

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT RESOURCES

When applying for physician assistant programs, it is important that you review the amount and types of experience needed for your application to be considered. Physician assistant programs are unique in the experience they require. You should carefully review the admission requirements for each program you apply to, the guidelines on the **Centralized Application service for Physician Assistants (CASPA)**, and information provided by the **American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA)**. General recommendations on the experience needed are:

- There are **2 types** of experience that programs are looking for: healthcare **experience (HCE)** and patient care **experience (PCE)**. HCE includes experience that may not have been directly accountable for patient care, while PCE works directly with patients. (For more on this see the article *6 Steps to Become a PA* - <https://www.aapa.org/news-central/2018/08/6-steps-become-pa/>.)
- Most programs require between **1,000 – 3,000 hours of experience**. You will need to check each program's page to see whether they prefer HCE, PCE, or have other requirements.
- Many students take a **gap year** when preparing for PA programs in order to gain meaningful experience. Some types of experience that will increase the competitiveness of your application may include **Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA), medical scribes, volunteer with the American Red Cross, or volunteer at a community hospital**. If you are unsure of where to gain experience, talk with a pre-professional advisor or contact the programs you wish to apply for.

PREREQUISITE COURSES

Most common prerequisite courses:

Principles of Biology I & II – BIOL 1107/L & 1108/L

Human Anatomy & Physiology I – BIOL 2160

Human Anatomy & Physiology II – BIOL 2170

Microbiology – BIOL 4180

Principles of Chemistry I & II – CHEM 1211/L & 1212/L

Biochemistry – CHEM 3711/L

Organic Chemistry I & II – CHEM 3361/L & 3362/L

Intro to General Psychology – PSYC 1101

Probability & Statistics – MATH 2600

Other highly suggested courses are:

Genetics – BIOL 2100

Cellular and Molecular Physiology – BIOL 3200

Abnormal Psychology – PSYC 3200

Histology – BIOL 4140

Required prerequisites can vary from program to program. Be sure to check with each school of interest for their required courses.

***Talk with your academic advisor before choosing courses!*

GRE PREPARATION

Some physician assistant programs require prospective students to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). It is important that you thoroughly read each school's website to ensure that you have followed their procedure and that you meet their specific qualifications. The GRE is made up of **3 sections including: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing**. You can register for the GRE [here](#). It is highly suggested that you spend time prior to your test date familiarizing yourself with the types of questions in each section, which you can do through taking a course with a company like Kaplan or Princeton Review, or you can buy study books online that contain practice tests and examples. **Check the CASPA website and each school's admission page to ensure that you are submitting your application and test scores by the correct date.**

PERSONAL STATEMENTS & SUPPLEMENTAL APPLICATIONS

Personal Statements used to apply to physician assistant programs should be general and not program specific. When applying through the common application service, **CASPA**, they will forward your information to the schools you select including your general personal statement. Pay attention to the character count allotted for the essay, and remember that this could take spaces into account! Follow the instructions listed carefully to ensure that you follow all of the parameters set. **CASPA allows for a 5,000-character limit** and asks that you **“write a brief statement expressing your motivation or desire to become a physician assistant.”** You should start writing your personal statement early so that you can get adequate feedback prior to submitting your application. **Supplemental applications** could be a requirement of the programs you are applying to. Some programs have additional questions included in the CASPA application while others send out supplemental applications after receiving your full application. It is important to thoroughly read the requirements of each program that you apply to because they could differ drastically. These supplemental materials could include additional essays, questionnaires, etc.

OBTAINING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION/EVALUATIONS

Developing **meaningful relationships with faculty is vital** when seeking letters of recommendation. Begin thinking about faculty who you have or will have taken several classes with, have similar research interests with, or that you feel a connection to, so that you can begin building those relationships from day 1. Remember that a person’s title is not near as important as how well they know you as a student and as a person. When requesting letters of recommendation, quality highly outweighs quantity. **It is ideal to get at least 1 letter from a physician whom you have shadowed or worked closely with, and at least 1 from a science faculty member.** **CASPA** requires each applicant to send **at least 3 and no more than 5 evaluations.** It is important to note that CASPA uses a specific process when requesting evaluation information and each evaluator **must be listed on the final application.** Thoroughly read the instructions from each program you are applying to and on CASPA to ensure you are following the guidelines.

