

# PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT RESOURCES



CAREER CENTER

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This handout is designed to provide students a general guide to applying to physician assistant programs. For further assistance, please schedule an appointment with a Career Advisor.

## QUICK FACTS

**Physician assistants (PA)** are medical professionals that are required to complete years of study, hands-on clinical experience, earn a Master of PA Studies, and obtain their PA licensure before they are fully prepared to enter into professional practice. Through this training, **PAs develop a robust set of skills** – from diagnosing and treating illnesses, ordering and interpreting tests, and assisting in surgery – which make them a valuable member of any healthcare setting. However, there are many factors to consider when applying to a PA program.

Here are things to keep in mind as you begin **navigating the application process**:

- Applications usually require some combination of these materials: **minimum GPA, healthcare or patient care experience hours, letters of recommendation, GRE scores, PA-CAT scores, Casper scores, and an interview.** Thoroughly read through the requirements each school/program has for admission.
- These materials will be submitted through the **Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA)**, an application system maintained by the **Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA)**.
- PA programs may require students to complete the **Graduate Record Exam (GRE)**, the **Physician Assistant College Admissions Test (PA-CAT)**, the **Computer-Based Assessment for Sampling Personal Characteristics (Casper)** test, or a combination of these tests before they apply to a program.
  - Testing and score requirement vary between schools, so it's important to carefully review any testing requirements beforehand.

## EXPERIENCE HOURS

Programs are often looking for two types of experience: **healthcare experience (HCE)** and **patient care experience (PCE)**

- **Healthcare experience** includes experiences that are not directly related to patient care but are still in the healthcare field
- **Patient care experience** focuses on experiences that are directly related to working with patients in some sort of clinical environment
- The required healthcare hours for PA programs can vary greatly, but most require somewhere between 100 – 1000 hours of experience.
- Programs may have a preference for between HCE and PCE, or other requirements for the experience to count, so it's important to be thorough while reviewing application requirements

**Many students take a gap year in order to gain meaningful experience before applying to a PA program.**

Certain positions – such as Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT), Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA), and medical scribes – and volunteer work – such as volunteering with the American Red Cross or your local hospital – can increase the competitiveness of your applications.

## COMMON PREREQUISITES

Principles of Biology I – **BIOL 1107/L**

Principles of Biology II – **BIOL 1108/L**

Human Anatomy & Physiology I – **BIOL 2160**

Human Anatomy & Physiology II – **BIOL 2170**

Microbiology – **BIOL 4180**

Principles of Chemistry I – **CHEM 1211/L**

Principles of Chemistry II – **CHEM 1212/L**

Biochemistry – **CHEM 3711/L**

Organic Chemistry I – **CHEM 3361/L**

Organic Chemistry II – **CHEM 3362/L**

Intro to General Psychology – **PSYC 1101**

Probability & Statistics – **MATH 2600**

**\*\*This list is not exhaustive. Please consult your academic advisor prior to registering for classes.**

## KEY NUMBERS

- Median Minimum GPA: **3.0**
- Average Experience Hours: **100-1000**

**\*Check with each school for their key numbers**

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## GRE PREPARATION

### Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

- Applicants are required to take the GRE only by some programs, but **required minimum scores vary**.
- You can register for the GRE using this link: <https://www.ets.org/gre.html>.
- The exam is composed of 3 sections including: **Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing**.
- Be sure to take the test in enough time to make the application deadlines.

### Prepare in advance!

- Spend time prior to your test date familiarizing yourself with the types of questions in each section.
- You can study through taking a course with a company like **Kaplan** or **Princeton Review**, or you can purchase study books online that contain practice tests and examples.

## PA-CAT

The **Physician Assistant College Admissions Test (PA-CAT)** is a specialized discipline-specific exam consisting of 240 questions that cover 9 science subject areas and is designed to assess PA applicants' knowledge and academic ability.

- Subjects covered are: anatomy, behavioral sciences, biochemistry, general biology, general and organic chemistry, genetics, microbiology, physiology, and statistics
- You can register for the PA-CAT at [www.pa-cat.com](http://www.pa-cat.com).

## CASPer

In addition to the GRE or PA-CAT, some programs may also require you to take the **Computer-based Assessment for Sampling Personal Characteristics (CASPer)** test. The CASPer is a fully online situational judgement test. During the test, which is divided into two sections (one video response and one typed response), you will be tasked with answering open ended questions about each scenario presented to you. Here is an overview:

- Video responses consist of 2 written scenarios and 4 video scenarios.
  - For each scenario, you will record videos to answer 2 open-ended questions on the scenario.
  - Each recording must be done in one minute.
- Type responses consist of 3 written scenarios and 5 video scenarios.
  - For each scenario, you will type responses to 3 opened-ended questions.
  - You will have a total of five minutes to answer each scenarios three questions.
- The test runs for approximately 90-110 minutes (with optional breaks between sections) and must be completed in one sitting.
- You can register for the CASPer at <https://acuityinsights.app/casper/>

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION

**When preparing for professional school interviews, a lot of the same rules apply as with most job interviews.**

- Visit **Handshake** to view the Career Center's interview resources and handouts.
- **Practice ahead of time.** "Why do you want to be a physician assistant?" or "Why our program?" are common types of questions that you want to be sure and prepare for.
- There are different types of interviews for physician assistant programs such as **traditional interviews, group interviews, multiple mini interviews (MMI)**; with MMI's becoming more popular.

## SOURCES

### CASPer Homepage

<https://acuityinsights.app/>

### Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants

<https://caspa.liaisoncas.com/>

### GRE Registration

<https://www.ets.org/gre.html>

### Kaplan Resources

<https://www.kaptest.com/gre>

### Physician Assistant College Admissions Test

<https://www.pa-cat.com/>

### Physician Assistant Education Association

<https://paeaonline.org/>

### Princeton Review Resources

<https://www.princetonreview.com/grad/gre-test-prep>