Pre-Physician Assistant Guide

UT Austin
PAI 5.03
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Visit our Website
Preface

The information presented in this document provides important resources for UT Austin undergraduate and graduate students planning on applying to Physician Assistant school. Remember it is important to research Physician Assistant programs and evaluate their fit before you apply.

Additional Pre-Health Professions resources including pre-requisites, timelines and application information for the following Health Professions: Medical, Dental, Pharmacy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Optometry or Veterinary can be found on our [HPO Pathways Page](#).
Selecting a Major

So what should you major in at UT? Most Pre-Physician Assistant students choose to major in a science discipline within the College of Natural Sciences. However, if your heart is set on a non-science major, we recommend that you choose a degree based on your interests. Choose a major that you are passionate about, and keep in mind that certain degrees may cover the Pre-Physician Assistant prerequisites. Also, Physician Assistant schools also accept students who show broad interests in their academic coursework through a non-science major.

Explore Majors/Health Professions further at one or more of the following resources:
- Way finder [http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/wayfinder/explore/path/index](http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/wayfinder/explore/path/index)

Explore a Physician Assistant Career further:
- AAPA’s “How to become a PA” is a great resource for those on the path to a career as a Physician Assistant: [How to become a PA](http://www.aapa.org/)
- AAPA’s “what’s a PA?” Video [What's a PA?](http://www.aapa.org/)

Pre-Physician Assistant Self-Assessment

The assessment below is designed to assess Physician Assistant School application strengths. If you are a new Pre-Physician Assistant student, please use this assessment as a planning guide for your Pre-PA Pathway. (Please check out the New-Pre Health Longhorn Information page at the Health Professions website: [http://cns.utexas.edu/health-professions](http://cns.utexas.edu/health-professions).

Are you working towards submitting a well-rounded application?

Start by Developing Your Personal Qualities

Individuals who are successful in their pursuit of a health care career possess a set of qualities that they develop as young adults. These include qualities such as: Good Judgment, Self-Discipline, Maturity, Compassion/Empathy, Integrity, Intellectual Curiosity, Strong Work Ethic, Leadership/Accountability, Reliability, Motivation/Persistence, Honesty, and Cultural Competency. Develop these qualities through the experiences and activities you choose to get involved with.

I want to develop the following qualities:

__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

How are you going to develop these qualities? (Be specific)

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__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
Get Involved & Gain Experience

There are several ways you can get involved. Get involved in what you are interested in - this is key! There are many things you can do to boost your application, including but not limited to: volunteering, shadowing, studying abroad, and/or participating in a summer program. Get involved on campus, tutor, mentor, teach, participate in Rec Sports - the list goes on and on! If you are considering adding studying abroad to your list, check out the study abroad section in this guide. Always remember to be yourself and do what you enjoy.

Volunteering

Professional school admissions committees will look favorably upon any experience in which you are giving back to the community. A community service activity where you are directly helping people face-to-face is of the most value, and making an ongoing commitment to that service gives you time to grow and gain real value from the experience.

Track your Volunteer Hours

Track your volunteer hours, as most professional school applications will ask for details of the time you spent volunteering. UT Austin’s “Give Pulse” is a great way to find volunteer opportunities, track hours, and become a part of a great service community. If you are tracking your volunteer and health care experience personally, it’s important to keep a record of your volunteer supervisor(s), including name(s) and title(s). The below sections are examples of how the CASPA application system defines and tracks volunteer and hands on health care experience. *Using programs like Microsoft Word or Excel to make and keep track of tables can be helpful.*

Quick Tips:
When deciding where/how to volunteer and get hands on experience, you should investigate how each school you are interested in defines volunteer, healthcare, and hands-on experience, what each individual school’s requirements are, and if your experience will fulfill these requirements.
Example:
University of Houston Health Science Center - San Antonio requires:
- Community Service
- 100 hours of PA shadowing
- 500 hours of health care experience

Community Service

Volunteer work done outside of the health care field; for example, working for Habitat for Humanity, tutoring children, participating in or working for a fundraiser walk or blood drive, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community Service</th>
<th>Dates (can list time period or individual dates)</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Responsibilities</th>
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</table>
What have I learned about myself through these volunteer experiences?
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________________________
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Have I involved myself in a diverse set of experiences? What skills have I enhanced/gained through these experiences? (For example: “I have become a better communicator through my volunteering experiences at the local hospital” – then, explain how you have done this.)
________________________________________________________________________________________
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I want to explore the following volunteer activities:
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
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Health Care Shadowing
Time spent officially following and observing health care professionals at work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PA Name or Name of Experience</th>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Type of Experience: Shadow/Volunteer/Paid</th>
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What have I learned from these experiences?
________________________________________________________________________________________
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I want to reach out to the following Physician Assistants to ask about shadowing:
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
Get Hands-On Experience!
It can be good to gain some hands-on experience in a health care setting to add to your application. You can do so in many different ways. You can get a phlebotomy certification, go through an EMT Basic course, become a Certified Nursing Assistant, or become a scribe, among other things. Find one that you are interested in by doing informational interviews. Speak to a Pre-Health Professions coach about these different ways to gain experience.

Direct Patient Care Experience
Experiences in which you are directly responsible for a patient’s care; for example: prescribing medication, performing procedures, directing a course of treatment, working on patients as an active EMT, etc.

