Pre-Physician Assistant Guide
2023-2024

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 Residencies, usually 12-18 months 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 requirements. 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

Year 1:
CHEM:1070 General Chemistry I CHEM:1110 Principles of Chemistry I
MATH: based on UI math placement MATH: related to major*

Year 2:
BIOL:1411 Foundations of Biology BIOL:1412 Div. of Form and Function
STAT:3510 Biostatistics** Summer:

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

Year 4:
Advanced biology course Advanced biology course
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 Programs
Advanced biology or physiology              Advanced biology course
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.

***The UI PA program doesn’t require GRE or MCAT any longer.

UI PA Class of 2023-2025: 25 students admitted each year
- Mean cumulative GPA: 3.87 on 128 hours
- Mean science GPA: 3.84 on 47 hours
- Last 40 hours of Science GPA is 3.83 on 40 hours
- Mean GRE scores: Verbal (157), Quantitative (157), and Written (4.5)
- Mean Health Contact Hours 2,508 hours
- Mean Research Hours 468 hours/ Mean Shadowing Hours 20

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 https://paeaonline.org/our-programs

Students can apply to over 254 ARC-PA accredited 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 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. The only course that must be completed at the time of application is Biochemistry. 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 **NOT** required for admission to the UI Program. However, other programs still require GRE. Arrange to take the test early to ensure receipt of the scores prior to the application deadlines. For more information about the test and to register, visit [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org).

**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 at the collegiate level 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 July 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, 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 process of applying to PA programs. To learn more, contact Dr. Thomas M. O’Shea, PhD., Director of Administrative & Student Services at thomas-oshea@uiowa.edu.

Websites
American Academy of Physician Assistants: www.aapa.org
Physician Asst. Education Association: www.paeaonline.org
Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA): www.caspaonline.org
UI Physician Assistant Program: http://www.medicine.uiowa.edu/pa/

Pre-Physician Assistant Coursework Checklist

- CHEM:1110 Principles of Chemistry I
- CHEM:1120 Principles of Chemistry II
- BIOL:1411 Foundations of Biology
- BIOL:1412 Div. of Form and Function
- BIOC:3110 Biochemistry or BIOC:3120 Biochemistry and Molecular Biology I (fall)
- BIOL:3343 Animal Physiology (spring), HHP:1300 Fundamentals of Human Physiology, or HHP:1350 Fundamentals of Human Physiology with lab, HHP:3500 Human Physiology, HHP:3550 Human Physiology with lab, HHP:4250 Human Pathophysiology, HHP:4410 Exercise Physiology (fall),
- STAT:3510 Biostatistics, STAT:4143 Intro to Statistical Methods, or BIOS:4120 Intro. to Biostatistics

(Courses listed are preferred although any statistics course, except STAT:1010 Statistics and Society, is accepted.)

*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 [MICR:3164 Microbiology and Human Health is accepted, but MICR:2157 is preferred.]
- 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.

This form is to be used as a planning tool. Your degree audit is the official record of degree requirements.

Academic Advising Center, 2023-2024