

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAM

Overview

Graduates of our Physician Assistant (PA) Program will be equipped with the academic, clinical, professional and cultural skills necessary to deliver effective health care services. They will develop critical thinking abilities and be prepared to offer compassionate, comprehensive care to improve the health of their patients and communities in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

Mission

The Penn State College of Medicine Physician Assistant Program's mission is to prepare graduates to be academically, clinically, professionally and culturally competent physician assistants who are devoted to serving patients in their communities through the application of clinical reasoning, critical thinking, and evidence-based practice to deliver compassionate and comprehensive care.

Goals of the PA Program

- Goal 1: To enroll an academically qualified, diverse in thought student body
- Goal 2: To promote the development of critical thinking skills
- Goal 3: To enable graduates to practice competent health care with an emphasis in primary care and/or work in federally designated underserved communities
- Goal 4: To foster the development of patient-centered professional clinicians working as part of an interprofessional team

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE GOALS OF THE PA PROGRAM AND HOW SUCCESS IS MEASURED (<https://med.psu.edu/education/degree-programs/pa-physician-assistant/mission-vision-goals/>)

Admissions

Penn State College of Medicine's Physician Assistant Program uses Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) (<https://caspa.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login>) and adheres to CASPA's Admissions Code of Conduct.

Before beginning your CASPA application, please review the program admissions requirements. All verified CASPA applicants will receive via email, and must submit, a Penn State Physician Assistant secondary application to receive full admissions consideration. There is no application fee to complete your Penn State PA secondary application.

The verified CASPA application deadline is Dec. 1.

The Penn State secondary application deadline is 11:59 p.m. (Eastern) Dec. 15.

Key Dates

- **Nov. 20:** Date by which you are strongly encouraged to complete your CASPA application, which allows sufficient time for CASPA processing.
- **Dec. 1:** Firm deadline by which your primary application must be CASPA-verified to be considered for a May start in the program.
- **Dec. 15:** Firm deadline by which your secondary application must be completed.

Admission Details

If you have questions, please contact us at 717-531-0003, ext. 285595, or PSUPAProgram@pennstatehealth.psu.edu.

COVID-19 Admissions Questions

The PA Program at Penn State College of Medicine has updated its admissions policies, understanding COVID-19 may have impacted your educational experience. At this time, we have updated our policies as follows:

- GREs continue to be an admissions requirement. This remains unchanged.
 - We have never had a minimum GRE requirement and the range of an acceptable score varies. This can be viewed on our class profiles page (<https://med.psu.edu/education/degree-programs/pa-physician-assistant/class-profiles/>).
- While our grading preference remains taking a letter grade for courses, the Penn State PA Admissions Committee revised its grading policy for courses taken in the Spring 2020 and Summer 2020 semesters to accept Satisfactory or Pass grades in lieu of letter grades for both pre-requisites and other courses. Again, our preference is that a candidate reports a letter grade, but if your school did not give you the option to take a letter grade, we will accept Satisfactory or Pass grades for all courses, including pre-requisites, during these two semesters.
- We do not have a minimum letter grade requirement for individual pre-requisite courses; this remains unchanged.
- We have always accepted online courses and labs, including sciences, from regionally accredited institutions; this remains unchanged.
- You will be given the option to detail any academic, professional, personal hardships faced because of COVID-19 by way of an Impact Essay within CASPA.
- Healthcare hours required to matriculate remains at a minimum of 500 hours; many virtual experiences are accepted towards the minimum requirement.

2025-2026 Interview Cycle

The 2025-2026 admissions interview cycle will be conducted virtually.

This decision was made foremost for the safety of all involved parties and in order to limit undue risk. We are confident that what has been developed for this year's interview experience will enable candidates to experience the Penn State PA Program virtually to the best extent possible while also providing candidates ample opportunity to share who they are.

Our admissions committee will learn a great deal before a request to interview is offered based on all aspects of the CASPA and secondary applications. Our committee takes great pride in reading and reviewing each candidate's file prior to interviewing.

It is the goal of the PA admissions committee to provide a seamless, safe and informative experience from the candidate's current location.

Interview sessions provide a personalized experience with the program and involve the following activities:

- Program director interview
- Faculty interviews; each candidate will meet individually with two faculty
- Group activity

- Program presentation
- Current student session

What are the Application Requirements

A number of prerequisites apply to students seeking to join the PA Program. Detailed Prerequisite information can be viewed on the Prerequisites tab (p. 2).