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<tr>
<th>Name of Experience</th>
<th>Specialty</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Type of Experience: Shadow/Volunteer/Paid</th>
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What have I learned from these experiences?
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_________________________________________________________________________________________
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What skills have I enhanced/gained through these experiences? What do I like and dislike about my experiences in this setting?
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________

Quick Tip:
Finding a healthcare provider who is willing to allow you to shadow can be a challenge, but it is worth the effort. Many students start with their own health care providers. You may also network with other pre-health students to see where they have shadowed.
**Awards, Honors, Professional Membership & Leadership**

Relevant awards or honors earned as a college student or post-college. High school honors should not be included. Professional Memberships and Leadership refers to your membership in a professional organization, such as the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), or leadership roles you performed in a professional position or organization.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Organization</th>
<th>Position/Title (ex: Communication Director, President, Member, etc.)</th>
<th>Total participation time (ex: 2 years, 3 semesters, etc.)</th>
<th>Duties/Activities participated in with this organization/group</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

What relevant awards and honors have I earned as a college student or post-college?

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__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

What is the most important thing I have learned about myself from these experiences?

__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

Brainstorm some specific ways you can develop your leadership skills:

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__________________________________________________________________________________________
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__________________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________________

**Other Healthcare or Work Experience**

This could be working in the health or a health-related field but when you are not directly responsible for a patient’s care; for example, filling prescriptions, performing clerical work, delivering patient food, cleaning patient rooms, working as a “Candy Stripper” or hospital volunteer, etc. Any paid work done outside of the health care field; for example: a retail or restaurant job.
I have the following non-direct health care experience:
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

I have the following paid experience outside of the healthcare field:
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Research
Research projects done in addition to classroom work; research should NOT appear as credit on a school transcript.

I want to explore the following research topics and activities:
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

How are you going to explore these topics and activities? (Be specific):
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________________

Academics
Academics include your GPA and GRE Scores. How well are you doing? Are you taking between 14-17 credit hours per semester? Are you keeping your grades up? Use the GPA calculator in your UT Direct account to figure out your GPA.

Quick Tip:
When entering coursework and grades into the CASPA application, it is important to review the Academic History section and follow the instructions for entering coursework to properly calculate your course’s numerical value. CASPA Coursework Instructions

Overall GPA ________
*This includes all course taken at UT and other institutions

Science GPA __________

Quick Tip:
To be competitive for professional school, you will need a GPA in the range of 3.4 to 3.8 and above. This means you need to be making A’s and B’s with more A’s than B’s. If you feel that you are behind in your classes, please don’t wait until you get your first poor test score to ask for help. There are numerous resources on campus to help you with tutoring! Start with visiting your faculty members & teaching assistants during office hours.
Get in the Habit of Personal Reflection
Your insights about who you are as a person and how your experiences have shaped you will be of
tremendous benefit when it is time to write your personal statement (a required part of your professional
school application.) Keep a journal handy so you can jot down your thoughts and observations!

***Once you have completed this assessment, if you have not made an appointment with a Pre-Health
Professions Coach, we recommend that you do so to discuss these topics as well as your application strengths
as a whole.

Track Your Progress

Why do I want to be a Physician Assistant?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What characteristics do you have that you feel will help you be an excellent Physician Assistant?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Have you had experience working with people from backgrounds different from your own? What
impact has it had on you?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Self-Evaluation
Mark Yes or No for each question. This will allow you to identify areas in which you feel strongest and areas in
which you wish to grow.

Can you explain to someone why you want to be a Physician Assistant? Y  N
Is your GPA above a 3.5? Y  N
Have your grades improved over time? Y  N
Have you shadowed more than one PA? Y  N
Does your application reflect a diverse set of extracurricular
activities over time? Y  N
Have you shown consistency with your volunteer activities/community
service? Y  N
Why do I want to be a Physician Assistant?

Can you go beyond loving science and wanting to help? Remember, there are many helping professions out there? Why this one? (What Does a PA Do?)
Get to Know Your Faculty

This can be challenging at UT Austin—the campus is huge, and most of the classes in your first year have large numbers of students. Even though the professors can sometimes seem tough or intimidating, most of them are very approachable one-on-one. Visit your professors during office hours, even if you are doing well in their class. It will make your request for a future letter of evaluation much easier! Get to know your faculty, check out the video on the HPO YouTube page for some tips!

Who are your letter writers?

I would like to ask the following faculty for letters of reference:

1) __________________________________________
2) __________________________________________

I would like to ask the following third letter writer for a letter of reference; this letter will add a different dimension to my application:

1) __________________________________________

Quick Tip:
It is essential to determine what requirements, if any, your PA programs have regarding references’ roles or relationship to you BEFORE listing ANY references on your CASPA application. Many programs have strict guidelines for this, and once a reference is completed on the CASPA application, it can NOT be removed or replaced. You should also investigate the types of letters each school you are interested in requires. Some programs require letters from professors, health care providers, employers, or supervisors, while others only recommend or prefer it.

*Keep in mind that some PA programs require one letter be written by a PA.

CASPA instructions

***Once you have completed this self-assessment, if you have not made an appointment with a Health Professions Coach, we recommend that you do so in order to discuss these topics as well as your application strengths as a whole. Make sure to track your progress!***

Notes:

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Pre-Physician Assistant Prerequisite Courses

For the most updated and current PA school and prerequisite courses, please visit the Pre-Physician Assistant Pathways page here. Completion of the courses listed on this site will prepare you for Texas and most out-of-state United States PA schools. If you need to find out the prerequisites for an out-of-state school, you can contact that particular school’s admissions office.

