Career Description

- Pathologists’ assistants provide anatomical and pathology services under the supervision of a pathologist (a physician—either an MD or DO).
- Pathologists’ assistants perform a variety of tasks including gross examination of surgical pathology specimens; frozen section preparation; postmortem exams; dissection and preparation of specimens; obtaining clinical histories; preparing tissues for histological processing; photographing pertinent gross specimens; conferring with physicians; and administrative, supervisory, and teaching duties.
- Pathologists’ assistants work mostly in surgical pathology with fewer of them performing autopsies. This is based largely on the sharp declines in autopsy rates in the United States.
- Pathologists’ assistants work in a variety of settings including hospitals, private labs, forensic pathology labs, reference labs, government healthcare, medical teaching facilities, and businesses.

Becoming a Pathologists’ Assistant

- To attend one of the accredited Pathologists’ Assistant programs, a bachelor’s degree completed in any major with prerequisite courses is required.
- Programs generally consist of a year of courses and 10-12 months of clinical work.
- Once clinical training is successfully completed, students must pass the national certification exam and be licensed in a state as an American Society of Clinical Pathology PA (ASCP).
- Most programs take 22-24 months and result in a master’s degree.

Preparation

- Shadow a Pathologists’ Assistant to make sure this is the right field and you truly understand what a pathologists’ assistant does.
- Take an aptitude test if it is needed to apply to the graduate program(s) of interest to you.
- Both the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) and/or the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) are generally accepted. If English is not your first language, a TOEFL exam may also be required.
- Although programs do not have a standard set of requirements, many similarities in their requirements do exist.
- Initial courses are similar to other professional health care fields such as MD programs, but some further courses are required.
- Research possible programs of interest early in your academic career to make all requirements are met.

Common Prerequisite Courses (requirements determined by each graduate program)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirements</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Purdue Equivalent (specific courses may vary by major)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Intro Biology with lab</td>
<td>BIOL 11000-11100 or BIOL 13100 &amp; BIOL 23100 &amp; 23200 (lab) or BIOL 23000 &amp; upper level biology (including 2 hours of lab)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>BIOL 20300-20400 or BIOL 30100-30200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Microbiology with lab</td>
<td>BIOL 22100 or BIOL 43800 &amp; 43900 (lab)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>General Chemistry with lab</td>
<td>CHM 11500-11600 or CHM 12901 (CHM 11500 credit exam recommended with 12901) or CHM 12500-12600 or CHM 12300-12400 or CHM 13600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organic Chemistry with lab</td>
<td>CHM 25500-25600 or CHM 26100-26200 or CHM 26505-26605 or MCMP 20400-20500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(recommend 2 semesters)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>BCHM 30700 or BCHM 56100 or CHM 33300 or CHM 33900 or CHM 53300 or MCMP 20800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>ENGL 10600 or ENGL 10800 or SCLA 10100 (may need individual school approval)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Possible Requirements</td>
<td>Additional Biology, English, Math, Physics, Ethics</td>
<td>Histology, Cell Biology, Genetics, Statistics, Physics, Biomedical Ethics, Technical Writing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Student Organization: Caduceus Club, Purdue Forensic Science Club

Researching Programs

- [Accredited Training Programs for PAs](https://www.pathassist.org/page/AboutUs_NAACLS)

Applying

- Application is directly through the schools you would like to attend.
- Competitive applicants will have:
  - Strong academic performance
  - Above average scores on the aptitude test (GRE or MCAT)
  - Leadership, teamwork, and communication skills
  - Volunteer and shadowing/observation experiences
  - Strong positive letters of recommendation
- Early application is recommended as many programs take only a handful of students.

Fee Assistance

- Visit specific school websites to learn if fee assistance is offered.
- [GRE Fee Reduction Program](https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/reductions/)
- [MCAT Fee Assistance through the AAMC](https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/fee-assistance-program/)

Employment Outlook

- The demand for PAs (ASCP) is growing.
- Many laboratories nationwide are facing manpower shortages.
- PAs work in hospitals, academic centers, private pathology laboratories, medical research centers, and medical examiner offices.
- Salaries average about $89,999 and most students are employed before leaving their graduate program.

Programs in the Region

- [Indiana University Pathologists’ Assistant M.S. Program](https://medicine.iu.edu/departments/pathology/education-programs/graduate-degrees/masters/) Indianapolis, IN
- [Rosalind Franklin University Pathologists’ Assistant M.S. Program](https://rosalindfranklin.edu/academics/college-of-health-professions/degree-programs/pathologists-assistant-ms/) North Chicago, IL
- [Wayne State University Pathologists’ Assistant Program](http://cphs.wayne.edu/pathologists-assistant/) Detroit, MI

More Information

- [American Association of Pathologists’ Assistants](https://www.pathassist.org/default.aspx)
- [What is a Pathologists’ Assistant?](https://www.pathassist.org/page/What_is_a_PA)
- [Who’s Who in the Lab](https://labtestsonline.org/articles/medical-laboratory-professionals)
- [American Society for Clinical Pathology](https://www.ascp.org/content)
- [National Accrediting Association for Clinical Laboratory Sciences](https://www.naacls.org/)

Other Careers to Consider

- Physician (to become a pathologist)
- Medical Laboratory Science
- Forensic Scientist

Information for this career guide came from the above websites and the [Explore Health Careers](https://explorehealthcareers.org/career/allied-health-professions/pathologists-assistant/)