



# Pathologists' Assistant (P.A.)

## Career Description

- Laboratory professionals are the unheralded life savers in medicine.
- Over 70% of diagnostic and treatment decisions made by doctors are based on medical laboratory tests (according to Dr. John Eble, Chief Pathologist at Indiana University Health).
- Pathologists' assistants provide anatomical and pathology services under the supervision of a pathologist (a physician—either an MD or DO).
- They perform a variety of tasks including gross examination of surgical pathology specimens, frozen section preparation, and performance postmortem exams.
- A Pathologists' assistant's duties include dissection and preparation of specimens, obtaining clinical histories, preparing tissues for histologic processing, photographing pertinent gross specimens, performing postmortem exams, conferring with physicians, 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 needed.
- Most students do come from academic backgrounds such as biology, chemistry, or clinical laboratory science. An interest in the anatomic aspect of pathology is a must.
- Programs generally consist of a year of courses and 10-12 months of clinical work.
- Once clinical training is successfully completed, you must pass the national certification exam and be licensed in your state as an American Society of Clinical Pathology PA (ASCP).
- Most programs take 22-24 months and result in a master's degree.

## Prerequisite Courses

- Although PA (ASCP) 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.
- Course requirements can vary substantially between programs. Research possible programs of interest early in your academic career to make sure requirements are met.

### Common Prerequisite Courses (requirements determined by each graduate program)

Requirements	Course	Purdue Equivalent (specific courses may vary by major)
Biology	Intro Biology with lab	BIOL 11000-11100 <b>or</b> 13100 & 23100 & 23200 (lab)
	Anatomy & Physiology	BIOL 20300-20400 <b>or</b> BIOL 30100-30200
	Microbiology with lab	BIOL 22100 <b>or</b> 43800
Chemistry	General Chemistry with lab	CHM 11500-11600 <b>or</b> CHM 12901 <b>or</b> equivalent
	Organic Chemistry with lab (recommend 2 semesters)	CHM 25500-25600 <b>or</b> 26100-26200 <b>or</b> 26505-26605 <b>or</b> MCMP 20400-20500
	Biochemistry	BCHM 30700 <b>or</b> 56100 <b>or</b> CHM 33300 <b>or</b> 33900 <b>or</b> CHM 53300
English	Writing	ENGL 10600 <b>or</b> 10800
Other Possible Subjects	Additional Biology, English, Math, Physics, Ethics	Histology, Cell Biology, Genetics, Statistics, Physics, Biomedical Ethics, Technical Writing

## Job 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 range from \$75,000-90,000 and most students are employed before leaving their graduate program.

## Preparation

- Shadow a PA (ASCP) 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.

## Applying

- Application is made directly with the schools you would like to attend.
- 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/) [https://www.ets.org/gre/revised\\_general/about/fees/reductions/](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/) <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/fee-assistance-program/>

## More Information

- [American Association of Pathologists' Assistants](http://www.pathassist.org/) <http://www.pathassist.org/>
- [What is a Pathologists' Assistant?](http://www.pathassist.org/?page=AboutUs_WhatIsAPA) [http://www.pathassist.org/?page=AboutUs\\_WhatIsAPA](http://www.pathassist.org/?page=AboutUs_WhatIsAPA)
- [American Society for Clinical Pathology](http://www.ascp.org) <http://www.ascp.org>
- [National Accrediting Association for Clinical Laboratory Sciences](http://www.naacls.org/) <http://www.naacls.org/>

## Programs in the Region

[Indiana University Pathologists' Assistant M.S. Program](http://pathology.medicine.iu.edu/education/graduate/graduate-tracks/pathologists-assistant/) Indianapolis, IN

<http://pathology.medicine.iu.edu/education/graduate/graduate-tracks/pathologists-assistant/>

[Rosalind Franklin University Pathologists' Assistant M.S. Program](https://rosalindfranklin.edu/academics/college-of-health-professions/degree-programs/pathologists-assistant-ms/) North Chicago, IL

<https://rosalindfranklin.edu/academics/college-of-health-professions/degree-programs/pathologists-assistant-ms/>

[Wayne State University Pathologists' Assistant Program](http://cphs.wayne.edu/pathologists-assistant/) Detroit, MI

<http://cphs.wayne.edu/pathologists-assistant/>

Information for this career guide came from the above websites and the [Pathologists' Assistant page at Explore Health Careers website](http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career/119/Pathologists_Assistant) [http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career/119/Pathologists\\_Assistant](http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career/119/Pathologists_Assistant)