

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT (PA-C) ACADEMIC AND CAREER INFORMATION

NATURE OF THE WORK, EARNINGS, AND OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK

Physician Assistants (PA) provide a wide range of health care services and work as a team under the supervision of physicians and surgeons. Many PAs 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. Settings typically include private practice, clinics, hospitals, the armed forces, and other federal government agencies. Physician Assistants are required to have leadership skills, self-confidence, and emotional stability. They must be willing to continue studying throughout their career to keep up with medical advances. 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.

Earnings and Job Outlook: The median income for physician assistants was \$108,610 in 2018. Job growth is expected to grow by 31% between 2018-2028 (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2018).

TRAINING

There are 250 accredited physician assistant programs in the United States. The vast majority award master's degrees, and most applicants to PA programs have a bachelor's degree and 3-years of healthcare experience at the time of entry.

PAs are educated as generalists in medicine; all programs emphasize primary care. PA programs require students to complete approximately 26 months of classroom studies, and the educational program is modeled after the medical school curriculum with a combination of classroom and clinical instruction. 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.

ACADEMIC PREPARATION

Any major is appropriate for PA preparation. Students are advised to select a major they find interesting and to work at developing a broad-based, interdisciplinary foundation of knowledge and skills from which they can build upon. The majority of PA programs have prerequisites in chemistry, physiology, anatomy, microbiology, and biology.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

CSULB courses which fulfill admission requirements for some U.S. programs:

Students maintain responsibility for verifying course selection with individual programs. This is NOT a comprehensive list of prerequisites for all programs.

Coursework	CSULB Courses
One year of General Chemistry with lab	Chemistry 111A & 111B
One year of General Biology with lab	Biology 211, 212, (213 also recommended)
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Biology 311
One course in Statistics	Biology 260 OR Statistics 108 OR HDEV 250
One course of Psychology	Psychology 100
One year of Beginning Spanish Language	Spanish 101B & 201A

IMPORTANT FACTORS CONSIDERED FOR SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS

STANDARDIZED TEST: Most programs require the [Graduate Record Examination \(GRE\)](#) for admission. Some programs require the [Medical College Admission Test \(MCAT\)](#) instead.

CLINICAL EXPOSURE: Many PA programs require prior health care experience with hands-on patient care. Hands-on, paid, patient care clinical experience is preferred. Examples of such work include emergency medical technicians, medical scribes, etc. The hours required by a program may range from 1,000 to 3,000 hours minimum. It is important that PA applicants are familiar with medical care environments and the role of a physician assistant, and have experience working with patients.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION: Many programs require at least 2-3 letters of recommendation, although more may be recommended or required, as part of the admissions process.

ADMISSIONS: The [Central Application Service for Physician Assistants \(CASPA\)](#) is used for applications for physician assistant programs.

ADMISSIONS STATISTICS: The national average GPA for the Fall 2018 entering class was **3.56 (Total)** and **3.51 (Science)**. The average GRE scores were **153.3 (Quantitative)**, **153.5 (Verbal)** and **4.1 (Writing)**.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [PA Focus](#)
- [PA Program Directory](#)
- [Central Application Service for Physician Assistants \(CASPA\)](#)

For more information about Physician Assistant Programs, visit www.paeaonline.org and see your HPAO advisor for further information on the application process, application assistance, and a list of upcoming workshops and events.