

Becoming a Competitive Applicant to PA Programs

Applicants to PA programs must complete a Bachelor's degree along with the pre-physician assistant course prerequisites. Competitive applicants for admission to PA programs have a solid academic record, a well-rounded profile of co-curricular experiences, solid experience working directly with patients, supportive letters of recommendation, and can clearly articulate their reasons for choosing the PA profession.

SELECTING A MAJOR

Applicants with a well-rounded education, a variety of interests and personal experiences are ideal candidates. Students are encouraged to choose a major where they can demonstrate strong overall academic performance while also focusing on developing a solid foundation in the sciences. PA Programs look for students who demonstrate the academic ability to handle a rigorous course load.

GPA

GPA's calculated on PA school applications normally include coursework done at all colleges attended. If a course is repeated, both grades will be included in the GPA's calculated by the PA schools. Aim for **GPA's of 3.5 or higher**.

GRADES

C is an honorable grade, though most, if not all, grades should be higher! Multiple grades below B, especially within the two academic years leading up to PA school application, could interfere with competitive admission to PA schools. Faced with a likely grade below C, some students should withdraw (W) and later try for a higher grade; consult with your advisors as you decide. More than two W's, however, could indicate a lack of judgment or an inability to handle challenges later in PA school.



PRE-HEALTH GUIDANCE AND RESOURCES

EDGE PRE-HEALTH ADVISING:

Pre-Health Advisors in the EDGE are available to meet with students one-on-one about their pre-health goals and path.

EDGE PRE-HEALTH SEMINARS:

The EDGE seminars assist students in exploring the medical profession, gaining experience in healthcare, and preparing for the application process. Students should participate in PHLC 200 in their sophomore year, and then PPA 300 in either the junior or senior year (depending upon the student's application timeline).

PRE-HEALTH LISTSERV: Subscribe at: <http://lists.creighton.edu/mail-man/listinfo>

PRE-PA CLUB: All pre-PA students should participate in the Pre-PA Club. This student-run organization provides leadership opportunities to further explore and gain experience in the PA profession - <https://creighton.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/pre-pa>

CU Master's of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS): Make an appointment with the admissions office personnel in the spring of the year applying to personalize the application process

HELPFUL LINKS:

creighton.edu/edge - Creighton EDGE

Creighton School of Medicine (MPAS): <https://medschool.creighton.edu/program/physician-assistant-mpas>
Physician Assistant Education Association: www.paeonline.org

PRE-REQUISITE AND RECOMMENDED COURSES

There is some variability among pre-requisite courses required by PA schools; students are strongly encouraged to research potential schools carefully to be aware of all pre-requisite course and other admissions policies. Pre-PA students who complete the following courses should be well-prepared to apply to a large percentage of PA programs. Some Pre-PA students will plan on completing academic pre-requisites as well as adding healthcare experience in the Senior year, and applying after graduation. Students should consult with advisors for timeline planning.

PRE-REQUISITES MOST OFTEN REQUIRED BY PA PROGRAMS:

- Two semesters of General Biology with lab – BIO 201/205; BIO 202/206
- Two semesters General Chemistry with lab – CHM 203/204; CHM 205/206; CHM 285/286 also meets this requirement
- Two semesters Organic Chemistry with lab – CHM 321/322; CHM 323/324
- One semester of Biochemistry – completion of Organic Chemistry I & II required at Creighton
- One semester of Microbiology
- One semester of Human Anatomy with lab
- One semester of Human Physiology with lab
(A two-semester combined Human Anatomy and Physiology course with labs is acceptable)
- Two semesters of Psychology (specific courses vary; often General Psychology, Abnormal or Lifespan Psychology)
- Two semesters of English, including composition
- One semester of Statistics
- One semester of Medical Terminology

Some PA programs additionally recommend (or might require) any or all of the following: College Math, Genetics, Immunology, Social Sciences, Languages, or Public Speaking.

While many PA programs may accept AP/CLEP/IB, dual-credit college courses, or community college courses to meet pre-requisites, applicants should research individual schools to be certain of their admissions policies.

Course Scheduling Considerations: Freshmen and sophomores usually take only two natural science or math subjects each semester.