When asking for letters, remember to be gracious and *ask* for the letter. “Would you be willing to,” is usually a good way to start the conversation rather than demanding that they write you a letter. Faculty expect you to ask, and they will most likely agree as long as they feel comfortable speaking on your behalf. Be sure to give the faculty member, physician, or whomever you plan to ask plenty of notice, generally a month is suggested. Providing a resume, CV, personal statement, or some other document will show that you are serious about obtaining a letter and give the faculty member some reference as to what you want them to talk about. **ALWAYS REMEMBER TO THANK YOUR REFERENCES!**

INTERVIEWING PREPARATION

When preparing for professional school interviews, a lot of the same rules apply as with most job interviews. Remember to dress accordingly to interview etiquette and conduct yourself in a professional manner. On Handshake, you can view the Career Center’s “Dress for Success” handouts by clicking on the *Resources* tab. In addition, you want to be sure that you practice ahead of time. “Why do you want to be a physician assistant?” or “Why our program?” are common types of questions that you want to be sure and prepare for. There are different types of interviews for PA schools such as traditional interviews, video interviews, multiple mini interviews (MMI), among others. To become more familiar with interview types and preparation, make an appointment with a pre-professional advisor.

Also, you will want to prepare your own questions to ask. Much like job interviews, you are interviewing the school and program just like they are interviewing you. Finding a good fit is important for you to thrive in a program. Once the interview is over, it is always a good idea to write thank you notes. These can be via email or hand-written. Making it to the interview stage is a huge feat, so you want to make sure that you make the best impression!

MAJORING IN SOMETHING OTHER THAN SCIENCE?

You do not need to have a degree in a science discipline to get accepted to PA school! This is a misconception that many have about the majority of health professions. Professional programs are seeking out students that will bring a different perspective to their program, and a major other than a STEM field could help you stand out. However, you must consider the required prerequisites that will need to be worked into the curriculum of your chosen major. Also, consider seeking out additional challenging science or medical related courses as electives to make yourself a well-rounded candidate. But be sure to consult with your academic advisor before choosing courses!

Remember to take into account the amount of hours that is required to be accepted into a physician’s assistant program. When participating in experiences outside of the classroom, be strategic about working in the required experience for programs.

TIMELINE

Year 1	Meet with a pre-professional advisor to start building your timeline and to explore options and opportunities available to you.	Use the Learning Center for Supplemental Instruction to maintain a strong GPA from day 1 <i>especially in science courses!</i>	Register for professional memberships and newsletters to stay up to date on events and information.	Explore professional healthcare careers using Focus2 and the Occupational Outlook Handbook, as well as attending the Graduate & Professional School Fair.
Summer 1	<p><i>*Work with the Career Center to start building your resume or CV to prepare your applications for summer experiences*</i></p> <p>Volunteer at local hospitals or health centers and keep a journal about your experiences. Other summer experiences could include: research with a faculty member, summer enrichment programs, participate on campus with community science education programs for youth.</p>			
Year 2	Assess academic standing and plans for completing prerequisite courses with Academic Advisor.	Identify and connect with faculty for mentorship, research opportunities, and professional advice.	Seek out campus leadership opportunities.	Continue gaining experience in your field as mentioned above. Attend the Graduate & Professional School Fair to continue growing your network and knowledge of programs available.
Summer 2	<p><i>*Work with a pre-professional advisor to begin looking at schools/programs of interest and choose several*</i></p> <p>Start familiarizing yourself with the GRE and the physician assistant school application process available through the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA). Continue to gain meaningful shadowing and volunteer hours. Create a budget that will include the GRE, test preparation, and application fees for each program of interest including secondary application fees.</p>			
Year 3	Begin preparing for the GRE by registering for a course with companies such as Princeton Review, Kaplan, etc. and choose test date by the start of second semester.	Consider what faculty, advisors, and mentors could potentially write your letters of recommendation and consult with them so that you can include their names on your CASPA application.	Take the GRE and plan to have your final GRE score available in the spring and be ready to start applying if you are not taking a gap year.	Discuss alternatives with your pre-professional advisor in case of needed gap year or change in career plans. Attend the Graduate & Professional School Fair to explore your options.
Summer 3	<p>The CASPA application opens in mid-April, so you'll want to complete and submit your application and any secondary application requirements as early as possible. Continue involvement, research, and/or meaningful volunteering and shadowing that can be added to your experiences when applying. Keep regular contact with your pre-professional advisor to fine tune your application strategy, schools of interest, personal statement, and create your CASPA account.</p>			
Year 4	Prepare with the Career Center for different types of interviews with schools.	Complete secondary applications/essays as requested.	Evaluate acceptance offers and talk with your pre-professional advisor for guidance.	Consider if a gap year would be in your best interest to acquire the needed shadowing or volunteer hours, practical experiences, or prerequisites. If you decide on a gap year, begin preparing to sign up for the GRE in the upcoming summer.