Pre-Physician Assistant Time Line

A Note from Your HP Coaches:

This timeline is an example of how UT Austin students may complete the pre-Physician Assistant course requirements for application to all of the Texas PA programs listed on the Physician Assistant Studies Prerequisite Courses document. Many programs require that the courses be completed by the end of fall semester in the year of application. Some require completion by the application deadline or earlier. This time line accommodates these requirements as of the date of this document.

[Requirements can change at any time. Check often for updates and review school web sites for changes that may occur between updates.]

See the prerequisite courses page for details on these courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRST YEAR</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>College Algebra or higher</td>
<td>Biology II</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biology I</td>
<td>Chemistry II</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chemistry I</td>
<td>Chemistry or Biology Lab</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rhetoric</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SECOND YEAR</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genetics</td>
<td>Organic Chemistry II</td>
<td>Microbiology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Genetics Lab</td>
<td>Organic Chemistry Lab</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organic Chemistry I</td>
<td>Biology (3 hrs UD)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THIRD YEAR</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Anatomy</td>
<td>Physiology</td>
<td>(Apply)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>Physiology Lab</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Psychology (3 hrs)</td>
<td>(GRE: Graduate Record Exam)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<th>FOURTH YEAR</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
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<td></td>
<td>(BLS certification)</td>
<td>(BLS certification)</td>
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</table>

Continue in course work and activities that will prepare you for professional school.

***NOTE: UNTHSC, UTMB, and UTSW also require one semester of math (College Algebra or higher).***
Can I Take Courses Away From UT?

Completing your coursework at UT (your home institution) is considered best preparation for health professions schools. For students who find it necessary to take courses away from UT, we offer the following recommendations.

**KEY:**
- **UT:** Take classes at UT Austin
- **4YR:** If necessary, okay to take class at other 4 year institution
- **CC:** If necessary, okay to take class at community college

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-Medical</th>
<th>Pre-Dental</th>
<th>Pre-Veterinary</th>
<th>Pre-Optometry</th>
<th>Pre-Pharmacy</th>
<th>Pre-Physician Asst</th>
<th>Pre-Physical Therapy</th>
<th>Pre-Occupational Therapy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology &amp; Chemistry</td>
<td>UT</td>
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<td>UT</td>
<td>UT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
<td>Not Required</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics, Calculus</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
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<tr>
<td>English &amp; Rhetoric</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
<td>4YR or CC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Pre-requisites</td>
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Generally, it seems to be okay to take other prerequisites away from UT Austin, if needed; however, students should contact individual professional schools’ admission offices for questions about specific courses.

**General Recommendations:**
1. Taking courses away from UT can give the impression that the student is avoiding UT Austin’s rigorous courses; therefore, it is important to earn excellent grades at both community colleges and other four-year institutions.
2. It generally appears to be okay with professional schools to take government and history requirements at other four-year institutions or community colleges.
3. For other general requirements students can check with professional schools’ admission offices.

Most health professions schools require that prerequisites be taken at U.S. accredited schools, and some will accept credits from Canadian accredited schools.

Although exchange program courses and some affiliated program courses are counted as in-residence credit by UT Austin, according to Texas state law, foreign course work cannot be counted in the GPAs for application to graduate and post-baccalaureate professional schools. The rules and policies can vary among the professional schools. Students who plan to study abroad should research this carefully for the schools and application services they plan to apply to. Look in the education requirements, transcripts, and FAQ sections of their web sites for information about foreign course work and study abroad.

UT Austin faculty-led courses are “in-residence” courses as well as U.S. credits, and so courses like Organic Chemistry II (CH 320N) taught in Spain by UT Austin faculty can be used to satisfy a prerequisite; however, for many students taking these rigorous courses in only 5 weeks may not be recommended. It is important that pre-health professions students master these courses and retain this knowledge for success in entrance exams and in advanced studies. On CASPA’s instructions and FAQS page there is a section titled “Study abroad and Overseas U.S. Institutions Transcripts”. This section details how to report study abroad course credits and transcripts.

The UT Austin Health Professions Office very strongly recommends that our students satisfy their health professions prerequisites at UT Austin. Use the study abroad opportunity to study the culture.
and language of that country and to satisfy general education requirements if approved by your academic advisor. Science courses that are not considered direct preparation for the health professions can be considered as well.

(Examples: research, ecology, environmental science; but NOT cell, molecular, microbiology, anatomy, physiology which figure heavily into your preparation and readiness for professional school and the admissions committee’s assessment of your application.

FAQ - Foreign Applicants, Coursework from Foreign Schools and Study Abroad

Do Schools accept foreign coursework?

No! State law requires that academic work taken at foreign colleges, universities or preparatory schools shall be excluded from the calculation of the grade point average for students seeking admission to graduate or post-baccalaureate professional school.

Foreign coursework will not count towards satisfying any of the required coursework.

Undergraduate foreign coursework that appears as transfer credit on the transcript of a regionally accredited US college will count towards the 90-hour requirement. Each individual transfer course credit granted by the US school must be listed on the transcript. Lump sum credit with no specific course and hour identification will not be accepted.

What about Claiming AP/IB Credit for Prerequisites?

