Physician Assistants (PAs) practice medicine under the supervision of physicians and surgeons. Working as members of a healthcare team, they take medical histories, examine and treat patients, order and interpret laboratory tests and x-rays, and make diagnoses. They also treat injuries by suturing, splinting, and casting. PAs record progress notes, instruct and counsel patients, and order or carry out therapy. Physician Assistants also may prescribe certain medications. Many PAs work in primary care specialties, such as general internal medicine, pediatrics, and family medicine. Other specialty areas include general and thoracic surgery, emergency medicine, orthopedics, and geriatrics. (From the online Occupational Outlook Handbook)

A career as a Physician Assistant may appeal to some students because the educational training is shorter and does not include a residency requirement. PA Fellowships, usually 1 year in length, are becoming available but not required for graduation or certification. PAs typically have a more flexible schedule than physicians, work fewer hours per week, and can switch between specialty areas without returning to school for additional training.

The University of Iowa offers a Master of Physician Assistant Studies degree. The program starts in the fall semester and runs 28 months. Admitted students must hold a baccalaureate degree from a regionally-accredited U.S. institution and be able to meet the program’s admission and technical standards. Applications are accepted from U.S. citizens or permanent residents.

Sample Pre-Physician Assistant Four-Year Academic Plans

### Plan A: Starting with General Chemistry and Pre-Calculus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 1:</th>
<th>Year 2:</th>
<th>Year 3:</th>
<th>Year 4:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHEM:1070 General Chemistry I</td>
<td>CHEM:1120 Princ. of Chem. II</td>
<td>CHEM:1110 Principles of Chemistry I</td>
<td>Advanced biology course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATH: based on UI math placement</td>
<td>STAT:3510 Biostatistics**</td>
<td>BIOL:1412 Div. of Form and Function</td>
<td>Advanced biology course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATH: related to major*</td>
<td>Summer: CHEM:2220 Org. Chem. II</td>
<td>Summer: Apply to PA Programs</td>
<td>Take GRE or MCAT in spring or summer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Take GRE or MCAT in spring or summer
Plan B: Starting with Principles of Chemistry and Calculus

Year 1:
CHEM:1110 Princ. of Chemistry I    CHEM:1120 Princ. of Chemistry II
MATH: related to major*    BIOL:1411 Foundations of Biology

Year 2:
CHEM:2210 Org. Chemistry I    CHEM:2220 Organic Chemistry II (recommended course)
BIOL:1412 Div. of Form and Function    STAT:3510 Biostatistics**

Year 3:
Biochemistry course    Advanced biology    Summer: Apply to Advanced biology or physiology
Advanced biology or physiology Advanced biology course    Programs
Advanced biology course    Take GRE or MCAT in spring or summer

Year 4:
Advanced biology course    Advanced biology course

*Calculus is not required for the UI PA program, but is required for most science majors. The major will determine which math class is taken.

**The UI PA program prefers STAT:3510 Biostatistics, STAT:4143 Introduction to Statistical Methods or BIOS:4120 Introduction to Biostatistics, although any statistics course except STAT:1010 Statistics and Society is accepted.

UI PA Class of 2021-2023: 25 students admitted each year
- Mean cumulative GPA: 3.81 on 134 hours
- Mean science GPA: 3.77 on 78 hours
- Last 40 hours of Science GPA is 3.80 on 40 hours
- Mean GRE scores: Verbal (158), Quantitative (158), and Written (4.5)
- Mean MCAT (of those reporting) – 508 (New-3 students)
- Mean Health Contact Hours 2,975 hours
- Mean Research Hours 705 hours/ Mean Shadowing Hours 40

The Application Process
Students should begin researching schools early because programs have different admission requirements. Students may find the information contained in the Physician Assistant Programs Directory helpful. This online directory is free of charge; visit http://directory.paeaonline.org

Students can apply to over 226 PA programs, including the UI PA Program, by completing their initial application through the web-based Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA). Programs not requiring CASPA will accept applications directly to their schools. Schools using CASPA may or may not require a supplemental application. Check with each program. The UI program does not have a supplemental application.

UI applicants must have achieved a cumulative GPA of at least 3.00 on all course work completed at the college or university level. In addition, UI applicants must have achieved a cumulative science GPA of at least a 3.20 on a 4.00 scale OR at least a 3.20 on a 4.00 scale on the most recently completed 40 credit hours of science coursework. They must have a minimum of 1,000 hours of direct patient healthcare experience and have taken the GRE General Test or MCAT within the last 10 years. All applicants
taking the GRE must be at the 25th percentile or higher in the Verbal, Quantitative and Analytical sections. Students submitting the MCAT will be reviewed on an individual basis. All applicants must be able to meet the program’s technical standards.

