



Physician Assistant (P.A.)

Career Description

- Physician Assistants are trained to provide diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic care as designated by a licensed physician.
- PAs are trained as generalists but can also work in specialty areas.
- PAs can perform such duties as physical exams, diagnosing and treating illness, ordering and interpreting lab tests, prescribing medication, suturing wounds, assisting in surgery, providing patient education and counseling, and making rounds in hospitals.
- Nearly 40% of PAs practice in hospital settings. An equal number work in group and solo-physician offices. The rest are found in rural and community health centers, nursing homes, surgical facilities, school and college-based health centers, industry, and correctional facilities.
- Originally PA programs were created to train former military corpsmen to practice medicine and provide care for people with limited access to health care.
- In recent years, the field has included students directly from undergraduate studies as well as practitioners from a variety of healthcare fields.

Becoming a Physician Assistant

- To attend one of the accredited PA programs, a bachelor's degree with any major of choice is needed as long as appropriate prerequisite courses are completed (see below).
- **Considerable health care experience** (generally hands-on patient care) is needed to be admitted to most programs. Some require as many as 2,000 hours.
- PA students spend more than 2,000 hours in clinical rotations including specialties in family medicine, pediatrics, emergency medicine, internal medicine, general surgery, psychiatry, and obstetrics/gynecology.
- Training is competency based. Once clinical training is finished, students must pass the national PA certification exam and be licensed in their state.

Prerequisite Courses

- Course requirements can vary substantially between programs, you should look at possible programs to which you would like to apply early in your academic career to make sure you meet their requirements.
- The initial courses are similar to other professional health care fields such as MD programs.

Common Prerequisite Courses (pre-reqs determined by each PA school & may vary from this list)

| Requirement | Course | Purdue Equivalents (specific courses may vary by major) |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| Biology | Intro Biology with lab | BIOL 11000-11100 or 13100 & 23100 & 23200 (lab) |
| | Anatomy & Physiology with lab | BIOL 20300-20400 or 30100-30200 |
| | Microbiology with lab | BIOL 22100 or 43800 & 43900 (lab) |
| Chemistry | General with lab | CHM 11500-11600 or 12500-12600 or 12901 & CHM 11500 credit exam (not accepted at all schools) |
| | Organic with lab | CHM 25500-25600 or 26100-26200 or MCMP 20400-20500 |
| | Biochemistry | BCHM 30700 or 56100 or CHM 33300 or 33900 or 53300 or MCMP 20800 |
| Psychology | General | PSY 12000 (may need abnormal psych [350] and/or developmental psych [230]) |
| English | Composition | ENGL 10600 or 10800 (some schools require a second English course) |
| Additional courses | Statistics | STAT 30100 or 50300 or PSY 20100 or SOC 38200 |
| | Communications | COM 11400 or COM 21200 |
| | Medical Terminology | HSCI 13100 |
| | Nutrition | NUTR 30300 or 31500 |
| May need | | Physics, Ethics or other courses; <i>additional Bio (with lab) may be required</i> |
| Pre-Medical Planning Seminar (Optional) | | BIOL 39600 is a 0 credit 10 week class covering how to apply to PA school and other health professions programs |

Job Outlook

- According to the *Bureau of Labor Statistics* (BLS), "Physician Assistants rank among the fastest growing occupations, as physicians and health care institutions increasingly utilize Physician Assistants to contain costs." The BLS predicts 30% job growth in the field through 2024.
- Some studies have shown that PAs save as much as 20% of the costs of medical care and can perform at least 80% of the functions in an ambulatory care practice.
- *U.S. News and World Report* in their *100 Best Jobs of 2014* ranks PA as one of the top 15 jobs in the United States.
- Median pay for a PA is \$98,180 in 2015.

Preparation

- Observe a PA to make sure this is the right field and you truly understand what a PA does.
- The most significant hurdle to a competitive application is the hands-on patient care requirement. As above, some schools require 2,000 hours. Schools have different opinions on the experiences they value for this, so be sure to research the schools you are interested in carefully. Generally you will need additional training so you can work in a health care setting.

Applying

- Some programs require the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).
- The initial application to most PA programs is through an online application service called the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA).
- Your letters of reference may be submitted electronically and you are responsible for sending all of your college transcripts (along with a transcript request form) to CASPA for verification.
- Your online application will also include an application essay.
- Early application is recommended.

More Information

- [American Academy of Physician Assistants](https://www.aapa.org) <https://www.aapa.org>
- [Physician Assistant Education Association](http://www.paeaonline.org/) <http://www.paeaonline.org/>
- [CASPA](https://caspa.liasoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login) (application service) <https://caspa.liasoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login>

Programs in Indiana

- [IUPUI](https://shrs.iupui.edu/academics/physician-assistant/) Indianapolis, IN <https://shrs.iupui.edu/academics/physician-assistant/>
- [University of Saint Francis](http://pa.sf.edu/) Ft. Wayne, IN <http://pa.sf.edu/>
- [Butler University](https://www.butler.edu/physician-assistant/pa-admission-information) (Standard Admission Pathway for those entering with an undergrad degree) Indianapolis, IN <https://www.butler.edu/physician-assistant/pa-admission-information>
- [University of Evansville](https://www.evansville.edu/majors/physicianassistant/) (new program-provisional accreditation) Evansville, IN <https://www.evansville.edu/majors/physicianassistant/>
- [Indiana State University](http://www.indstate.edu/health/program/pa) (new program-on probation) Terre Haute, IN <http://www.indstate.edu/health/program/pa>

Information for this career guide came from the above websites and the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physician-assistants.htm) <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physician-assistants.htm>.