

Syracuse University

College of Arts & Sciences

Advising and Career Services

Physician Assistant

Physician Assistant (PA) as a Career

The Physician Assistant (PA) is part of the health service delivery team practicing under a supervising physician. PAs perform medical duties delegated by a physician. These duties include but are not limited to: taking medical histories, conducting physical exams, ordering laboratory tests, diagnosing and treating illnesses, prescribing medications, assisting in surgical procedures, and counseling patients. While the majority practice in primary care, PA's can be found practicing in many medical specialties and can be found in virtually all of the same settings as physicians (e.g., private practices, hospitals, community clinics, nursing homes, HMOs, public health organizations, research centers, medical education, et. al.) The field continues to grow and is helping to alleviate the shortage of physicians.

Physician Assistant School

According to the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) there are 154 accredited PA programs in the US and programs last from two to two and one-half years. Students will spend the first year in the classroom covering basic and clinical sciences and will be engaged in clinical rotations during the second year. Graduates are eligible for licensing upon successful completion of the Physician Assistant National Certification Examination (PANCE) which assesses basic medical and surgical knowledge. PAs are required to maintain their certification through biannual continuing education requirements and successful completion of the Physician Assistant National Recertifying Exam (PANRE) every six years.

The Pre-PA Curriculum

Academic Prerequisites

Below are some common prerequisites which may vary by school. It is recommended that you consult with a health professions counselor and check with PA program admissions offices to discuss specific prerequisites.

General Biology & Labs (BIO 121, 123/124)

Anatomy/Physiology (BIO 216, 217 or 316, 317)

Microbiology (BIO 409)

General Chemistry & Labs (CHE 106/107, 116/117)

Biochemistry and/or Organic Chemistry (BCM 475, CHE 275/276)

Expository Writing (WRT 105, 205)

Statistics (MAT 121, 221)

General Psychology (PSY 205)

Additionally Recommended courses

Immunology (BIO 447)
Genetics (BIO 326)
Cell Biology (BIO 327)
Calculus (MAT 285)
Psychology (PSY 315, 335, 336, 337, 382)
Ethics & Bioethics (PHI 593, 594)
Public Health (HTW 221)
Nutrition (NSD 225)

Non-academic Prerequisites

Most programs have a required threshold of verifiable direct patient contact hours. The number of hours varies by school, but could range from 750 to 2,000 hours. It is important to check the requirements of the schools in which the student plans to apply. Other non-academic prerequisites include: Research, Leadership, Community & Public Service, Letters of Recommendation, and Interviewing Skills.

Entrance Exam and Application

Graduate Record Exam (GRE)

While not all programs require an admissions exam, most require the GRE and in some cases the MCAT may be accepted in lieu of the GRE. Students should plan to take the GRE early enough to have scores available for their application.

Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA)

CASPA opens in April and students are strongly encouraged to apply early. Many PA schools have supplemental applications and deadlines vary so it is important to be aware of the admissions requirements of the school(s) which you plan to apply.

Additional Resources

[Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants \(CASPA\)](#)

[Physician Assistant Education Association \(PAEA\)](#)

[American Academy of Physician Assistants \(AAPA\)](#)