PA applications are accepted beginning in May and early submission is recommended. Each applicant must complete the CASPA application which includes letters of recommendation, transcripts, and personal statement. GRE or MCAT scores should be sent directly to the schools. For the UI PA program, the application deadline is October 1. Most prerequisite courses should be completed by the time of application because the UI Admissions Committee gives special attention to an applicant’s performance in science courses. Students should consult the PA Program Directory, or individual school websites, for application deadlines and other school-specific application information.

**Early Admission**
UI does not offer an early admission program.

**Diversity in the Physician Assistant Profession**
Most physician assistant schools, including the UI PA Program, seek a diverse class of students. Programs recruit individuals of the highest possible quality from diverse ethnicities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and life experiences. Diverse PA programs provide students with the necessary clinical and professional knowledge, skills and abilities to provide high quality, compassionate medical care to diverse patient populations. Students may contact their Pre-PA advisors and individual PA schools for more information.

**Entrance Examination Requirement**
The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test or Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) is required for admission to the UI Program. Arrange to take the test early to ensure receipt of the scores prior to the November 1 application deadline. All applicants taking the GRE must be at the 25th percentile or higher in the Verbal, Quantitative and Analytical sections. Students submitting the MCAT will be reviewed in an individual basis. For more information about the test and to register, visit [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org) or [www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/)

**Letters of Evaluation/Recommendation**
Most physician assistant schools require two to three reference letters from faculty and supervisors of patient care experiences. Students should develop strong academic and work relationships early in their college careers and keep their references informed about their academic progress and work experiences. Letter writers submit their letters, whether paper or electronic, directly to CASPA. **The UI program requires three letters. One must be an academic reference and one must be from a healthcare supervisor. The third can be the student’s choice.**

**Interviews**
Interviews vary by school; students should check with the individual schools for their interview timelines. The UI Admissions Committee requires personal, on-campus interviews. Candidates selected will be contacted to arrange an interview. Interviews are scheduled from August through January. Practice interviews are available through the UI Career Center in C310 Pomerantz Center.

**Criminal Background Checks**
The CASPA application asks, “Have you been disciplined or placed on academic probation while attending an academic institution?” and “Have you ever been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor?”
Students answering “yes” will need to provide an explanation. When applicants are accepted into UI’s program, students agree to have a criminal background check completed.

**Citizenship/International Students**

Only citizens or permanent residents of the United States are eligible for admission to the University of Iowa Physician Assistant Program. A few PA programs admit non-citizens. Since the odds can be challenging, non-citizen students should thoroughly research and carefully consider such a decision and discuss it with their Pre-PA advisors early in their undergraduate years. For the UI Physician Assistant program, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is required of all applicants for whom English is not their first language. See your pre-PA advisor for more information.

**Pre-PA Club**

Students wanting to learn more about the profession should attend the UI meetings of the Pre-PA Club. The Club meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month in Sept, Oct, Nov, Jan, Feb, March and April. Meetings will highlight the UI PA program but will also help students learn about other programs across the country. In addition, the Pre-PA Club will provide academic and career resources to help students be successful with the progress of applying to PA programs. To learn more, contact Dr. Thomas M. O’Shea, PhD., Department Administrator at thomas-oshea@uiowa.edu.

**Websites**

American Academy of Physician Assistants: [www.aapa.org](http://www.aapa.org)

Physician Asst. Education Association: [www.paeaonline.org](http://www.paeaonline.org)

Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA): [www.caspaonline.org](http://www.caspaonline.org)

UI Physician Assistant Program: [http://www.medicine.uiowa.edu/pa/](http://www.medicine.uiowa.edu/pa/)

**Pre-Physician Assistant Coursework Checklist**

- **CHEM:1110** Principles of Chemistry I
- **CHEM:1120** Principles of Chemistry II
- **BIOC:3110** Biochemistry or **BIOC:3120** Biochemistry and Molecular Biology I (fall)
- **STAT:3510** Biostatistics, **STAT:4143** Intro to Statistical Methods, or **BIOS:4120** Intro. to Biostatistics

*Three advanced biology courses are required for admission to the UI PA program; however, accepted applicants average 6 to 12 courses. Highly recommended advanced biology courses include:

- **BIOL:2254** Endocrinology
- **BIOL:2723** Cell Biology
- **HHP:4220** Biomechanics
- **HHP:4450** Genetic Basis of Disease
- **HHP:4480** Human Pharmacology
- **MICR:2157** General Microbiology
- **HHP:1100** Human Anatomy, or **HHP:1150** Human Anatomy with lab, or **HHP:3115** Anatomy for Human Physiology with lab

**Note:** The above are prerequisites for the UI PA Program. Other PA Programs may have different requirements. Check the websites for individual schools or contact your pre-PA advisor for more information.