CASPA applications must include the following items to be eligible for consideration. Incomplete applications will not be considered.

- **Verified CASPA application**
- **Official transcripts** from all post-secondary institutions attended
- **GRE General Test scores:** GRE school code 0900 (see details below)
- **Personal/biographic information**
- **Academic history**
- **Three letters of recommendation:** At applicant's discretion to select those writing recommendations
- **Experiences** (see details on CASPA (https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_CASPA_Application/3_CASPA_Supporting_Information/2_Experiences/))
- **Achievements and certifications** (see details on CASPA (https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_CASPA_Application/3_CASPA_Supporting_Information/3_Achievements_and_Certifications/))
- **Essay** (see details on CASPA (https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_CASPA_Application/3_CASPA_Supporting_Information/4_Essay/))
- **Release statement** (see details on CASPA (https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Filling_Out_Your_CASPA_Application/3_CASPA_Supporting_Information/7_CASPA_Release_Statement/))

Applicants must also agree to abide by the CASPA Professional Code of Conduct (https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Starting_Your_CASPA_Application/Getting_Started_with_Your_CASPA_Application/4_CASPA_Professional_Code_of_Conduct/) and the CASPA Admissions Code of Cooperation (https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Starting_Your_CASPA_Application/Getting_Started_with_Your_CASPA_Application/5_CASPA_Admissions_Code_of_Cooperation/).

Early Assurance

The Penn State PA Program has early assurance programs with the following institutions:

- Franklin and Marshall College
- Hampton University
- Lebanon Valley College
- Lincoln University

Students at these institutions should speak directly with their pre-med pre-health adviser to discuss requirements and eligibility. The Early Assurance program allows students to apply to the PA Program during the junior year of undergraduate. Early Assurance applicants have the opportunity to be granted admission at the completion of the Early Assurance process, forgoing the entire CASPA application process as a senior. Information regarding this program is available on request. To view the number of students who enroll via Early Assurance in each class, please visit the program class profiles (<https://med.psu.edu/education/degree-programs/pa-physician-assistant/class-profiles/>).

Standardized Testing Requirements

We require completion of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test for admission to our PA Program.

Penn State's PA Program GRE Code is 0900. Official GRE scores are uploaded directly to CASPA.

Alternately, if you have previously tested on any exam listed, you may provide these scores in lieu of completing the GRE:

- MCAT total score of at least 29 or higher (old version) or 505 (new version)
- PCAT total score 75th percentile rank or higher
- DAT total score of 18 or higher

Penn State's Physician Assistant Program has not adopted the PA-CAT or CASPer as an admission requirement. All applicants are required to submit results of the GRE general exam.

If it has been more than five years since you took the GRE, and the Educational Testing Service no longer has record of your score, we will accept a student copy of your GRE results. You must upload this document with your secondary application via LionPATH. If you no longer have a student copy, you will need to retake the GRE.

Applicants from Penn State College of Medicine must be U.S. citizens, permanent residents or have official DACA status. International candidates are not eligible. All applicants must have a bachelor's degree with completion of all academic requirement from an accredited U.S. or Canadian college or university.

Preference Factors

In accordance with the PA Program's mission and goals, a cornerstone of the program is to enroll an academically qualified, diverse in thought student body, with special consideration for those from rural backgrounds with a passion for advancing rural healthcare, first-generation in college, veterans and active duty, Pennsylvania residents, Penn State graduates, Penn State Health employees, and those from federally designated underserved areas and educationally or economically disadvantaged regions.

Equal Opportunity, Non-Discrimination and Campus Safety

Penn State College of Medicine is an equal-opportunity employer and accepts all qualified applications regardless of their gender, ethnic origin or religious background.

The College of Medicine is also committed to fostering an environment free from discrimination and harassment.

The Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act and Pennsylvania Act of 1988 require that crime statistics for Pennsylvania colleges and universities be made available to applicants upon request.

Prerequisites

Applicants will need to complete an undergraduate bachelor's degree prior to matriculation into the PA Program.

Health Sciences major is preferred. For admissions consideration, an applicant must have:

- A CASPA-calculated overall cumulative GPA of at least 3.0
- A CASPA-calculated overall science GPA of at least 3.0

Detailed Prerequisites

We require several course prerequisites for admission consideration, although completion of this coursework is not required until the time of matriculation. Applicants can submit their CASPA and secondary applications with courses in progress or planned.