While we generally recommend that as a Pre-Health Professions student you not “claim” AP/IB credit for prerequisite courses such as Biology, Chemistry, English, Physics, and Mathematics, these are important decisions that you must make for yourself that require your careful consideration. It may seem like a convenient way to eliminate hours from your degree plan and accelerate your path to professional school, but claiming credit can actually be detrimental to your preparation for success on entrance exams and in professional studies. Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses vary in rigor, and they are generally not equivalent to the rigor of UT Austin courses. However, your AP/IB courses can be very good preparation for taking these courses at UT Austin, providing the opportunity to master that material, become better prepared, enhance your GPA, and demonstrate your academic ability and readiness for advanced study in health professions schools.

Unless you are academically very well prepared, it is best to start with the introductory courses. Please consult with your academic advisor for help in determining your readiness for higher level science courses. Most schools that accept AP/IB credit will expect you to take additional upper-division course work in that area of study.

Here are some specific recommendations:

Science Courses

Biology and Chemistry

If you claim credit in courses like BIO 311D and BIO 311C you may not be adequately prepared for the rigorous next course here at UT Austin, BIO 325 (Genetics). If you claim credit for CH 301 and CH 302, your first college level chemistry course at UT Austin will be CH 310M (Organic Chemistry I).
Honors students in Biology and Chemistry may claim test credit, register in the honors sequence for Biology or Chemistry, and will take additional upper-division credits in those areas, making up for the lack of first-year hours in those disciplines.

Your UT Austin faculty will expect you to be prepared to learn and understand the material conceptually and theoretically in order to understand test questions well enough to earn A's on your exams. They will teach material beyond the textbook that was not presented in your high school courses. You will be in second year courses with many students who took General Biology and General Chemistry here and are well prepared to handle the exams in the more advanced courses. They will set the standard for the grade scale or curve in your classes.

**Physics**

Physics is required to prepare for some health professions schools. In some cases, you will be tested on Physics in your professional school entrance exam. We strongly recommend taking physics at the college level if you are preparing for a professional school that requires physics.

**Calculus and Statistics**

For the Texas medical schools, if you take statistics in the classroom here at UT Austin, you can use statistics to satisfy the math prerequisite. Then if your degree plan or any of your science courses require calculus, you can decide with your academic advisor whether to use credit-by-exam or take the course(s) in the classroom.

For all health professions schools, both in Texas and out-of-state, it is important to check their admissions web sites for any restrictions and preferences on credit-by-exam.

**Non-Science Courses**

It is usually acceptable to claim credit-by-exam for general education or core curriculum requirements such as history and government. Claiming this type of credit may give you time to take the courses that will prepare you for professional school and school entrance exams. On the other hand, critical thinking skills and an understanding of ethics, society, community, cultures, history, and human behavior are important for your success now and throughout your professional and personal life. Taking college level courses is a good way to develop these areas of knowledge.

**English Literature, Rhetoric, Writing**

If you claim credit for freshman writing and literature courses, we recommend taking additional courses in the classroom at the college level. Even if your high school verbal skills were strong, this type of academic skill weakens over time if you do not use it.

Verbal skills are extremely important to your success in your undergraduate course work, your entrance exams, in professional school, and as a health care professional. You must be able to read efficiently, at a good rate, with high comprehension and critical thinking skills. You must develop and maintain a good vocabulary, not just for the sciences but also for social and behavioral sciences, ethics, policies and regulations, and procedural information. Many admissions deans recommend reading well-written novels in addition to your textbook material.

**ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

PA Schools vary in their policies and perspectives on credit-by-exam. Review the information on our prerequisite courses lists, located on page 12. Also check individual school admissions web sites or contact their admissions offices to be sure about each school’s expectations. Taking courses in the college classroom...
will help you to compete for admission and to succeed in professional school. We strongly recommend that you use these courses as building blocks that will be the foundation for your future career.

**Quick Tips:**
Check with each school you plan to apply to and see if they accept AP/IB for the classes you would like to claim credit for. Some Schools will not accept AP/IB credit for biological science prerequisites, but will accept them for English and social/behavioral science classes.

### To Q or Not to Q (or to switch to pass/fail)

No admissions committee for any health professional school likes to see “Q drops” on a transcript. This is an indication that something became too much for you to handle and that you chose to drop the course rather than see it through. There are times when the Q-drop is the best course of action, however, keep reading to see how your choice may affect your competitiveness for professional school.

**More of a problem if:**
1. **Q-dropping is a pattern on your transcript.** Two Q-drops can signal a possible pattern; three Q-drops create a definite pattern.

2. **It occurs in a context of inconsistent grades.** To be competitive for professional school, you should be making A’s and B’s with more A’s than B’s. If you have semesters which include B’s and C’s – even one or two C’s, your grades are “inconsistent” by a professional school’s standard.

3. **It’s one of your prerequisite courses for professional school.** In this case, you might consider sticking with the class on a pass/fail basis. Then you only need to earn a D to earn credit. **Check with your academic advisor** about whether you can use the pass/fail option.

4. **It’s any science-based course,** since the bulk of professional school curriculum will be science based.

**Less of a problem if:**
1. **It’s the only Q-drop on your transcript at time of application to professional school.** You will want to choose wisely however, depending on the course. If you are taking a lower division or introductory course, keep in mind that upper division courses will be more challenging. You may want to hold on to that “one and only Q-drop” for later.

2. **It’s a non-science course.** While professional schools want you to do well in all classes, they are likely to be less concerned if you dropped a sociology or business class.

