Pre-PA Quick Facts

Students prepare for a career as a Physician Assistant by building credentials in scholarship, leadership, humanitarian/community service, and shadowing in the various settings of the profession. PA schools also greatly value direct patient care experience often requiring a substantial number of hours for acceptance. There is no “best” major for pre-PA students nor are there majors that will make a student “stand out.” Students are encouraged to pursue majors in which they are most interested and in which they believe they will excel.

CASPA (Centralized Application Service)

To apply to most PA programs, students will utilize the CASPA application service. Official transcripts, GRE scores, a personal statement, and letters of recommendation are all submitted to CASPA. Four out of the five PA programs in Georgia use this application service; only Augusta University requires students apply directly through their institution.

CASPA opens each year in April, but programs differ in terms of their application deadlines. Most deadlines are in the fall for a summer start; however, some may have spring deadlines for a winter start. Students are responsible for checking the application deadlines for the programs to which they hope to apply.

Required Courses & GPA Expectations

DISCLAIMER: This is not a definitive list of the classes you will need for every school. Always check with the individual schools to see their specific requirements. For example, Augusta University requires Microbiology (but not Biochemistry) while Mercer University requires both Microbiology AND Biochemistry.

Do grade trends matter?

Students who wish to enter a PA program will require strong science and overall GPAs as admission is competitive. Admissions committees look not only at raw numbers, but also at grade trends on a student’s transcript—so all is not lost if a student stumbles in their first semester or two, but then shows substantial improvement each subsequent year. However, they will also notice negative trends such as if a student is consistently withdrawing from or performing poorly in hard sciences or is completing courses away from their home institution. While an instance or two is not a deal-breaker, a pattern of behavior should be avoided. Students must demonstrate the ability to handle difficult scientific content as this will translate directly to their ability to perform in a PA program.

Typical PA Pre-Requisites

Biology (BIOL 1107/L & 1108/L)
Chemistry (CHEM 1211/L, 1212/L & CHEM 2211/L)
Anatomy and Physiology (CBIO2200/L & CBIO2210/L)
Psychology (PSYC1101 or PSYC3230)
Microbiology (MIBO2500/L, MIBO3000/L, or MIBO3500/3510/L)

GRE

Most PA schools require that applicants take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). The GRE consists of three sections: Quantitative, Verbal, and Essay section. There are no specific courses that students need to take prior to the GRE, but students should plan to dedicate roughly six to eight weeks to exam preparation. While students can opt for a commercial prep course for the GRE, self-study is often sufficient.

Students usually sit for the exam in their junior or senior year depending on their application timeline. Generally, it is recommended for a student to take the GRE January-May as they head into the application cycle. The GRE is offered via University Testing Services on a regular basis.

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Direct Patient Care

Students interested in becoming physician assistants must spend a significant amount of time working or volunteering in clinical settings where they are able to administer care to patients. It is not enough to volunteer in a hospital or clinic doing clerical work; experience must be “hands-on” and can include activities such as taking vitals, drawing blood, bathing or helping transport patients, administering treatment, etc. It is common for students to get certified as medical assistants, nursing assistants, EMTs or phlebotomists to build up these hours. Certification is not always required, but it can be very helpful for finding a position and can also be included on the PA application. Students should always be appropriately trained when administering medical care.

Competitive applicants to PA school generally have over 1000 hours of experience. While programs will commonly list minimum hours that are lower, they do not normally matriculate students who only have the minimum. As a result, it is not unusual for pre-PA students to take a gap year to focus on direct patient care experience.

üler Patient Care Hours

Shadowing is a passive activity which does not count towards direct patient care; it is the act of observing the interactions between PAs and patients. While PA programs do require significantly more direct patient care hours, shadowing is often still required or recommended. The value of shadowing a PA lies in gaining knowledge of the profession, and building a rapport with a PA who can then write a strong letter of recommendation. While some schools may not specify the number of shadowing hours required, students should expect to have a little over 100 hours between at least two different settings.

Undergraduate Research & Volunteering

While there are many benefits to getting involved in undergraduate research, it is not required for admission into most PA schools. Therefore, if a student were not interested in research, they would be better served dedicating that time to other activities such as direct patient care, volunteering, or shadowing. Students interested in research should plan to dedicate at least a year to a specific project or research lab.

Volunteering is a large portion of the application that should not be neglected. PA schools are looking for students who not only demonstrate that they can manage rigorous courses while staying busy, but also those who are compassionate, enjoy working with people and are dedicated to serving the community. PA schools are looking for students that show depth of commitment and substantial involvement and leadership in the community.

Letters of Evaluation

Most PA schools require two to three letters of evaluation. Requirements can vary between schools, and it is the student’s responsibility to ensure that they have collected the correct letters for their program of interest. Generally, programs expect students to provide one letter from a PA, one from a science faculty member, and one other of the student’s choosing. This can come from another PA, a physician, a research mentor, volunteer coordinator, employer, etc. While students should select what they believe will be the most compelling letter, it is often best if that letter can speak to the student’s work with patients.

Georgia PA Program Application Dates

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<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Application Period</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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Pre-Health Advising Office