

Pre-Physician Assistant Academic & Career Information

NATURE OF THE WORK, EARNINGS AND OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK

Many Physician Assistants (PA) work in primary care areas such as general internal medicine, pediatrics, and family medicine. Others work in specialty areas, such as general and thoracic surgery, emergency medicine, orthopedics, and geriatrics. PAs take medical histories, perform physical exams, order and interpret laboratory tests, diagnose and treat illnesses, counsel patients, assist in surgery, and set fractures. The responsibilities of a PA depend on the practice setting, education, and experience of the PA, and on the state laws and regulations. PAs are required to have leadership skills, and be willing to continue studying throughout their career to keep up with medical advances.

According to the American Academy of Physician Assistants ([AAPA](#)), the number of practicing PA's has doubled in the last decade, and should reach between 106,200-145,900 jobs by 2026. State laws regulating physician assistants have expanded access to physician services provided by PAs, including the authority to prescribe medications in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and Guam. The development of Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) and other prepaid plans and the growing acceptance of PAs by other health care professionals have combined to strengthen the job market for PAs. Employment of PA's is expected to grow much faster than average (37%) for all occupations through 2026. Median income for physician assistants is \$104,860 ([Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2018](#)).

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION

There are many entry pathways into the physician assistant profession. **Options include certificate of completion, as well as associate, baccalaureate, and master's degree** --admissions to these different *programs are highly competitive*. There are 225 accredited physician assistant programs in the United States, and they are located at medical schools, medical centers, hospitals, two- and four-year colleges and universities, and in the uniformed forces (Physician Assistant Education Association). The vast majority award Masters degrees, and most applicants to PA programs have a bachelor's degree and 3-years of health care experience at the time of entry.

PAs are educated as generalists in medicine; all programs emphasize primary care. PA programs require students to complete 26 months of classroom studies, and the educational program is modeled after the medical school curriculum with a combination of classroom and clinical instruction (Association of Physician Assistant Programs). PA education includes classroom instruction in biochemistry, nutrition, human anatomy, physiology, microbiology, clinical pharmacology, clinical medicine, geriatric and home health care, disease prevention, and medical ethics. Students obtain supervised clinical training in several areas, including primary care medicine, inpatient medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, geriatrics, emergency medicine, psychiatry, and pediatrics. PAs must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every 2-years and take recertification exams every 10-years ([Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2018](#)).

PRE-PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PREPARATION

Prerequisite admission requirements and selection criteria vary according to the individual institution's philosophy, thus refer to the individual program website for detailed information. For a list of programs accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) visit the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) website www.paeaonline.org, and click on the Accredited Programs tab.

MAJOR

Any major is appropriate for PA preparation. Students should select a major they find interesting and develop a broad, interdisciplinary foundation of knowledge and skills from which they can build upon. Most PA programs require that applicants have a minimum of two years of college credits and some health care experience prior to admission.

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS

Many schools require a certain amount of hours of direct patient care (check with the school that you are considering). Some examples of preferred clinical experiences are: Military Medic or Corpsman, Back Office Medical Assistant (MA), Certified Nurses' Aide (CAN), Emergency Medical Technician (EMT--patient care hours only), Paramedic, Physical Therapy Aide or Physical Therapist, Radiological Technician, Nurse (Licensed Vocational Nurse or Registered Nurse), Respiratory Therapist, Occupational Therapist Aide or Occupational Therapist, Athletic Trainer (others that are considered depending on the patient interaction i.e. phlebotomy, scribe).

Examples of clinical experiences *not preferred*: Administrative duties, Massage Therapy, Personal Trainer, Home Care Aide, Home Health Aide, Pharmacy Technician, Certified Nurses' Aide, shadowing a physician or PA, research with no patient contact, hours received during training programs (i.e. medical school, internship, etc.).

APPLICATION

CASPA is the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants--a centralized Web-based application service provided by the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA). CASPA allows you to apply to any number of participating schools by completing a single application. California schools not participating in CASPA include Stanford University. In 2016 the total number of applicants that were offered admissions into PA programs via the CASPA was 8,106. The mean **Science GPA: 3.51, Non-science GPA: 3.64, Cumulative GPA: 3.56.**

For more information regarding CASPA refer to their website: <http://paeaonline.org/caspa/>

The information above is reprinted with permission from CSULB's Health Professions Advising Office: <http://web.csulb.edu/colleges/cnsm/sas/hpao/planning.html>

This is NOT a comprehensive list of prerequisites for all programs. Students maintain responsibility for verifying course selection with individual Physician Assistant programs. Below is a list of requirements for 8 PA schools in California.

Samuel Merritt University – <http://www.samuelmerritt.edu/admission/mpa/prereg>

Note: Most applicants will have a minimum of 1,000 hours of direct patient contact.

Samuel Merritt Prerequisites	IVC Courses
One course in General Chemistry with lab*	CHEM 1A or CHEM 1B
One course in Organic Chemistry with lab*	CHEM 12A
One course each in Human Anatomy* and Physiology*	BIO 11 & BIO 12
One course in Microbiology*	BIO 15
One additional Biology elective in any area	At least 3 units for a min. total of 16 units of Bio. Sciences
One course in Statistics	MATH 10 or PSYC 10/10H

* Strong preference will be given to those who have completed these courses within the past 5 years. This recency recommendation is less stringent for those currently working in the health care field.

Touro University - <http://admissions.tu.edu/paprogram/requirements.html>

Note: A min. of 500 hrs.of paid or volunteer health care/clinical experience. 1,000 or more hrs. of direct patient care is preferred.