**What if there are non-academic reasons for needing to Q-drop?**

Sometimes personal or family emergencies and other special circumstances make it difficult to find time for and focus on your studies. Sometimes, especially for new students, it is difficult to make the transition to UT. If you are dealing with something that is getting in the way of your school work, it is very important that you get help.

1. Talk to your academic advisor and/or an advisor in your college student division office
2. Check out the support services at the Counseling and Mental Health Center

**When is switching to pass/fail a better option?**

This should really only be undertaken when you are reasonably certain that you can pass the class, in other words, earn at least a D. An F from a pass/fail course is just the same as an F from a letter grade course.
If you are taking a pre-requisite course that you must repeat (and you meet the above criteria of being reasonably sure you can pass), you should consider the pass/fail option. This will allow you to continue your exposure to the material for the entire semester. This will create a much stronger foundation when you repeat the course.

**What if I keep the class and then I make a C or lower?**

No one wants to explain a poor grade in a class, but there is actually much to be learned about being responsible for your grades (see exercise below). Talking about how you might change your strategy going forward can be not only a sign of maturity and integrity, it can also demonstrate your resilience. All of these qualities are important to future health professionals.

**What did you learn from this experience?**

While it can be tempting to blame others for the need to Q drop a class, you must understand that the responsibility is 100% yours. To help you identify your responsibility, ask yourself these questions.

1. Could I have met with the professor to see what I could do to improve my understanding?
2. (If my professor was difficult to understand or hard for me to follow) Did I look for other sections of the courses to sit in on so that I could learn the material in a different way?
3. Could I have identified that I needed assistance earlier in the semester? (In time to have possibly salvaged my grade)
4. Could I have managed my time better so that I had appropriate time to devote to the class?
5. Could I have checked out resources for tutoring through the Sanger Learning Center?
6. Could I have adjusted my priorities (lowering especially those which are non-academic) to allow focus on my studies?

**Preparing for the possible professional school interview question**

You will want to spend some time reflecting on what you could have done differently so that you did not have to drop the class (see above). If you are asked about the Q-drop, you should be able to explain where things went wrong, what you learned from the experience, and how you might choose differently in the future. Remember the Health Professions Office does mock interviews and can help you practice your response.

**Academic Assistance**

**Academic Support**

Sanger Learning Center’s resources can help you achieve your academic goals. You can get help with course content. You can make an appointment to meet one-on-one with a tutor for an hour-long session. Together, you and your tutor will tackle difficult homework problems and review course concepts. You can also receive coaching on how to understand and work those science exam questions that you need to earn an A. Visit JES A315A for drop-in tutoring for mathematics, physics, and chemistry courses. It’s a great way to study alone or in groups and is especially good for completing homework assignments. Attend free classes for calculus refreshers and exam reviews.

**Utilize Faculty Office Hours**

Your grades in a given course will ultimately be determined by the professor who is teaching it. If you are struggling in a course, your first request for help should go to the professor. Not only are they experts in the content being taught, but they also have established the method by which you will be evaluated. Be prepared to explain to the professor what you have been doing to grasp/retain the content and where you believe you
are falling short. This not only communicates your commitment to learning, it also gives the professor a starting point for your discussion.

**Visit with Your Teaching Assistants (TAs)**

These students are hired to help expand the reach of the professor, providing another source of assistance. While they don’t have the expertise of a professor, they have mastered the course previously, often with the same professor. TAs are great for quick questions and – depending on their skill level and availability – can be great “tutors”, explaining concepts in a way that may be easier for you to grasp.

**Improve Your Study Skills**

Visit us in JES A332 to speak with a learning specialist about your study-related questions and concerns. Meet weekly with a peer academic coach to develop and implement study strategies to help you succeed at UT Austin. Attend monthly workshops on study strategies and time management.

**Attend Course-specific Study Groups**

The Sanger Learning Center is housed in undergraduate studies and is main resource for academic support. Supplemental Instruction offers optional weekly discussion sections for students enrolled in some historically difficult, large-format courses, including calculus. The PLUS program provides peer-led study groups for a number of difficult, upper-division courses. Visit the Sanger Learning Center website for additional Academic Support Resources: [https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc/support/one-on-one](https://ugs.utexas.edu/slc/support/one-on-one)

The Vick Center for Strategic Advising and Career Counseling is housed in undergraduate studies and serves students across campus who are exploring majors and careers, as well as undeclared students enrolled in the School of Undergraduate Studies. If you need help finding a major connect, with the Vick Center: [https://ugs.utexas.edu/vick](https://ugs.utexas.edu/vick)

**GRE Information**

Most PA schools require that applicants take the Graduate Record Examinations (GRE). The GRE is offered as a computer-delivered test year round at most locations around the world, and as a paper-delivered test up to three times a year in areas where computer-delivered testing is not available. The test is usually taken by spring semester of junior year, if the school requires it. The test consists of 3 areas: 1) Verbal Reasoning; 2) Quantitative Reasoning; 3) Analytical Reasoning. Students can prepare for the GRE in a variety of ways, including taking a test preparatory course or by purchasing study materials individually. Students can be successful using either strategy, so you should weigh your personal needs when deciding on an approach.

**Scheduling Your Exam & Preparation**

To learn how to register for the GRE along with prep tips, fees, score reporting and more, please be sure to check out the GRE page on the ETS website: [http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/register](http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/register) Most PA schools accept GRE scores that are no more than 5 years old. If you plan to use a GRE score from a test taken prior to the August 1, 2011 test revision you may need use a conversion chart to see what percentile your score falls under. [GRE Score Conversion Chart](#)

**Your GRE Score**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRE Section</th>
<th>My Score</th>
<th>Avg. Score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Reasoning</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quantitative Reasoning</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Analytical Writing</td>
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</table>
Need a GPA Booster?

