General Chemistry (with laboratory)	CHEM G180 + G185
1 semester of additional science with lab ²	CHEM G220 or PHYS G110 + G110L
1 year of Biology (with laboratory) ¹	BIOL G180 + G182
1 semester of Human Anatomy	BIOL G220
1 semester of Human Physiology	BIOL G225
1 semester of microbiology (with laboratory)	BIOL G210
1 semester of College Algebra or statistics	MATH G115, G160, or MATH G180 (requirement varies by campus)
1 semester of Psychology	PSYCH G100
1 semester of Sociology (preferred) or Anthropology	SOC G100 or ANTH G100
Spanish Languages	SPAN G180 + G185
Computer Skills, Medical Terminology	Highly Recommended
Clinical Hours ³	Requirement Varies. 500 - 2000+ hours (documented)
Shadowing Hours	Requirement Varies. 20 – 100 hours

**Note: Most schools have a 5-7 year recency requirement for prerequisites. Many schools also allow AP/CLEP credit for first semester English and Math only. AP generally not allowed for prerequisite science coursework.*

¹ Many programs require additional hours in a "biology elective," beyond the year of biology. including cellular biology, immunology, genetics, etc.

²Requires Organic Chemistry, highly recommended for others.

Choosing the Best Major

What is the best major for entering Physician Assistant programs? The answer is: *there is no best major*. Choose a major that you find most interesting, challenging and satisfying. You should study subjects that you really enjoy, and avoid choosing a major because it might "look good" on your application. No points are given for the major that you choose, however, you will probably perform better in a major that captures your interests. If you decide to pursue a non-science major, then your strong performance in the premedical requirements will be crucial.

Important for Community College Students:

If you complete all of your PA school requirements at community college, it may be in your best interest to take several upper-division science classes at the four-year institution to which you transfer. Performing well in upper-division science courses further demonstrates your ability to handle the rigorous science-based coursework found in PA Programs. If you are not a science major, it

may still be important for you to take additional science courses beyond the minimum requirements to further support application to PA school.

Clinical Experience, Research, Work Experience and Community Service

Clinical experience is required for PA program admissions, and can include paid or non-paid work in a doctor's office, clinic, or local hospital. Examples of preferred clinical experiences include: Military medic or corpsman, Paramedic/EMT (waiting time not included in hours), Nurse (LVN or RN), Radiology technologist, Physical therapist, Respiratory therapist, Occupational therapist, Medical technologist, Medical Assistant (certified; back office hours only), Athletic trainer. Other professions not listed (e.g. phlebotomy, scribe, etc.) will be considered on a case-by-case basis and are dependent upon the quality of patient interaction. Experiences in administrative duties, home care/home health aide, pharmacy technician, and shadowing are often not included in the minimum requirements for clinical hours. See individual campuses for allowed experiences.

Physician Assistant School Application Process

1. Meet minimum Requirements: Appropriate degree level for most all applicants, prerequisite coursework, letters of recommendation, documented clinical hours. Check individual programs for GRE requirements.
2. Apply to programs. Those deemed competitive are invited to interview with selected university committees
3. Get a letter of "Acceptance", "Denial", or "Waitlist"
4. Matriculate to the university of choice where final acceptance was granted.

Physician Assistant Schools: There are 210 Physician Assistant (PA) schools. There are eleven (11) PA Programs in California. Those marked with an (#) are provisionally accredited. Master's Degree programs unless noted.

Campus	Website	GPA	BCPM GPA	Patient hours	Shadowing hours
California Baptist University ¹	https://calbaptist.edu/programs/master-of-science-physician-assistant-studies/	3.76	3.74	3200	
Central Coast Physician Assistant Program (A.T. Still University of Health Sciences)	https://www.atsu.edu/college-for-healthy-communities/prospective-students/ccpap	2.5+ ³	2.5+ ³		
CSU Monterey Bay	https://csumb.edu/mspa/	3.35	3.29	4148	152
CSU San Marcos					
Chapman University	https://www.chapman.edu/crean/academic-programs/graduate-programs/physician-assistant/	3.65	3.57	3161	80
Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science ²	https://www.cdrewu.edu/cosh/PA	3.37	3.35	5000	
Dominican University of California	https://www.dominican.edu/directory/physician-assistant-studies	3.50 ³	3.75 ³	514	
Loma Linda University ¹²	https://alliedhealth.llu.edu/academics/physician-assistant	3.57	3.54	4780	
Marshall Ketchum University	https://www.ketchum.edu/pa-studies	3.50	3.46	5067	
Southern California University of Health Sciences	https://www.scuhs.edu/masters-degrees/physician-assistant-program/	3.0+ ³	3.0+ ³	2000 min	
Point Loma Nazarene University ²	https://www.pointloma.edu/graduate-studies/programs/physician-assistant-msm#applicationinformation	3.7	3.78	3600	
Samuel Merritt University ²	https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/college-health-sciences/master-physician-assistant	2.8+ ³	2.8+ ³	1000 min	
Stanford University	https://med.stanford.edu/pa.html	3.6	3.6	3782	783
UC Davis ²	https://health.ucdavis.edu/nursing/admissions/programs/mhs-pa.html	3.0+ ³	3.0+ ³	1000+ ³	
UC San Diego ⁴	https://medschool.ucsd.edu/education/pa-education/Pages/default.aspx	-	-	-	
University of LaVerne	https://health.laverne.edu/physician-assistant/	3.40	3.75		
USC	https://keck.usc.edu/physician-assistant-program/	3.49	3.40	4300	20
University of the Pacific	https://healthsciences.pacific.edu/healthsciences/programs/master-of-physician-assistant-studies	3.69	3.68	4031	
Western University of Health Science	https://prospective.westernu.edu/health-sciences/mspa/	3.64	3.74	--	

¹ This campus does only accepts AP credit for English and Mathematics to meet prerequisites.

² Requires Organic Chemistry, highly recommended for others.

³ GPA not disclosed. For most, 3.0 GPA is the minimum. Preferred GPA may be listed or higher than minimum.

⁴ New program beginning 2024

Degrees Offered: Masters Degree In Physician Assistant Studies/Practice (exact title varies at each institution). The educational process generally consists of didactic (classroom-based) instruction and on-site clinical education. Most programs are 2-3 years in length.

Minimum GPA 3.00 cumulative / 3.00 science for master's level programs.

Average GPA for Master's level PA Programs: 3.56 overall / 3.57 sciences.

Average Clinical Hours for admission selection: 3780

Residency Status: US citizen or permanent resident (permanent residents must be in possession of their resident alien card at time of application)

Median Income: \$136,920

Additional Resources:

Physician Assistant Committee (PAC): <https://www.pab.ca.gov/>

Accredited Physician Assistant Programs: <https://paeaonline.org/our-programs>

Assistants (CAPA): www.capanet.org (requires registration for content)