

Physician Assistant (PA) School: Factors Considered for Admission

Physician Assistant (PA) schools evaluate applicants in three areas: GPA, GRE scores, and other non-academic factors. Because each school places different weight on each area, be sure to research specific schools. To do so, consult individual school websites and refer to the PAEA Program Directory (<http://directory.paeaonline.org/>). Additionally, utilize the services available at the Preprofessional Advisement Center.

Academic Factors for PA School Admission

- *GPA*: Both your cumulative GPA and science GPA are an important part of your application. In 2015 the mean overall GPA of BYU students matriculating to PA school was 3.48 and the mean science GPA was 3.37.
- *GRE Scores*: 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. The average GRE scores of BYU students matriculating to PA school in 2015 were 155 (Verbal Reasoning), 153 (Quantitative Reasoning) and 4.0 (Analytical Writing).
- *Pre-requisite Courses*: 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. Note that some schools have expiration dates on pre-requisite courses (especially relevant to graduated students applying a few years later).

Picking a 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. Factors to consider when choosing a major include your interests, how well the major fits with prerequisite requirements, and what kinds of alternatives are available if you choose to pursue another career.

Non-Academic Factors for PA School Admission

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.

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 – <http://directory.paeonline.org/>
- American Academy of Physician Assistants – www.aapa.org
- CASPA online application – portal.caspaonline.org
- Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc. – <http://arc-pa.org/>
- Explore Health Careers – www.explorehealthcareers.org