

# Pre-Physician Assistant Quick Facts

A Physician Assistant (PA) is a healthcare professional who practices medicine as part of a healthcare team with supervising physicians. The median annual salary is \$98,180. PA programs are highly competitive and admission committees 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.

## Required Courses

**Anatomy & Physiology:** BIOL 2301/2101 & BIOL 2302/2102

**Biology:** BIOL 1306/1106 & BIOL 1307/1107

**Chemistry:** CHEM 1311/1111 & CHEM 1312/1112

**English:** ENGL 1301 & 1302

**Genetics:** BIOL 3301

**Immunology:** BIOL 4323 (*only for UTMB*)

**Medical Terminology:** HLT 3325

**Microbiology:** BIOL 2321/2121

**Organic Chemistry:** CHEM 2323/2123

**Psychology:** PSYC 2301

**Sociology:** SOCI 1301

**Statistics:** MATH 3339 or PSYC 2317 (*MATH 1342 is not universally accepted by PA programs due to absence of ANOVA*)

## CASPA

To apply to most PA programs, applicants will utilize the **CASPA application service**. Official transcripts, test scores, a personal statement, and letters of recommendation are all submitted to CASPA. CASPA opens each year in April, but programs will 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. You are responsible for checking the application deadlines for the programs in which you are interested.

## Letters of Evaluation

Most PA schools require 2-3 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.

## Admissions Exam (GRE & PA-CAT)

PA schools require that applicants complete either the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) or Physician Assistant College Admission Test (PA-CAT). Applicants usually take the GRE/PA-CAT in their junior or senior year depending on their individual application timeline.

The GRE is 3-hours and 45-minutes in length and currently costs \$205. It consists of Quantitative, Verbal, and an Analytical Writing (Essay) sections. Scoring: 260-340 (score is valid for 5-years).

The PA-CAT is 4.5 hours in length and currently costs \$228. It consists of 240 multiple-choice questions covering the following topics: Anatomy, Physiology, General Biology, Biochemistry, General and Organic Chemistry, Microbiology, Behavioral Sciences, Genetics, Statistics. Scoring: 200-800 (score is valid for 2-years).

## General Information

- Average GPA: 3.5
- GRE: ~300 combined/ 4.0 writing
- Master’s Degree
- Program Length: 2-3 years
- Nine PA programs in Texas

**DISCLAIMER:** This list provides an overview of common requirements for PA programs within Texas. It is not meant to be definitive. Additionally, many PA programs do not accept AP/IB credit for pre-requisites. Refer to PA program websites to confirm specific coursework requirements.

**\*\*NOTE:** If you encounter issues with your application to a Texas PA program due to the Anatomy & Physiology requirements, please contact our office: [prehealth@uh.edu](mailto:prehealth@uh.edu).

## 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 **500-1000 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.

### Shadowing vs. Direct Patient Care Experience

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.

## Texas PA Program Application Information

Institution	Application Deadline (Start Term)	Application?	Patient Care/Shadowing Required?
Baylor College of Medicine	September 1 (May)	CASPA	No, but encouraged
Hardin-Simmons University	September 1 (August)	CASPA	No, but strongly recommended
Texas Tech University	August 1 (May)	CASPA/ Merlin	No, but encouraged
University of Mary Hardin Baylor	August 1 (January)	CASPA	100 hours of service oriented volunteerism
University of North Texas	October 1 (August)	CASPA	No, but encouraged
University of Texas -Rio Grande Valley	September 1 (August)	CASPA/UTRGV Graduate School Application	No, but strongly recommended
University of Texas Health -San Antonio	October 1 (June)	CASPA/PAS Supplemental Application	No, but strongly recommended
University of Texas -Southwestern	September 1 (May)	CASPA	Yes, but no stated minimum
UTMB-Galveston	September 1 (July)	CASPA	No, but encouraged