A Post-Baccalaureate program is for students who have already completed an undergraduate degree and are interested in a health professions career. They often need to finish prerequisite courses and/or need to improve their academic standing for a more competitive professional school application. A few options of the types of Post-Bacc programs for Physician Assistant students are given below.

What Different Post-Bacc Programs are Available?

There are a few different types of Post-Bacc programs for students hoping to attend PA school, these programs usually come in the form of pre-med Post-Bacc programs that accept PA students, Science focused certificate programs, and graduate programs:

Basic Sciences: This type of program is for students who have not completed the basic requirements for PA school. Generally this is for “career changers” who have decided to pursue a career in healthcare as a Physician Assistant. The coursework can be done in a formal Post-Bacc program or individually at a local university.

Advanced Sciences/GPA Boosters: This type of program is designed for students who were science majors or have completed the basic science requirements. These are for students who:

- Want to stay academically engaged during a gap year while applying to PA schools.
- Need to raise their GPA to become a more competitive PA school applicant.

Graduate Degree: This type of program is applicable to various students. Some students may choose to pursue a graduate degree to boost their GPA, provide basic science requirements, or offer knowledge in areas that will complement their future Physician Assistant education. Examples of these programs would be an MPH in Public Health, or MS in Medical/Biological Sciences.

How Do I Get In?

Selection criteria vary around the country. Most programs require at least a 3.0 GPA. Applications for the fall semester are usually due by March of that year. Check with individual programs so as not to miss deadlines. Also try and Google Post-Bacc PA Programs as other out of state schools do have programs that are not part of a centralized list.

Examples of Post Baccalaureate Programs

- The University of North Texas: Master of Science Degree in Medical Sciences
- Northwestern University: Pre-Physician Assistant Post-Baccalaureate Program
- Texas Tech University: Graduate Medical Sciences - MS in Biomedical Sciences
- The University of Vermont: Post-Baccalaureate Physician Assistant (PA) Program
- Arcadia University: Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Health Professions or in the Sciences
- The University of Texas School of Public Health: Master of Public Health
Research Schools Before You Apply!

Quick Tips: Make sure to investigate each Post-Bacc you plan on applying to.
Be sure to ask questions like
What GRE help is provided?
Do you provide a preceptorship?
How much does your program cost?
Example: The University of North Texas offers a Post-Bacc program. They help pre-PA students find preceptorships if they are accepted into the program, but do require them to do your own GRE prep, with the programs support.

Thinking about what type of Physician Assistant school you are looking for? Not sure what you want in a school? Check out the following possible criteria for evaluating a PA school's fit for you!

What type of PA school am I looking for?
1. Size of your cohort
2. Prestige of the institution
3. Training facilities
4. Opportunity to do research
5. Support programs – tutoring, counseling, student health services, childcare
6. Community building – student organizations
7. Options for financial aid/scholarship
8. Outreach/Service to Community
9. Family/Friends (Support in close proximity)
10. Lifestyle - outdoorsy, athletic, cultural arts, etc.
11. Centers/ Institutes /Programs that align with your PA School Goals

Texas Physician Assistant Schools (Public)
- Texas Tech University Health Science Center Physician Assistant Program (Midland)
- University of North Texas Health Science Center Department of Physician Assistant Studies (Ft. Worth)
- University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio Department of Physician Assistant Studies
- University of Texas Medical Branch (UTMB) at Galveston Physician Assistant Studies Program
- University of Texas Pan American - Physician Assistant Department (Edinburg)
- University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center Physician Assistant Studies Program (Dallas)

Texas Physician Assistant Studies Programs (Private)
- Baylor College of Medicine Physician Assistant Program (Houston)

Provisionally Accredited Physician Assistant Studies Programs (Newer Programs)
- Hardin-Simmons University Physician Assistant Program (Abilene)
  Check accreditation status here. http://directory.paeaonline.org/programs/1227
- University of Incarnate Word Physician Assistant Program (San Antonio)
  Check accreditation status here. http://directory.paeaonline.org/programs/1235
My Top Ten Schools Are:

1) ________________________________________________________________
2) ________________________________________________________________
3) ________________________________________________________________
4) ________________________________________________________________
5) ________________________________________________________________
6) ________________________________________________________________
7) ________________________________________________________________
8) ________________________________________________________________
9) ________________________________________________________________
10) ________________________________________________________________

