

PRE-PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT: ACADEMIC AND CAREER INFORMATION



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NATURE OF THE WORK, EARNINGS AND OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK

Physician assistants (PAs) provide a wide range of health care services under the supervision of physicians. They should not be confused with medical assistants, who perform routine clinical and clerical tasks. Many PAs work in primary care areas such as general internal medicine, pediatrics, and family medicine. Others work in specialty areas, such as general and thoracic surgery, emergency medicine, orthopedics, and geriatrics. Physician assistants take medical histories, perform physical exams, order and interpret laboratory tests, diagnose and treat illnesses, counsel patients, assist in surgery, and set fractures. The responsibilities of a physician assistant depend on the practice setting, education, and experience of the PA, and on the state laws and regulations. Physician assistants are required to have leadership skills, self-confidence, and emotional stability. They must be willing to continue studying throughout their career to keep up with medical advances.

According to the American Academy of Physician Assistants, there were about 74,800 individual eligible to practice as PAs in 2008. State laws regulating physician assistants have expanded access to physician services provided by PAs, including the authority to prescribe medications in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, and Guam. The development of HMOs and other prepaid plans and the growing acceptance of PAs by other health care professionals have combined to strengthen the job market for PAs. Employment of PA's is expected to grow much faster than average for all occupations through 2016 (Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2010-2011). According to the American Academy of Physician Assistants 2008 Census Survey, the median income for physician assistants was \$85,710, ranging from a low of less than \$51,360 to as high as \$110,240. The income varies by specialty, practice setting, geographical location, and years of experience.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION

There are many entry pathways into the physician assistant profession. **Options include certificate of completion, as well as associate, baccalaureate, and master's degree.** There are 142 accredited physician assistant programs in the United States, and they are located at medical schools, medical centers, hospitals, two- and four-year colleges and universities, and in the uniformed forces (Association of Physician Assistant Programs). More than 90 PA programs offered the Master's degree option and most applicants to PA programs already possess a bachelor's degree at the time of entry.

Physician assistants are educated as generalists in medicine; all programs emphasize primary care. PA programs require students to complete 9 to 12 months of classroom studies and then 9 to 15 months of supervised clinical rotations (Association of Physician Assistant Programs). PA education includes classroom instruction in biochemistry, nutrition, human anatomy, physiology, microbiology, clinical pharmacology, clinical medicine, geriatric and home health care, disease prevention, and medical ethics. Students obtain supervised clinical training in several areas, including primary care medicine, inpatient medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, geriatrics, emergency medicine, psychiatry, and pediatrics.

PRE-PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PREPARATION

Prerequisite admission requirements vary from school to school. Selection criteria may also vary according to the individual institution's philosophy, thus refer to the individual program website for detailed information. For a list of programs accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) visit the **Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA)** website www.paeaonline.org, and click on the Member Programs tab.

MAJOR:

Any major is appropriate for PA preparation. Students are advised to select a major they find interesting and to work at developing a broad-based, interdisciplinary foundation of knowledge and skills from which they can build upon. Most PA programs require that applicants have a minimum of two years of college credits and some health care experience prior to admission. Analysis of student enrollment data shows that more than half of those who apply to physician assistant programs already have a college degree (PAEA).

COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR CALIFORNIA PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAMS:

Below is a list of requirements for the 9 PA schools in California. Students maintain responsibility for verifying course selection with individual PA programs.

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for the [Keck School of Medicine - University of Southern California](#):

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One year of General Chemistry with lab	Chemistry 111A & 111B
One year of General Biology with lab	Biology 211 & 212 (Biology 111 w/ 111L & 212 w/ 212L taken prior to catalog year 2010-11)
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L OR 345 w/ 345L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One course in Statistics	Biology 260 OR Statistics 108 OR Psychology 210
One course of Psychology	Psychology 100
One year of Beginning Spanish Language	Spanish 101B & 201A
One year of English	English 100 & 1 Additional

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for [Loma Linda University](#):

Note: Documented hands-on patient care experience, 2000 hours.

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One year of General Chemistry with lab	Chemistry 111A & 111B
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One course of Psychology	Psychology 100
Once course of Sociology or Cultural Anthropology	Sociology 100 OR Anthropology 120
One year of English	English 100 & 1 Additional
One course in College-level Algebra	Math 113
One course in Statistics (Recommended)	Biology 260 OR Statistics 108 OR Psychology 210
One course in Medical Terminology (Recommended)	Health Science 150

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for [Samuel Merritt](#):

Note: Most competitive applicants will have a minimum of 1000 hours of related direct patient contact.

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One year of General Chemistry with lab	Chemistry 111A & 111B
One course of Organic Chemistry with lab	Chemistry 322A w/ 323A OR 320A & 320B
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One additional Biology course	Any course offered by the biological sciences department
One course in Statistics	Biology 260 OR Statistics 108 OR Psychology 210

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for [Touro University](#):

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One year of General Chemistry with Lab	Chemistry 111A & 111B
One year of General Biology with lab	Biology 211 & 212 (Biology 111 w/ 111L & 212 w/ 212L taken prior to catalog year 2010-11)
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One Behavioral Science course	Psychology 100 OR Sociology 100 OR Anthropology 120
One course in Statistics	Biology 260 OR Statistics 108 OR Psychology 210

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for [Western University of Health Sciences](#):

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One year of General Chemistry with lab	Chemistry 111A & 111B
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One course in Genetics	Biology 370
One course in Statistics	Biology 260 OR Statistics 108 OR Psychology 210
One course in College Algebra	Math 113
One course of Psychology	Psychology 100
One course of Sociology	Sociology 100
One year of English	English 100 & 1 additional course
Three courses of the Humanities	e.g. Art, Music, Ethics, Philosophy, etc.