Touro University Prerequisites	IVC Courses
Two semesters of Chemistry with Lab	CHEM 1A and CHEM 1B or CHEM 12A and CHEM 12B
Two semesters of General Biology with lab	BIO 5 and BIO 16 or BIO 16 and BIO 80/80H
One semester of Human Anatomy with lab*	BIO 11
One semester in Human Physiology with lab*	BIO 12
One semester in Microbiology with lab	BIO 15
One semester in Statistics	MATH 10 or PSYC 10/10H

* Strong preference will be given to those who have completed these courses within the past 5 years.

Keck School of Medicine - University of Southern California

<https://keck.usc.edu/physician-assistant-program/admission/>

Note: Hands-on, paid patient care clinical experience is preferred. Volunteer clinical experiences is also considered.

Keck School of Medicine - USC Prerequisites	IVC Courses
One year sequence of General Chemistry with lab	CHEM 1A and CHEM 1B
One year sequence of General Biology with lab	BIO 5 and 16 or BIO 16 and BIO 80/80H
One semester of Human Anatomy with lab	BIO 11
One semester of Human Physiology with lab	BIO 12
One semester of Microbiology with lab	BIO 15
One semester of Statistics - preferably statistics for psychology, sociology or biology	MATH 10 or PSYC 10/10H
One semester of Psychology	PSYC 1/1H
One year of Beginning Spanish Language	SPAN 1/1H and SPAN 2
One year of English - applies to international applicants only	WR 1/1H and WR 2/2H

All science prerequisites must be completed within ten years of the application deadline. See website for exceptions.

Loma Linda University

<http://www.llu.edu/allied-health/sahp/pa/prerequisites.page>

Note: A minimum of 2,000 hours of hands-on patient care experience.

Loma Linda University Prerequisites	IVC Courses
Two semesters of General Chemistry with lab	CHEM 1A & CHEM 1B
One semester of Human Anatomy with lab	BIO 11
One semester of Human Physiology with lab	BIO 12
One semester of Microbiology with lab	BIO 15
One semester of Psychology	PSYC 1/1H
One semester of Sociology or Cultural Anthropology	SOC 1/1H or ANTH 2/2H
Two semesters of English	WR 1/1H and WR 2/2H
One semester of College-level Algebra	MATH 8
One semester of Statistics (Recommended)	MATH 10 or PSYC 10/10H
Conversational Spanish (Recommended)	SPAN 10 and/or 11
One course in Medical Terminology (Recommended)	Not available at IVC

*A maximum of two total prerequisite courses may be outstanding (in progress; one science and one non-science) at time of application.

Marshall B. Ketchum University School of Physician Assistant Studies (within SCCOP)

<https://www.ketchum.edu/pa-studies/requirements>

Note: A minimum of 1,000 hours of verifiable, direct, hands-on patient care experience.

Marshall B. Ketchum University School of Physician Assistant Studies Prerequisites	IVC Courses
3 Units in any area of the Biological Sciences	3 units in any of the Biological Sciences
One semester of General Microbiology with lab	BIO 15
One semester of Biochemistry or Organic Chemistry	BIO 10 or CHEM 12A
General Psychology*	PSYC 1/1H
Statistics*	MATH 10 or PSYC 10/10H or ECON 10/10H or MGT 10/10H
One semester of Human Anatomy with lab**	BIO 11
Human Physiology with lab**	BIO 12

*AP Credits will be accepted for Psychology and Statistics; **Must be taken within the last 7 years.

Stanford University

<http://med.stanford.edu/pa/admissions/entrance-requirements.html>

Note: Prior healthcare experience (>500 hours) through either prior employment or volunteer work is strongly recommended.

Stanford University Prerequisites	IVC Courses
One semester of General Chemistry	CHEM 1A
One semester of Human Anatomy with lab*	BIO 11
One semester of Human Physiology with lab*	BIO 12
One semester of Statistics	MATH 10 or BIO 7
One semester of Psychology	PSYC 1/1H

University of California, Davis, Betty Irene Moore School of Nursing

<http://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/nursing/admissions/programs/mhs-pa.html>

Note: A minimum of 1,000 hours of paid or volunteer experience in a clinical environment with direct patient exposure.

UC Davis School of Medicine Prerequisites	IVC Courses
One course in General Chemistry with Lab	CHEM 1A
One course in Human Anatomy and Physiology with lab*	BIO 11 and BIO 12
One course in Microbiology with lab	BIO 15
One course in English Composition	WR 1/1H
Two courses in Social Sciences (may be completed in two different subject areas or within the same subject area.)	PSYC 1/1H or PSYC 30/SOC 30 or SOC 1/1H or GS 10 or ANTH 2/2H

**Should be taken within the past five years*

Western University of Health Sciences

<http://prospective.westernu.edu/physician-assistant/requirements-14/>

Note: Clinical experience, while preferred, is not required.

Western University of Health Sciences Prerequisites	IVC Courses
Two semester sequence of General Chemistry with lab*	CHEM 1A and CHEM 1B
One semester of Human Anatomy with lab*	BIO 11
One semester of Human Physiology with lab*	BIO 12
One semester of Microbiology with lab*	BIO 15
One semester of Genetics*	BIO 72 or BIO 82
One semester of Statistics	MATH 10
One semester of College Algebra (Pre-Calculus, Calculus or Trigonometry courses are acceptable)	MATH 8 MATH 2, MATH 3A/3AH or MATH 124
One semester of Psychology	PSYC 1/1H
One semester of Sociology	SOC 1/1H
Two semester sequence of College English	WR 1/1H and WR 2/2H
Three semester courses (9 units) in the Humanities	e.g. Art, Music, Ethics, Philosophy, Foreign Languages and Religion
Spanish (highly recommended)	SPAN 1/1H and SPAN 2

**Must be taken within the past 7 years*