**REMEMBER**

It is important to make sure to do your research on the PA Schools you plan to apply to before doing so. Check out [CASPA's participating PA programs](#), and the [PAEA program directory](#) to help you get started and answer school specific questions.
## Follow the Time Line for Applying to PA School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Semester Before Application Cycle</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Begin compiling list of experiences; include details such as dates, hours, tasks and responsibilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Attend personal statement workshop presented by a Pre-Health Professions Coach</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Begin drafting personal statement and optional essays</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Ask evaluators for letters of reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Research schools to determine where to apply</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>January</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• We recommend students take the GRE by the spring semester of their junior year, no later than April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continue to work on personal statement</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>February/March</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Attend Health Professions Fair, usually held in February or March to visit with professional schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Continue to work on personal statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Begin to gather letters of reference</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>April</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CASPA Application Link</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open CASPA application link, and begin application process</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Send friendly reminder to evaluators at the end of the month if haven’t already submitted letters of reference</td>
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<tr>
<th>May</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Obtain official transcripts from all institutions attended. Review for accuracy of information and use as reference for completing application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Print and read application service instructions; Make a plan or “to do” checklist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Be sure to read instructions about score reporting; these vary year-to-year and by schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Request transcripts from all institutions attended to be sent to application services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schedule a personal statement review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Finish personal statement</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>June/July</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Submit when application is complete (this includes spring grades) and you’re confident you’ve done your best! (<strong>Earlier is better – Ideally by mid-summer</strong>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Complete and submit secondary applications; applications are not complete until secondary applications are submitted.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall/Spring Semester during Application Cycle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Follow up to make sure application is verified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If applying to out-of-state school, speak with health professions coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Schedule mock interview with Health Professions Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Interviews are done throughout the fall semester, and have the possibility of going into the spring semester.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If you have multiple admissions offers, talk with a health professions coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Deadline to submit CASPA application is about March 1</strong> (<strong>Earlier is better - we encourage submitting by mid-summer</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Quick Tips:**

- **READ and understand all application instructions for CASPA and individual programs you are applying to. Example: Instructions for Grade reporting varies based on +/- grades and study abroad credits/grades.**
- **Try to send any time sensitive application materials based on the earliest deadline for each school you are applying to. Example: If the deadline to submit any application materials is September 1st, try to finish all materials by that time, to prevent missing any deadlines.**
- **Pay attention to the interview cycle of every school you are applying to, times will vary based on when the application deadlines are.**
Overview of Physician Assistant School Application Services and Resources

There is one application service that you will use to apply to most Physician Assistant Schools in the United States. CASPA Online application service will be used for all Texas Schools. Be sure to review the CASPA Deadline Color Code Guide to ensure you submit your application properly and on time. *Early applications are encouraged!

Helpful Resources:

For more tips watch this quick application video from PAEA: http://vimeo.com/84711398

PA Schools Requiring Secondary Applications

Some health professions schools require secondary applications to be completed in addition to the primary application. Applications are not considered complete until the secondary application is submitted. Most secondary applications require an additional fee and the majority of secondary application fees are non-refundable. The program links provided on CASPA’s participating PA programs page offer detailed information on each schools secondary application requirements, costs, and deadlines. *All Texas schools with the exception of UT-Southwestern require secondary applications.

Letters of Reference

Letters are key pieces to your professional school application. The number and type of letters vary from school to school. For additional details and guidelines check with CASPA or the application service you are using. Check out HPO’s YouTube Channel for tips in a video on “Getting to Know Your Faculty Members.”

- CASPA’s Letters of Reference instructions and FAQ’s to help applicants
- Review resources on HPO’s Pathways Page

Writing Your Personal Statement

You are welcome to come speak to a Pre-Health Professions Coach to discuss your ideas before starting your personal statement. We will help you brainstorm ideas and help you stay on track. View our Health Professions Pathways page for more information.

CASPA Prompt: The personal essay provides an opportunity for you to explain why you desire to pursue physician Assistant education. The Admissions Committee members who read your essay are looking for individuals who are motivated, academically prepared, articulate, socially conscious, and knowledgeable about the profession. Write about your experiences and any qualities that will make you stand out.

Length: 5000 characters, including spaces, carriage returns, and other formatting. Anything entered in over the character limit will not be saved, and your narrative will be cut off at this point. If you type your essay directly into CASPA, you can view the remaining character count beneath the text box.

For the CASPA narrative and more information on the personal statement format, please review this resource: https://portal.caspaonline.org/caspaHelpPages/frequently-asked-questions/additional-information/narrative-personal-statement-information/

Visit our Application Resources Page for tools like a personal statement brainstorming worksheet, a list of action verbs, a list of words describing strengths and skills, and more!
Interview Tips and Preparation

Dress Professionally:
- View our Dressing Guide

Practice Improving Your Interview Skills:
- Schedule a PA School Mock Interview/Feedback session with a Pre-Health Professions Coach
- You may find it helpful to reflect on how your interview went. Check out the Post Interview Self Evaluation Form on our Application Resources page.

Prepare & Practice

Be prepared to discuss your strengths and weaknesses, obstacles and inspirations, current events and personal attributes. The following sample questions are meant to provide you with a better understanding of why the interviewer might be asking the questions that they do. By asking you certain questions, interviewers are attempting to gain a better understanding of your personality.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What kind of community/volunteer work have you done?
- What is the most rewarding experience of your life?
- Who is your favorite author?
- Have you worked while you have been in school?
- Have you had the opportunity to travel abroad?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- Tell me about the most difficult period of your life. How did you deal with this?
- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What is the most difficult decision that you’ve had to make?
- How do you plan to finance your education?
- How are you going to decide which Physician Assistant school to attend?
- How do you handle adversity?
- Why should we pick you instead of someone else?
- Why do you want to be a Physician Assistant?
- What will you do if you are not accepted to PA school?
- When did you first decide that you wanted to pursue a career as a Physician Assistant? Was there a specific cause for your decision? Has anything happened since that time to strengthen or weaken your decision?
- Can you see other careers in which you could achieve the same goals or meet the same needs?
- What steps have you taken to find out more about a career as a Physician Assistant?
- Where would you like to start practicing?
- How do you study? How do you manage your time?
- What courses do you find most enjoyable, most difficult? Why?
- Describe your hobbies and interests.
- Describe your best/least favorite course at UT and why it falls into that category.
- Why did you choose ____________ as your major?
- Are there any questions you would like to ask me?
- Describe a situation where you’ve worked with people from different backgrounds.
- What type of person do you enjoy being with? What type of person irritates you most and how have you dealt with these types of people?
- What about yourself would you most like the interviewer to know?
- Do you have any particular populations you would like to work with? Have you worked with this type of population in the past?
- How do you handle stress?
• How would you keep health care costs down?
• What is an HMO? / What do you know about managed care?
• What characteristics does a good PA possess?
• What current PA news/events have you heard about or been following?
• What are the advantages and limitations that you see going into a career as a PA? (Be specific)
• What problems do you predict Physician Assistants will face in the next decade?