A minimum of one semester is required and science labs are strongly encouraged to supplement any science course lecture component. Prerequisite courses are:

- General biology
- Anatomy and physiology – two semesters (or one semester each)
- Microbiology
- General or principles of chemistry
- Biochemistry or organic chemistry
- General psychology
- Statistics or bio statistics
- Two semesters of English composition (or two courses listed as writing intensive courses)

We offer conditional admission in the event that a course(s) or hours are outstanding at the time a candidate interviews with the program.

AP and CLEP Credit

AP credit that was accepted by your undergraduate institution can satisfy a number of our prerequisites including general biology, general chemistry, psychology, statistics, and English composition courses. You can also use CLEP credit to satisfy course prerequisites.

Hours

Each prerequisite can be satisfied by one full semester, typically 3 to 4 semester-hours. For applicants on a trimester schedule, five-to-six quarter hours at minimum satisfy a prerequisite.

Keep in mind that requirements to graduate with a bachelor's degree versus requirements for admission to Penn State's PA program will undoubtedly vary. For instance, completion of General Chemistry I can satisfy our prerequisite but often General Chemistry I and II are required to enroll in Organic Chemistry I at most institutions.

Online Courses

We accept online courses from regionally accredited institutions.

Currency and Exceptions

Three prerequisites have a five-year currency. They are:

- Anatomy (or A&P I)
- Physiology (or A&P II)
- Microbiology

This currency requirement will be waived for any applicant who has been working full time and continuously in the healthcare field since completing the coursework.

English Composition Courses

Any course that the institution deems as having satisfied a "writing intensive" will suffice. The course can be in any major and does not need to be an English-major based course. Additionally, if completion of a

bachelor's degree incorporates writing across the curriculum, please share this information with the admissions committee.

Healthcare Experience

For admission consideration, a candidate should have 500 hours of health care experience (paid or volunteer). These hours can be in progress or planned during the application cycle, and you can update the program directly to add hours accrued after initial submission of the CASPA and secondary application. Hours must be completed by the time a candidate would matriculate into the program.

While our program is flexible in accepting a wide variety of hours to help satisfy the 500-hour requirement, hours as a personal trainer or lifeguard are unacceptable.

Curriculum

Graduation Requirements

Graduation requirements for PA students include:

- Enrollment in the program for the time period specified by the program and approved by accrediting body for completion
- Satisfactory completion of all curricular requirements in good academic standing
 - Cumulative GPA of 3.00 or higher
 - No course or rotation grades below a "C" or "Low Pass"
 - Repeat and receive a "C" or higher in any course or rotation in the program for which a grade of "F" was earned.
- Attainment of good professional standing
- Successful completion of all components in the summative experience
- Meet or exceed the minimum requirements for clinical experiences and competencies.
- Recommendation for graduation by program faculty
- Satisfactory fulfillment of all financial obligations to the Penn State College of Medicine and Penn State University

The PA Program requires 101 credits for successful program completion. The program curriculum contains a senior summative, one-credit course that also must be successfully completed in order to meet the program requirements for graduation eligibility.

All courses offered in the curriculum are required, and all of these courses must be successfully completed (as detailed above) to meet this eligibility for graduation.

Advanced Placement Policy

The Penn State College of Medicine PA Program is a full-time academic program administered in a sequential fashion that builds on courses completed in the prior term. The program **does not** award credit for experiential learning or advanced placement, nor does the program accept transfer credits.

Student Roles and Policy on Employment During Program Enrollment

Students are strongly discouraged from working while enrolled in the PA program. It is expected that the PA Program is the student's primary responsibility. Concessions for missed classes, late assignments, scheduled assessments, and clinical rotation obligations due to work outside of the program will **not** be made.

Students are not permitted to work for the PA Program in any capacity while enrolled as a student at the Penn State College of Medicine.

Students may not substitute for, or function as, instructional faculty, clinical staff, or administrative staff while enrolled as a student at the Penn State College of Medicine.

Course Timeline

You'll need 101 credits total to complete our program: 55 credits in the pre-clinical year and 46 credits in the clinical year, as described below.

All courses in the curriculum are graded on a letter grade basis with the exception of the Evidence-Based Medicine Course in the didactic year and the Summative Experience in the clinical year. These are both Pass/Fail courses. Course descriptions can be found in the Penn State Graduate Bulletin (<https://bulletins.psu.edu/university-course-descriptions/medicine/pas/>).

