

Pre-Physician Assistant Program

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Explore Pre-Physician Assistant at UWM

UWM offers all of the prerequisite coursework necessary for application to physician assistant (PA) programs throughout the country. Although it theoretically is possible to enter a PA program after completing the necessary science and math courses but before earning the bachelor's degree, it is a rare situation and becoming even less common as more PA programs now require a bachelor's degree.

Admission to PA programs is extremely competitive, as much so if not more than medical school. Successful applicants will have not only a stellar GPA and academic record but also demonstrated excellence and experience in healthcare-related work. Most programs require applicants to have completed direct patient care experience, some as much as 2,000 hours.

How to get hands-on experience: Many students will obtain their CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) or EMT (Emergency Medical Technician) license while in college. These types of practical part-time jobs can be very valuable when applying to PA school.

Majors for Pre-PA Students

It is important to note that "pre-PA" is not a major. Many pre-PA students choose a natural science undergraduate major such as chemistry or biology because they already are taking many classes in those areas. However, it is possible to be admitted to a PA program with any major as long as the science and math prerequisites are met. Regardless of the major, students will be counseled on the required science courses needed for application

to PA school, and those courses will be integrated into the student's schedule.

PA programs look for students who excel at math and science and who have demonstrated strong skills in communication, compassion, and problem-solving. These traits align well with many majors beyond science, including ethnic studies, languages, communication, anthropology, psychology, and sociology.

Advising

Students who identify themselves as pre-PA will be assigned to a dedicated advisor who works with students interested in post-college study in the healthcare field. Our pre-PA advisor understands the long-term planning required to successfully complete the bachelor's program and the application process for PA programs.

Because many science courses have prerequisites and follow a very structured order, it is important that students plan their course schedule very carefully in consultation with their advisor. Getting off track as early as freshman year can delay graduation.

After Undergraduate Studies

Physician assistant programs usually take at least 2 years of full-time study after the undergraduate degree is completed. There are 217 accredited programs in the U.S. from which to choose. Most programs lead to a master's degree, though the exact degree varies from school to school. Some programs award the Master's of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS), while others offer the Master in Health Science (MHS) or the Master of Medical Science (MMSc).

A graduate from an accredited PA program must pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) before becoming a PA-C. This certification is required for licensure in all fifty states. Continuous education is required throughout the career to maintain licensure.

Quick Fact: Applicants to Physician Assistant schools generally take the GRE standardized test late in the spring of their junior year or during the summer between their junior and senior year of college.

Career Outlook

Physician assistants work under the supervision of a physician or surgeon to provide direct patient care. They may perform exams, order diagnostic tests, prescribe medication, make diagnoses, provide treatments, and assist with surgery. Like physicians, depending on the speciality, evening, weekend, and on-call hours may be a job expectation.

PAs work in all specialties, including primary care, emergency medicine, surgery, orthopedics, pediatrics, oncology, and many more. PAs can be found in doctors' offices and clinics, hospitals, community and college health centers, government agencies, and corporate health offices.

Employment of PAs is expected to increase 30 percent from 2014 to 2024, much faster than the average for other occupations. As changes to health insurance continue to evolve and the population ages, PAs will play an increasingly important role in the nation's healthcare system. States continually are looking at expanding the legally allowable procedures that PAs can perform.

The median annual wage of physician assistants was \$98,180 in 2015 but salaries can be significantly higher in certain specialties such as surgery. And, those who work in a hospital setting tend to make more than the median.

UWM Advantages

Students in the pre-PA program at UWM have several unique opportunities outside of the classroom to enhance their preparation for a PA program:

» **Medical Scribe Jobs:** Scribes assist physicians with medical documentation and the creation and maintenance of medical records using a Workstation on Wheels (WOW). Two companies – PhysAssist and Elite Medical Scribes – offer part-time jobs to highly-qualified UWM students. Students who are selected receive in-depth exposure to clinical medicine and medical terminology.

» **Hospice Volunteer Program:** Students may be trained and volunteer in one of three areas: administrative aspects of hospice care including Do not Resuscitate releases and insurance; direct patient contact; or vigil and bereavement during the last hours of life and immediately following death.

» **Unite For Sight's Global Impact Corps:** Student volunteers spend a week or more abroad, generally in less-developed areas of the world, working with medical professionals and social entrepreneurs.

» **Prevent Blindness Wisconsin (PBW) Vision Screening Program:** PBW is a statewide not-for-profit organization dedicated to preventing blindness through the identification of early signs of eye disorders. UWM students may become certified vision screeners and volunteer to work with children, adults, and the elderly.

» **Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP):** In partnership with Wheaton Franciscan Health Care, UWM student volunteers interact and visit with patients, assisting with feeding, mobility exercises, orientation therapy, or therapeutic interventions involving music, massage, or reading. There is a minimum 6 month commitment, one day a week for 3 - 4 hours/per week.

» **Vive Peru:** This summer medical mission partners students with medical professionals to bring healthcare to Peru.

» **Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR):** OUR provides access to research experiences for undergraduates. Students work directly with faculty members and graduate students in their chosen field of study.

Suggested Pre-PA Courses

One year of general Biology with lab (Bio Sci 150, 152)
Three semesters of General Chemistry with lab (Chem 100, 102, 104)
One year of Organic Chemistry with lab (Chem 343, 344 & 345)
Biochemistry (Chem 501)
One year of Anatomy and Physiology (Bio Sci 202, 203)
Microbiology (Bio Sci 101 or 383)
Two semesters of math, including statistics
6 credits of English, including composition
an Ethics course
Introduction to Psychology (Psych 101)

Revised 11/2016

