

# Physician Assistant (PA) School: Factors Considered for Admission

## Academic Factors for PA School Admission

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- **Major:** There is no pre-PA major. Choose a major you are interested in and one that provides other options in addition to PA school. Consult with your possible schools to determine which pre-requisite courses are required and when they must be completed, as the requirements vary from school to school.
- **GPA:** Both your cumulative GPA and science GPA are an important part of your application.
- **Test:** Many PA schools require applicants to take the GRE, which consists of three sections: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning, and Analytical Writing. Ideally, the GRE should be taken approximately 4-6 weeks prior to your PA school application.

## Non-Academic Factors for PA School Admission

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PA schools generally encourage applicants to be well-rounded individuals that have experiences in many different areas, particularly in clinical/direct patient care. Because the requirements and the relative weight of these factors often vary between schools, it is recommended that prospective students select a list of schools to tentatively prepare and plan for by following their respective requirements.

- **Rolling Admissions:** CASPA, the centralized application service for PA schools, opens in April. Due to rolling admissions, it is very important to submit your PA school application as close to the opening date as possible. Often students who are otherwise qualified are not accepted solely due to the fact that there were no more available seats and the student applied too late.
- **Direct Patient Contact/Clinical Hours:** It is necessary to have significant clinical work experience in order to be competitive and/or qualify for admission to most PA schools. It is recommended to work in a PAID position offering direct care to patients, usually for as many hours as possible. Specific hourly recommendations vary greatly, but can often range in the thousands of hours, with the national average around 2500. Accepted work experience also varies by PA school.
- **Shadowing:** Specific recommendations vary, but most schools recommend at least 40-50 hours of observation with a PA and/or physician. It is suggested to prioritize hours with a PA over hours with a physician in order to demonstrate evidence of an understanding of the PA role versus a general interest in medicine.
- **Community Service:** Emphasis on service varies, but it is recommended to have a history of service, approximately 50+ hours per year. Service activities should demonstrate consistent and long-term commitment to helping others, but do not need to be medically related. Community service (teaching English classes, humanitarian service projects, etc.) completed on a mission counts as a starting point, but engagement in your **own** community is seen as more valuable and should demonstrate a more current pattern of service.
- **Leadership:** Experiences that exhibit leadership qualities can be accrued in conjunction with clinical work experience, service, shadowing, and other extracurricular activities.
- **Research:** Participating in hypothesis-based research always looks good on your application, but is not required nor emphasized by most PA schools.
- **Letters of Recommendation:** Requirements vary by school. Generally, students need at least three letters, often including one from a PA, an academic reference, and a clinical supervisor. See our specific handouts regarding Letters of Recommendation and Evaluation.

## Application Process

Between 80 and 90 percent of PA schools utilize CASPA, a centralized application service. Through CASPA, you can apply to any number of participating PA programs by completing a single application. After you complete this one application, CASPA will verify your application for accuracy, calculate your GPA, and send your materials to the programs you designate.

CASPA opens mid to late April. Because most schools utilize rolling admissions (which means they interview and select qualified students as soon as students submit their applications), it is helpful to apply in April or May to increase your statistical probability of admission. It is not helpful, however, to submit your application before you have a well-written personal statement and application. Be sure you are fully ready to apply before submitting your application.

Often, schools will accept some unfinished prerequisite coursework if you will complete it before you matriculate. Consult with schools directly to understand their policy on when prerequisites must be completed.

## General Timeline

Year 1	Summer 1	Year 2	Summer 2	Year 3	Summer 3	Year 4	Summer 4
Take Prerequisite Courses							
Clinical Experiences							
Shadow PAs							
Extracurricular Activities							Matriculate into PA school
				CASPA opens in April, school deadlines vary			
				Interviews			
				Get letters of recommendation			
				Study for and take GRE			
Year 1	Summer 1	Year 2	Summer 2	Year 3	Summer 3	Year 4	Summer 4

## Other Resources

- Physician Assistant Education Association Program Directory
- American Academy of Physician Assistants
- CASPA online application
- Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc.
- Explore Health Careers
- BYU Allied Health Club (Pre-PA Club)