

# Pre-Pathologists' Assistant Program

## Contact Info:

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## What is a Pathologists' Assistant?

Pathologists' assistant is a small but growing career track for students interested in the medical field, specifically pathology. Similar to how a physician assistant helps doctors, pathologist assistants help pathologists with the tasks of their job. Duties may include gross examination and description of surgical specimens, assistance with intraoperative consultations, autopsies, laboratory management, data compilation and reporting, research, and inventory and lab maintenance according to industry standards. A pathologists' assistant can be found working in community and university hospitals, private laboratories, medical schools, morgues, and medical examiner offices.

## Required Education

The pathway to becoming a pathologists' assistant includes a four-year undergraduate (bachelor's) degree, followed by a two-year graduate program that includes both classroom education in medicine and pathology as well as clinical training.

Admission to these graduate programs is very competitive, and there are only 10 pathologists' assistant master's programs in the U.S. Typically students will have earned a 3.6 GPA or higher while in college, and will have scored above the 70th percentile on the standardized test for graduate school. Some pathologists' assistant schools require the MCAT exam, while others

require the GRE, either of which is usually taken the latter half of junior year.

## Internships

In addition to strong academic credentials, pathologists' assistant programs will be looking to see whether you have accumulated significant experience related to pathology while in college as part of their admissions process. This can include internships, lab work, related research projects, job shadowing, or part-time jobs. Students who declare an intention to take a pre-pathologists' assistant track will be assigned an advisor who specializes in advising pre-health students and can assist with finding these types of opportunities.

Pathologists' assistant schools do not require any specific major but do expect that students will have taken the necessary preparatory math and science coursework needed to succeed in their program. This includes multiple courses in chemistry, organic chemistry, and biochemistry; multiple classes in biological sciences including genetics and anatomy; math, generally through the first semester of calculus; and statistics. For this reason, many students choose to major in biology, chemistry, or biochemistry, but that is not a requirement. As long as a student takes the required preparatory coursework, he/she can major in any subject area.

## Course Planning

Because science coursework is very sequential and must be taken in a specific order, students interested in the pre-pathologists' assistant program should express their intentions early so that the advisor can help the student with course selection. Taking the right courses beginning



in freshman year is vital to staying on track and avoiding a delay in graduation.

### Career and Salary Outlook

Similar to most professions in the healthcare industry, the job outlook for a pathologists' assistant is very optimistic. The profession is expected to grow at an above average rate compared to other jobs.

Entry level salaries range from \$75,000 to \$90,000 depending on the area of the country and type of employer. Typically, pathologists' assistants can expect to earn more than \$100,000 as they gain more experience.

*Beyond the required scientific knowledge and lab skills, employers cite these qualities as essential for pathologists' assistants:*

- *Excellent written and oral communication skills to accurately and succinctly describe tissue samples and testing results*
- *Emotional fortitude to cope with stressful environments often involving death*
- *An unwavering attention to detail*
- *Excellent manual dexterity to work with scalpels and other medical equipment*
- *Ability to exercise compassion and empathy when working with patients*

### Physician Assistant vs. Pathologists' Assistant

Although both careers require a master's degree, the training for each is unique and distinct. Switching between the two careers without additional education is generally not possible because of the different types of training each career requires. The master's program to become a pathologists' assistant is tailored specifically to the tasks and knowledge in the field of pathology.

### UWM Advantages

Students in the pre-pathologists' assistant program at UWM have several unique opportunities outside of the classroom to enhance their preparation for graduate school:

- » **Office of Undergraduate Research (OUR).** The OUR program provides access to research experiences for undergraduates. Students work directly with faculty members and graduate students in their chosen field of study.
- » **Center for Community-Based Learning, Leadership, and Research.** The Center helps match interested students with opportunities on campus or in the community. It also offers leadership development courses and training to provide students with the philosophical background and tangible skills to make a difference as active citizens during college and after graduation.
- » **Specialty Advising.** Students who indicate they are on the pre-pathologists' assistant path will be assigned to our pre-health advisor with more than 20 years of experience helping students achieve their healthcare career goals. She assists students not only with course selection but also with finding the right experiential opportunities that will enhance their application to graduate school.

### Suggested Pre-Pathologists' Assistant Courses

Two semesters of General Chemistry with lab (Chem 102 and Chem 104)
One year of Organic Chemistry with lab (Chem 343, 344, 345)
Biochemistry (Chem 501)
One year of Biology with lab (Bio Sci 150, 152)
One advanced (300+ level) Biology course with lab
Statistics (Math Stat 215, Psych 210, or Bio 465)
6 credits of English, including composition
College-level algebra or higher math (Math 105 or higher)

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