

Physician Assistant Career Information

Physician Assistants (PA's) provide healthcare services under the supervision of physicians. They work in doctor's offices, hospitals, clinics, HMO's, and in the armed forces. Physician assistants are educated as generalists in medicine, and their education and credentialing are based on a primary care foundation. However, many PA's work in specialty fields, such as cardiovascular surgery, orthopedics, and emergency medicine. The largest proportion opts for the primary care specialty areas of family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology.

PA professionals can rotate to various specialty areas throughout their career and for the most part do not have to get extra certification to move from one to the other (surgery and other critical areas may require extra training, research these if interested). This makes the career very appealing for many students who want a variety of experiences in their careers. Most specialty areas do not require PA's to be on call and do allow for work-life balance unlike medical doctors. Areas like surgery may have more similarities to medical doctors in this respect. Extensive shadowing should be done to determine specific interest areas and day to day requirements for these fields.

PROGRAM DETAILS

PA programs are 3 years long and consist of rigorous coursework and clinical rotations with most programs awarding a masters degree. Students then complete national and state licensing exams and can start seeking a professional PA position. Programs are general (no specialty areas) and this means that the type of experience done before applying will likely determine the specialty area for the first position. Consider being strategic when thinking about what kind of clinical experience to do before applying. For example, if you want to work in emergency/trauma, an EMT certificate might be a good option.

CERTIFICATION & LICENSING

After graduating from an accredited PA program, you're eligible to take the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) to become certified. In order to practice, a state license is required. Licensure requirements vary by state but a license is needed in order to practice in any state. For more information: <http://www.nccpa.net/>

ADMISSION FACTS

- Average age of accepted students: 28
- Average accepted science GPA: 3.4
- Average accepted student # clinical hours: 2,500
- Average accepted student # shadowing hours: 20
- Most students have at least **3 years** of health experience

ADMISSION ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS

1. **GPA**
 - a. PA school is intense and very science focused. Most students that are accepted are science majors but, like medical school, you can be any major as long as pre-requisite classes are taken. PA schools require academic excellence. One way of showing that is through the science GPA. The average accepted science GPA is 3.4.
 - b. <http://www.mypatraining.com/pa-school-application-tip-2-protect-your-gpa>

2. TEST SCORES

- The GRE is the standard entrance for most programs though some will accept the MCAT. Check individual programs to get an idea of what sort of score you should be shooting for.

3. COURSES

- See <http://www.duels.ucsb.edu/academics/health/pa>
- In addition, you will want to meet with the PRE-HEALTH TEAM academic advisors
<http://duels.ucsb.edu/academics/health>

ADMISSION EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS

** Since PA schools requires years of experience before applying, it is HIGHLY recommended to keep a notebook where you log all clinical, community service, and shadowing experiences. Include # of hours per shift, stand out experiences and supervisor contact information. This will be extremely helpful when completing personal statements and preparing for interviews. Keep your notebook updated during your time at UCSB and beyond.

Keep in mind that no amount of experience can make up for a very low GPA.

SHADOWING EXPERIENCE

See the Getting Experience: Health Professions handout for detailed information on shadowing.

No minimum number of hours is required but it's recommended to shadow PA's in various settings and specialties such as hospitals, clinics, private practice, and so on. Each shadowing shift should be no less than 4 hours and the length of time that you're with one professional if often based on their availability. For example: 1 time each week for 3 months, etc.

CLINICAL EXPERIENCE

Clinical experience is considered hands-on experience with patients with health professional supervision. Many PA programs require PAID experiences so contact programs of interest to inquire about which experiences they will accept. Minimum 6-9 months is recommended commitment time for experiences.

Below is just a sampling of the most popular clinical experiences:

NURSING: Registered Nurse, Certified Nurse Assistant

ALLIED HEALTH: Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, X-Ray Technician

EMERGENCY SERVICES: Emergency Medical Technician (EMT), Paramedic, Emergency Room Technician

MISC: Phlebotomist, Athletic Trainer, Medical Volunteer

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Though not technically required for admission to PA school, all health professionals are considering leaders in the community and thus involvement in the community is a very positive component to your application package. Any type of community service (health or non-health) can show one's commitment to helping others. Students should select community service opportunities based on interests. Minimum 6-9 months is recommended commitment time for experiences.

UCSB CAMPUS RESOURCES

JOIN THE PRE-HEALTH LISTSERV for health related information and opportunities on and off-campus: <https://lists.lsit.ucsb.edu/listinfo/health>

CONNECT WITH THE PRE-HEALTH TEAM:

1. Academic Planning & Course Scheduling

Paula Bautista & Scott Kassner @ Cheadle Hall

For appointments, call (805) 893-2038 or schedule an appointment online <http://appts.duels.ucsb.edu/>

2. Career Exploration, Admissions, Applications, Interview Preparation, Finding Health Experiences

Dr. Stephen Blain @ Cheadle Hall

For appointments go to <http://appts.apps.duels.ucsb.edu/>

Counselors @ Career Services

For appointments call (805) 893-4412 or stop by Career Services Building 599

<http://career.sa.ucsb.edu> OR visit the PRE-HEALTH SECTION in the Career Resource Room

CONNECT WITH THE UCSB PA ASSOCIATION

http://osl.sa.ucsb.edu/show_profile/85204-pre-physician-assistant-association

GENERAL PA INFORMATION & PROGRAMS

ExploreHEALTHCareers.org

http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career/19/Physician_Assistant

American Academy of Physician Assistants

<http://www.aapa.org/become-a-pa/>

National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants

<http://www.nccpa.net/>

California Academy of Physician Assistants

http://www.capanet.org/Students_Pre-PA.aspx

Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physical Assistant, Inc.

http://www.arc-pa.org/acc_programs/