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for [University of California, Davis School of Medicine](#):

Note: A minimum of two years direct (hands-on) patient care experience is highly recommended.

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One year of General Chemistry with Lab	Chemistry 111A & 111B
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One course of English Composition	English 100
One course of Psychology	Psychology 100

One course in College Algebra, Statistics or Calculus	Math 113, Math 108 or Math 119A or Math 122
Once course of Sociology or Cultural Anthropology	Sociology 100 OR Anthropology 120

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for [Riverside City College](#):

Note: Priority is given to Riverside Community College students – Read Board Policy 5055. A minimum of 2,000 hours of paid “hands-on” patient care experience in the disciplines of medicine, nursing or allied health is required. Volunteer experience will not fulfill the patient care experience requirement.

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One course of General Chemistry	Chemistry 111A
One course of General Physics with Lab	Physics 100A OR 151
One course of College Algebra or Higher	Math 109 OR higher
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One course of Sociology, Psychology & Anthropology	Sociology 100, Psychology 100 & Anthropology 120
One course of English Composition	English 100
One course in Medical Terminology (Recommended)	Health Science 150

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for [San Joaquin Valley College](#):

Note: 2,000 hours of direct patient care experience are required. Both paid and volunteer hours are acceptable.

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One year of General Chemistry	Chemistry 111A
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One course of College Algebra or Higher	Math 109 OR higher
One course of Psychology	Psychology 100
One course of Sociology or Anthropology	Sociology 100 OR Anthropology 120
One course of Public Speaking	Communications 130
One course of English Composition	English 100

CSULB Courses that fulfill admission requirements for [Stanford University](#):

Note: A minimum of 3,000 hours of direct patient care experience must be completed by the application deadline.

Pre-physician assistant Coursework	CSULB Courses
One course of General Chemistry	Chemistry 111A
One course of Human Anatomy with lab	Biology 208
One course of Physiology with lab	Biology 207 OR 342 w/ 342L
One course of Microbiology with lab	Microbiology 200 OR 211
One course of College Algebra or Higher	Math 109 OR higher
One course of English Composition	English 100
One course of Psychology	Psychology 100
One course of Sociology or Anthropology	Sociology 100 OR Anthropology 120

APPLICATION

In 2007-2008 a total of 10,550 applicants applied PA programs via the Central Application for Physician Assistants (CASPA) and 3,835 applicants were offered admissions. The mean age was 26.7 with a mean GPA: **Science GPA: 3.34, Cumulative GPA: 3.43**. CASPA is a centralized Web-based application service provided by the Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA). CASPA allows you to apply to any number of participating schools by completing a single application. CA schools not participating in CASPA include San Joaquin Valley College, Stanford University, and Riverside City College. For more information regarding CASPA refer to their website: <http://www.caspaonline.org> or contact CASPA by phone at (240) 497-1895.

For more information about Physician Assistant Programs, visit www.paeaonline.org and see your HPAO advisor for further information on the application process, application assistance, and a list of upcoming workshops and events.

PA Program	Website	Length of Program	Degree Offered	Class Size	Minimum GPA	Direct Patient Care Experience (DPCE)	Selection factors	Letters of Recommendation
Keck School of Medicine - USC	www.keck.usc.edu	33 Months	Masters	40	2.75 science, 3.0 cum.	DPCE preferred. Community service required.	GRE or MCAT scores	3 required
Loma Linda University	www.llu.edu	24 Months	Masters	26	3.0 science, 3.0 cum.	2000 hrs. of documented experience	SDA, LLU grads, under-represented populations,	3 required- 1 practicing PA or Physician
Samuel Merritt College	www.samuelmerritt.edu	28 Months	Masters	36	3.0 science, 3.0 cum.	1000 hours is competitive and recommended		3 required- 1 health professional recommended.
Touro University CA Program	www.tu.edu	32 Months	Joint MPA/ MPH	40	2.9 science, 2.9 cum.	Shadowing recommended	Underserved populations	3 required- strongly encourage 1 from a clinician
Western University	www.westernu.edu	24 Months	Masters	98	2.7 science, pre-requisite, cum.	DPCE preferred; Community service recommended		Consult Admissions Office

PA Program	Website	Length of Program	Degree Offered	Class Size	Minimum GPA	Direct Patient Care Experience (DPCE)	Selection factors	Letters of Recommendation
UC Davis	www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/fnppa	24 Months	Masters and Certificate	60	No minimum.	2 years DPCE highly recommended.	Underserved Populations	Consult Admissions Office
Riverside Community College	www.rcc.edu	24 Months	Certificate	32	2.7 science, 2.5 overall	2000 hours documented experience	Residents of RCCD – Read Board Policy 5055.	Consult Admissions Office
San Joaquin Valley College	www.sjvc.edu	24 Months	Certificate	20	2.5 minimum	2000 hours required (paid or volunteer)	Underserved Populations	2 required
Stanford University	http://pcap.stanford.edu	16 Months	Certificate	50	C or better in pre-requisites.	3,000 DPCE required by application deadline	Medically Underserved	Consult Admissions Office