• Physician assistants (eventually to be renamed physician associates) provide diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic care as designated by a licensed physician.
• PAs are trained as generalists but can also work in specialty areas. They perform physical exams, diagnose and treat illness, order and interpret lab tests, prescribe medication, perform in-office procedures, suture wounds, assist in surgery, provide patient education and counseling, and make 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.

Education & Licensure

• To attend one of the accredited PA master’s programs, you need to complete a bachelor’s degree in any major along with appropriate prerequisite courses (below).
• Considerable health care experience (generally hands-on patient care) is needed to be admitted to most programs. Some programs require as many as 2,000 hours. Many admitted students will have even more hours. Schools have different opinions on the experiences they value. Training is typically needed to work in a healthcare setting.
• After completing science courses (didactic training), PA students complete clinical rotations in a number of specialties including 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 to become a PA-C and then be licensed in their state.

Preparation

• Observe a PA to make sure this is the right field and that you truly understand what a PA does.
• Course requirements can vary substantially between programs. Research programs of interest to you to make sure you meet their requirements.
• A grade of at least C (even higher at some schools) is often needed at many programs in required courses.

Common Prerequisite Courses (required courses determined by each PA school but similar to this list)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Purdue Equivalents (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)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anatomy &amp; Physiology</td>
<td>BIOL 20300-20400 (BIOL 30100-30200)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with lab</td>
<td>BIOL 22100 or BIOL 43800 &amp; 43900 (lab)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microbiology with lab</td>
<td>BIOL 22100</td>
<td>BIOL 11000-11100 or BIOL 13100 &amp; BIOL 23100 &amp; 23200 (lab)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>General with lab</td>
<td>CHM 11500-11600 or CHM 12500-12600 or CHM 12300-12400 or CHM 13600 or CHM 12901 &amp; CHM 11500 credit exam (not accepted at all schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organic with lab</td>
<td>CHM 25500-25600 or CHM 26100-26200 or CHM 26505-26605 or MCMP 20400-20500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>BCHM 30700 or BCHM 56100 or CHM 33900 or CHM 43300 or MCMP 20800 (CHM 33300, CHM 53300)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>General</td>
<td>PSY 12000, may need abnormal psych (PSY 350) at some schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Composition</td>
<td>ENGL 10600 or 10800 or SCLA 10100* (some schools require a second English course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional courses</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>STAT 30100 or STAT 50300 or PSY 20100 or SOC 38200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communications</td>
<td>SCLA 10200* or COM 11400 or COM 21200 or COM 21700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medical Terminology</td>
<td>HSCI 13100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nutrition</td>
<td>NUTR 30300 or NUTR 31500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Medical Planning Seminar (Optional)</td>
<td>BIOL 39600</td>
<td>is a 0 credit 10 week class covering how to apply to PA school and other health professions programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Ask individual PA school if they will accept this course toward their requirements; Courses no longer offered.

Student Organizations: Pre-PA Club, Caduceus Club

Applying

- The initial application to most PA programs is through an online application service called the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASA). https://caspa.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login
- The competitive applicant will have:
  - Strong academic performance including a grade point average of 3.5 or better
  - Scores above the national average on the GRE/PA-CAT
  - Leadership, teamwork, and communication skills
  - Volunteer and shadowing/observation experience
  - Significant hands-on patient care hours even at schools that don’t require it
  - Strong positive letters of recommendation (mostly from science faculty and physicians or PAs)
- Early application is important as most programs are relatively small. The application opens in April. Applications should be submitted in May for schools with January starts and in June or early July for August/September start dates (of the next year).
- Many students find they need to work for a year before applying to gain enough clinical hours to be competitive at many PA programs.

Fee Assistance

- CASPA Fee Assistance Program https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Starting_Your_CASPA_Application/Getting_Started_with_Your_CASPA_Application/3_CASPA_Application_Fees
- GRE Fee Reduction Program https://www.ets.org/gre/test-takers/general-test/register.html

Employment Outlook

- According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the PA field can expect continued job growth of 28% through 2031. Median pay for a PA was $121,530 in 2021. https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physician-assistants.htm

Diversity Matters

The PA profession needs physician assistants who look just like you, and who share your life experiences. Race or ethnicity, LGBTQ+ identity, disability, age, geographic region, socioeconomic status, social and cultural identity, and nationality add to a richer experience for all students in the PA classroom, contribute to the PA profession, and ultimately lead to better outcomes for patients.

Programs in Indiana

- Indiana University Indianapolis, IN https://shhs.iupui.edu/graduate-professional/physician-assistant-studies/index.html
- University of Saint Francis Ft. Wayne, IN https://majors.sf.edu/physician-assistant-studies/
- Butler University (Standard Admission Pathway for those entering with an undergrad degree) Indianapolis, IN https://www butler.edu/academics/academic-programs/physician-assistant/admission-information/
- University of Evansville Evansville, IN https://www.evansville.edu/majors/physicianassistant/
- Indiana State University Terre Haute, IN https://www.indstate.edu/health/program/pa
- Trine University (Probation) Angola, IN https://www.trine.edu/academics/majors-degrees/graduate/master-physician-assistant-studies/index.aspx
- Franklin College Franklin, IN https://franklincollege.edu/academics/graduate-programs/master-science-physician-assistant/
- Valparaiso University (combined undergrad/grad program) Valparaiso, IN http://www.valpo.edu/college-of-nursing-and-health-professions/physician-assistant/

More Information

- Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA) https://paeonline.org/
- Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) http://www.arc-pa.org/accreditation/accredited-programs/

Other Careers to Consider—Nurse Practitioner · Physician · Anesthesiologist Assistant

Preparing for your Giant Leap

purdue.edu/preprofessional