Didactic Year: Summer

Code	Title	Credits
PAS 701	Applied Human Structure and Function I	3
PAS 700	PA Professional Practice I	1
PAS 783	Inclusive Healthcare Practices	1
PAS 736	Introductory Concepts in Medicine	2
PAS 763	Principles of Immunology, Hematology and Oncology	3
PAS 784	Principles of Dermatology	2
PAS 785	Principles of Infectious Disease	3
PAS 786	Principles of Ophthalmology and Otolaryngology	2
Total Credits		17

Didactic Year: Fall

Code	Title	Credits
PAS 702	Applied Human Structure and Function II	3
PAS 721	PA Professional Practice II	2
PAS 787	Principles of Endocrinology	2
PAS 789	Principles of Pulmonology	3
PAS 788	Principles of Nephrology/Urology	2
PAS 790	Principles of Cardiology	4
PAS 791	Principles of Gastroenterology	3
Total Credits		19

Didactic Year: Spring

Code	Title	Credits
PAS 719	Evidence-Based Medicine	1
PAS 725	PA Professional Practice III	1
PAS 723	Principles of Behavioral Medicine	2
PAS 792	Principles of Neurology	3
PAS 793	Principles of Rheumatology and Orthopaedics	4
PAS 722	Principles of Human Sexuality and Reproductive Health	3
PAS 729	Principles of Emergency Medicine	3
PAS 794	Principles of Surgery	2
Total Credits		19

Clinical Year

During the clinical year, students will complete three mandatory primary-care rotations. Each rotation is 5 weeks.

Mandatory Clinical Year Courses (1 credit)

Code	Title	Credits
PAS 756	Summative Experience	1

Mandatory Clinical Rotations (40 Credits)

Code	Title	Credits
PAS 741	Behavioral Health Rotation I	5
PAS 732	Emergency Medicine Rotation I	5
PAS 734	Family Medicine Rotation I	5
PAS 739	Inpatient Internal Medicine Rotation I	5
PAS 735	Ambulatory Care Selective	5
PAS 737	General Surgery Rotation I	5
PAS 743	Pediatrics I	5
PAS 745	Reproductive Health I	5

Elective Clinical Rotations (select 1 for 5 credits)

Code	Title	Credits
PAS 776	Medicine Specialty Rotation	5
PAS 777	Surgical Specialty Rotation	5

Students enrolled in the PA program will have the opportunity to complete an elective rotation in either a medical or surgical specialty.

Students in good academic standing may select from a variety of specialties; including but not limited to additional time in a mandatory rotation listed above or experience another specialty such as burn, cardiology, critical care, dermatology, endocrinology, ENT, gastroenterology, hematology/oncology, infectious disease, interventional radiology, nephrology, neurology, ophthalmology, orthopedics, palliative care, prison medicine, radiation oncology, trauma, cardiothoracic surgery, neurosurgery, plastic & reconstructive surgery, physical medicine & rehabilitation, or vascular surgery.

Students with identified deficiencies during clinical year may have their elective rotation assigned to them by the clinical year team to ensure minimum program requirements for graduation have been met.

Summative Experience

Upon completion of the clinical training, students will participate in a one-credit Summative Experience. In addition to taking the PACKRAT examination (which does not impact student placement in the PA Program), students will be evaluated on their professionalism and participate in assessments for knowledge, technical skills, interpretation, and performance of diagnostic evaluations. The Summative Experience must be successfully completed as one of the final requirements for program completion.

Total credits: 46

Accreditation

The Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) (<http://www.arc-pa.org/>) has granted Accreditation - Continued status to the Penn State College of Medicine Physician Assistant Program sponsored by The Pennsylvania State University.

Accreditation-Continued is an accreditation status granted when a currently accredited program is in compliance with the ARC-PA Standards.

Accreditation remains in effect until the program closes or withdraws from the accreditation process or until accreditation is withdrawn for failure to comply with the Standards. The approximate date for the next validation review of the program by ARC-PA will be October 2027. The review date is contingent upon continued compliance with the Accreditation Standards and ARC-PA policy.

Professional Licensure/Certification

Many U.S. states and territories require professional licensure/certification to be employed. If you plan to pursue employment in a licensed profession after completing this program, please visit the Professional Licensure/Certification Disclosures by State (<https://opair.psu.edu/plc/dashboard/>) interactive map.

Contact

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