



PROFESSION OVERVIEW

Physician assistants (PAs) practice medicine on teams with physicians, surgeons, and other healthcare workers. They examine, diagnose, and treat patients and can prescribe medication.



LENGTH OF PROGRAM

Programs are typically two-three years; however, length varies by schools.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The *minimal prerequisites* for students applying to physician assistant schools are listed below as the requirements **vary greatly** from program to program. Most programs will require additional coursework. Check individual physician assistant school websites or the Physician Assistant Programs Directory section of the *Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA)* website at www.paeonline.org.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the applicant to know the exact requirements and deadlines for each school to which they apply.

- **One year of general biology*** BIOL 101/BIOL 102 or BIOL 107/108
- **One year of general chemistry** CHEM 201/CHEM 202

Other recommended, but not always required, courses:

- **Organic chemistry** CHEM 311/312
- **One year of physics** PHYS 101/102 or PHYS 105
- **Statistics** MATH 141
- **Schools may require English, cell biology, genetics, math and/or other courses such as Medical Terminology**

**Only Biology majors interested in pursuing a career as a physician assistant should take BIOL 101/102; all others should enroll in BIOL 107/108.*

ADMISSION CRITERIA

Physician Assistant admissions programs are looking for well-rounded applicants. The following list identifies criteria considered during the application process. Average grade point average (GPA) and Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores can be found in The Physician Assistant Programs Directory; www.paeonline.com.

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|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Overall and science GPA | • GRE scores |
| • Extracurricular activities | • Health-related experiences* |
| • Research experiences | • Community service |
| • Leadership experiences | • Letters of evaluation |
| • Interview | • Personal statement |

*Many PA programs will require a minimum of 1000-2000 hours of direct patient care to apply. Positions like CNA, EMT, medical assistant, ER tech or phlebotomist will help to acquire a range of experiences and accumulate the required hours for hands-on care.

APPLICATION TIMELINE

The application timeline is unique depending on when you are prepared and ready to pursue physician assistant school. If you plan to apply directly after graduating from IWU, you will want to complete the prerequisite courses by the end of your junior year and apply during the summer before senior year. If you choose to take a gap year, you should complete your prerequisites by the end of your senior year and can then apply the summer after graduation OR when you are ready.

Students today are often waiting a year or more after graduation before applying to a health professions school. This does not put the applicant at a disadvantage. Many programs look favorably upon applicants who have taken an extra year or two to mature and gain work experience, and who can make a better decision regarding a career in a health profession; see **"Make the Most of Your Gap Year"** (<https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/making-most-your-gap-year/>).

APPLICATION SERVICE

The Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) is the application processing service for PA applicants. Check with the application service and individual schools of interest for deadlines.

- Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA; www.caspaonline.org)
- Schools not participating CASPA require an application submitted directly to the school

STANDARDIZED TEST

Typically, the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is required of applicants to physician assistant school. The exam is offered year-round at computer-based test centers. The test consists of three sections: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative reasoning and Analytical Writing. The test should take about 4 hours to complete. The scaled score for the Verbal and Quantitative Reasoning sections ranges from 130-170, and the Analytical Writing scaled score section ranges from 0-6. Unofficial scores are received 10-15 days after the exam.

You can find more information regarding the GRE, including free and low-cost preparation materials, at www.ets.org/gre.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Physician Assistant Education Association (www.paeaonline.org)
- American Academy of Physician Assistants (www.aapa.org)
- PA Shadow Online (www.pashadowonline.com)
- Reference books at the **Hart Career Center**



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