

Exploring Health Professions: Physician Associate/Assistant

Academic Programs

To become a physician assistant, you will need to earn a Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies from an accredited program. This usually takes a little more than two years.

Prerequisite Courses

Required prerequisite undergraduate courses vary from program to program but may include anatomy, physiology, biochemistry, biology, microbiology, chemistry, organic chemistry, genetics, medical terminology, psychology, statistics, and English composition or another writing-intensive course (AAPA, n.d.).

GPA Requirements

Many PA programs have a minimum overall and science GPA requirement between 2.75 and 3.2 (Williams, 2019). However, the average overall GPA for applicants who were accepted into PA school was 3.6. Accepted students also had a science GPA of 3.5 and a BCP (biology, chemistry, and physics) GPA of 3.5 (Pasquini, 2023).

Standardized Testing

About half of all PA programs in the United States require applicants to take the [Graduate Record Exam](#) (Pasquini, 2020). Some programs may also require situational judgment tests such as the [Casper](#) exam.

Other Requirements

PA school applicants are generally expected to have significant clinical experience before they apply. Although minimum clinical experience varies from program to program, applicants will need at least 2,000 to 3,000 hours for their application to be competitive. Accepted PA students in one recent application cycle, for example, had an average of 2,669 patient contact experience hours (Pasquini, 2023).

Additional requirements may include shadowing, health care experience, or other experiences that will help you show that you understand the profession and your area of interest within it. Research experience, membership and leadership positions in student organizations, internships, volunteer work, paid work, and other experiences might also help you to build a competitive application.

After you finish your master's degree, you'll be required to pass the [Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam](#) (PANCE) to become licensed to practice.

Online Resources

PA Schools in Minnesota:

[Augsburg University](#) (Minneapolis)
[Bethel University](#) (St. Paul)
[College of St. Scholastica](#) (Duluth)
[Mayo Clinic](#) (Rochester)
[St. Catherine University](#) (St. Paul)

PA Schools (All Locations):

[PAEA Member PA Programs](#)

Certifying Bodies for Physician Associates:

[National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants](#) (NCCPA; administers the PANCE exam)

Career Exploration Websites:

[The Strommen Center for Meaningful Work](#)
[Explore Health Careers](#)
[O*NET Online](#)
[U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)

References

- American Academy of Physician Associates. (n.d.). *Become a PA*. AAPA.
<https://www.aapa.org/career-central/become-a-pa/>
- Pasquini, S. (2020). *80 PA schools that don't require the GRE*. The Physician Assistant Life. [https://www.thepalife.com/80-pa-schools-that-dont-require-the-gre/#:~:text=We ll%2C%20you%20are%20in%20luck,do%20not%20require%20the%20GRE](https://www.thepalife.com/80-pa-schools-that-dont-require-the-gre/#:~:text=We%2C%20you%20are%20in%20luck,do%20not%20require%20the%20GRE)
- Pasquini, S. (2023). *Who gets into PA school in 2023? here's what you need to know*. The Physician Assistant Life. <https://www.thepalife.com/who-gets-in/>
- Williams, D. (2019, April 26). *What does it take to get into PA school?* AAPA.
[https://www.aapa.org/news-central/2019/04/what-does-it-take-to-get-into-pa-school /](https://www.aapa.org/news-central/2019/04/what-does-it-take-to-get-into-pa-school/)