Research Current Events

The Networker
The PAEA Networker newsletter is published in a blog format
http://paeaonline.org/welcome-to-the-new-paeaonline-org/

ADVOCACY
Learn about policy and legislation affecting Physician Assistants
https://www.aapa.org/advocacy-central/

JAAPA ONLINE
The Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants
http://journals.lww.com/jaapa/pages/default.aspx

The Texas Academy of Physician Assistants
http://www.tapa.org/

Keep Calm and Call the PA
Information about PA education and training, licensure, practice settings, and continuing education
http://www.pasconnect.org/become-a-pa/

NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO ARCHIVES
www.npr.org

Financing Your Physician Assistant Education

The cost of your PA education varies based on which PA program you choose to attend. You should start your financial aid research at the same time as you apply to a PA program. To evaluate the total cost of completing a program, you should request information on expenses from all schools you are thinking of attending, including tuition, books, supplies, travel and lodging for rotations, and exams. Once you have that information you will want to consider how you will afford your education. Read more at: http://www.mypatraining.com/category/getting-into-pa-school/paying-for-pa-school

Looking for more information?

Grants are similar to scholarships, and availability is based on resources and financial need. When you submit your FAFSA form, you will be considered for Pell grants. Also, check your place of employment, organizations and place of worship for any grants for which you may be eligible.
https://fafsa.ed.gov/
The American Legion publishes “Need a Lift?” which contains information on loans and scholarships. The section on financial assistance is especially comprehensive for veterans and their dependents. http://www.legion.org/

There are also several websites which provide information about financial aid, such as FinAid. Check with the U.S. Department of Education for information on financial aid. http://www2.ed.gov/finaid/landing.jhtml

SimpleTuition offers an online student loan comparison tool that allows students and their families to make informed borrowing decisions. In addition, SimpleTuition.com contains a large online resource center full of relevant articles and blogs dedicated to preparing, paying and saving for your education. http://www.simpletuition.com/

*links listed under “looking for more information” are sourced from “Other Resources” section of SAAAPA financial aid resources website.
*Once accepted, work with your PA school’s financial aid services.

### Add It Up! – Don’t forget to include all Living Costs – Cost of Attendance is often more than tuition alone!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tuition:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rent:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertainment:</td>
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<td>Health Insurance:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Car Insurance:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gas:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Travel:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Expenses:</td>
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### Pre-Health Professions Services

**Applying to Professional School? We are here to guide you!**

**See a HP Peer Coach if you have questions in one or more of the following topic areas:**

- Going over pre-requisites ("What do I have to take to get into X school?")
- Shadowing opportunities (“how to find, importance of, what is”)
- Leadership opportunities (“how to find, importance of, what are”)
- Patient care experience (“how to find, importance of, what is”)
- Clubs/organizations
- How to ask for letters of recommendation/evaluation
- Course load ("Is this reasonable to take in one semester?")
- Study habits/tutoring resources
- Test-taking strategies
- How to use HPO services
See a Health Professions Coach for any of the following:

Pre-Health Professions Coaching Appointments

Schedule a Pre-Health Professions Coaching session to meet with a Pre-Health Professions Coach. These appointments cover:

- Progress checks ("How am I doing?" “What else do I need to do?")
- Application Strategies/resources
- Choosing letter writers ("Who should I ask?")
- Academic turnaround ("I am worried about my GPA")
- Potential gap year planning/Post Bacc discussions
- Academic dishonesty/legal issues
- Reapplication strategies
- Study abroad timeline
- Alumni or Post-Bacc Student questions

To Q or Not to Q Discussions

Not sure what to do? Thinking of dropping a course? Then you can schedule an appointment with a Pre-Health Professions Coach about deciding on Q dropping or the pass/fail option. Check out our To Q or Not to Q guide in this guide before your appointment.

Personal Statement Brainstorming

Come speak to a Pre-Health Professions Coach to discuss your ideas before starting your personal statement. We will help you brainstorm ideas for the content of your essays. We have additional personal statement resources here.

We no longer review personal statements in the Health Professions Office. However, we have developed a partnership with the University Writing Center for personal statements. The University Writing Center is an excellent resource to utilize when writing application essays. Their trained Writing Consultants can help you at any stage of writing, from getting started to making recommendations for a polished finished product.

Interview Prep Appointments

Discuss interview strategies and practice a couple of interview questions with us! You will go over any questions you have and practice a couple questions of your choice with a Pre-Health Professions Coach in this 30-minute appointment. You will receive tips and feedback to help you in your professional school interview. Dressing up for your HP Interview Prep appointment is optional, if you would like feedback on your clothing choice and you want to test whether it will be comfortable, or they can just discuss appropriate attire with you.