

Physician Assistant

Prerequisites

Admissions requirements vary widely from program to program. Please check the prerequisites for schools to which you hope to apply.

Below is a list of courses that may be required:

Prerequisites	Mason Courses
Cell Biology	BIOL 213
Human Anatomy and Physiology	BIOL 124 BIOL 125
General Chemistry	CHEM 211 CHEM 212
Organic Chemistry	CHEM 313/315 Varies by PA program
Biochemistry (BIOL 213 and CHEM 313 are prerequisites for this course.*)	BIOL 483/CHEM 463 Varies by PA program
Microbiology (BIOL 213 is a prerequisite for this course.*)	BIOL 305/306
English	ENGH 101 ENGH 302
Two Psychology	PSYC 100 PSYC 211 PSYC 325
Math	varies by PA program
Statistics	BIOL 214/STAT 250 varies by PA program
Medical Terminology	HAP 202 or ATEP 201

* See the [University Catalog](#) for further information about Course Prerequisites.

Additionally, Genetics (BIOL 311) and Organic Chemistry II (CHEM 314/318) may be required by some programs.

Students may consult the [American Association of Physician Assistants](#) and the [Physician Assistant Education Association Directory](#) to research the specific requirements of the schools to which they plan to apply.

Many PA programs also require prior healthcare experience with hands-on patient care. Other schools do not require the experience, but highly recommend it. According to [AAPA](#), “Most students have a bachelor’s degree and about three years of health care experience before entering a PA program.”

The following is a list of the types of direct patient care experiences that have been found to be acceptable to meet minimum program requirements: nurse, EMT or paramedic, corpsman, patient care technician, nurse’s aide, surgical assistant, clinic/medical assistant, respiratory technologist, radiology technologist, medical technologist, and phlebotomist. This list, however, it is not exhaustive and students should contact each school to find out what kind of experience is acceptable.

Physician Assistant Graduate Programs

The typical Physician Assistant Masters Degree takes 27 to 30 months to complete. The majority of students have a BA/BS degree and health care experience prior to admission to a PA program. More information about Physician Assistant Graduate Programs can be found in the Physician Assistant Education Association Directory. <http://directory.paeonline.org/>

Physician Assistant

Physician Assistants (PAs) provide healthcare services under the supervision of physicians. They work in doctor’s offices, hospitals, clinics, HMO’s, and 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 PAs 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. Some of the functions performed by a PA are:

- Taking medical histories
- Performing medical exams
- Ordering lab tests
- Diagnosing illnesses
- Counseling patients
- Assisting in surgery
- Prescribing medication (in many states)

For further information on a career as a physician assistant, visit [Explore Health Careers](#).

Standardized Tests

Many physician assistant programs require that applicants take the [Graduate Record Examination \(GRE\)](#), a standardized test used to gauge a student’s ability to perform in a graduate program. The GRE is given year-round at computer-based test centers in the U.S., Canada, and many other countries.

Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA)

[Central Application Service for Physician Assistants \(CASPA\)](#) is a centralized service which allows applicants to use a single application process to apply to multiple PA programs. Not all schools participate in CASPA. It is the responsibility of the applicant to learn which schools participate and send individual applications to those schools that do not participate.

Employment Outlook and Earnings

The current [Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook for Physician Assistants](#) can be found online.

Accredited Physician Assistant Programs in the Region

[Eastern Virginia Medical School](#)

[James Madison University](#)

[Jefferson College of Health Sciences](#)

[Shenandoah University](#)

[George Washington University](#)

Pre-Physician Assistant Advising

The information contained in this information sheet should be discussed with [the Health Professions Advisor](#). The availability of these health professions advising opportunities is announced through the [HEALTHPROFESSIONS-L listserv](#) for Mason students.

Students must still be advised in their department regarding their major.