Chemistry: General Chemistry I (CHM 203/204) and General Chemistry II (CHM 205/206) are typical choices for freshman fall and spring. Students must have a sufficient chemistry background (completion of high school chemistry) and sufficient math background (an ACT math score of at least 24 or an SAT math score of at least 560) to be eligible take General Chemistry in the freshman year. Students may instead take additional math and/or CHM 105 Introductory Chemistry in freshman year to be better prepared for General Chemistry in the sophomore year.

Biology: General Biology I (BIO 201/205) and General Biology II (BIO 202/206) are typical choices for freshman fall and spring, respectively. Some students taking General Chemistry in Sophomore year might take General Biology II in Sophomore year also.

Math: Pre-PA students will take a Mathematical Reasoning course for the Magis Core. Which math they choose will depend on their preparation and major choice.



Many PA programs have requirements for direct patient care experience that ranges from 100-4000 hours. Even programs who do not state a number of required hours of healthcare experience state that this experience is needed to be a competitive applicant. Students can gain some of this experience through volunteer service in healthcare settings. However, hands-on patient care experience is typically best gained through employment. Students are encouraged to seek both paid and volunteer patient care experience early in their undergraduate degrees.

PA SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

NATIONAL ADMISSION TESTS: Many PA programs require the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) in order to apply. Students typically take the GRE approximately 12-15 months before starting a PA program, if accepted. There are no specific course requirements needed for the exam, but students are encouraged to spend time preparing for the exam in order to meet minimum admissions requirements for a GRE score.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION: Students must submit at least three and up to five letters of recommendation with their application. PA programs have different requirements for letters. It is recommended to obtain at least one letter from a professor who taught the student in a science course. In some cases, a letter from a PA might be required or recommended.

INTERVIEWS: Many PA programs will interview promising applicants. Creighton undergraduate applicants to Creighton's MPAS are not guaranteed an interview, but all applicants benefit from the holistic review done by Admissions. The EDGE Career Center offers interview preparation assistance, including mock interviews.

Summer: Science courses may be taken in the summer by pre-PA students, but only when there are good reasons for doing so (not just a vague desire to "catch up") and, in many cases, not at community colleges. Speak with a pre-health advisor before taking summer science courses.

Sample First Semester Schedule: Course sequencing may vary depending upon a student's readiness.

- General Biology I with lab (4 sem. hours)
- General Chemistry I with lab (4 sem. hours)
- Magis Core Class (3 or 4 sem. hours) – ENG or Critical Issues + COM
- Magis Core Class (3 sem. hours) – PHL or THL
- Maybe another Magis Core Class (3 sem. hours) – PSY or SOC, foreign language
- RSP Class (.5 semester hours each freshman semester)

CO-CURRICULAR EXPECTATIONS

Strong academics alone are not enough to be competitive for a PA program. It is also important that you are a well-rounded applicant who participates in meaningful activities on your college campus and your community. PA Programs value community service, leadership, research and other co-curricular involvement.

VOLUNTEER AND SERVICE

Students should seek out service experiences in both healthcare and non-healthcare settings, and it is beneficial to show sustained commitment over time. Check out the Schelgel Center for Service and Justice for opportunities - <http://blogs.creighton.edu/ccsj/>

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Physician Assistants are called on to connect with and help people different from themselves, and make their patients feel comfortable during treatment. Seek out experiences that help you build communication skills through interactions with people from many walks of life.

HEALTHCARE EXPERIENCE

Students should seek opportunities for hands-on, direct patient care experience, whether volunteer, paid, or both. Some specific ways students gain this employment is through becoming a Certified Nurse Aide (CNA), an EMT with Basic certification, a phlebotomist, an eeg/ekg tech, patient care tech, PT/OT tech or aide, home health aide, or medication aide, among others.

SHADOWING

Students must gain knowledge of the profession by shadowing current professionals in their field. It is highly recommended that students shadow both primary care PAs and PAs in specialty areas, if possible.

LEADERSHIP

Leadership comes in many forms. Creighton has a number of resources to help you gain leadership experience through various organizations and student programming. Showing some leadership skills now demonstrates you can be a leader in your community later.

RESEARCH

Research experience is not a requirement for admission to PA programs, but may add an extra layer to your application if you are particularly interested in research. See the Center for Undergraduate Research and Scholarship for opportunities at <http://www.creighton.edu/curas/>.