

## THE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROFESSION

A physician assistant (PA) is a licensed health care professional who practices medicine under a physician's supervision. A PA provides a broad range of health care services and often spends time counseling patients on ways to stay healthy. PAs perform physical exams, diagnose illnesses, develop and carry out treatment plans, order and interpret diagnostic tests, suture wounds, assist in surgery, provide preventative health counseling, and write prescriptions. Physician assistants can provide primary care and specialize in any medical specialty. Examples of medical specialties include emergency medicine, internal medicine, surgery, dermatology, cardiology, oncology, pediatrics, administration, and many more. PA is a flexible career that allows practitioners to practice in a wide range of medical settings and specialties.

## UNDERGRADUATE PREPARATION

The majority of physician assistant programs require the completion of a bachelor's degree prior to admission to their program. Typically, any major is acceptable. The most common undergraduate majors among pre-PA students include biology, chemistry, and psychology. In selecting a college major, consider how you will satisfactorily complete the pre-requisite courses for your desired Physician Assistant program, as well as Nebraska Wesleyan University's graduation requirements. Additionally, know when choosing a major that GPA is important in PA program admission processes, so choose something that will continue to hold your interest and dedication.

## REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED COURSES

Although there is no required undergraduate major to become a Physician Assistant, each institution will have a required list of pre-requisite coursework that must be completed. Some programs accept AP/CLEP/other transfer credits, while other programs do not. To the right is a list of required pre-requisite coursework for the PA program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC). Students should contact their desired graduate school directly for specific pre-requisite requirements, transfer equivalencies, or other questions.

| Courses             | Credits |
|---------------------|---------|
| Biological sciences | 16      |
| Chemistry           | 16      |
| Biochemistry        | 4       |
| Statistics          | 3       |
| Psychology          | 9       |
| English & Writing   | 6       |
| Medical Terminology | 1       |

## BEYOND ACADEMICS

Pre-Physician Assistant students are encouraged to participate in experiences, such as leadership activities, volunteer opportunities, research, and shadowing of professionals, which will help prepare them for their physician assistant program and the PA profession. Activities beyond the classroom play a significant role in a student's application to a professional school program. Such experiences demonstrate a commitment to and knowledge of the profession. In particular, shadowing physician assistants will help students learn more about the daily activities of the PA profession.

At Nebraska Wesleyan University, student organizations that may be interesting or useful to students interested in the PA profession include the Athletic Training Students Association, Tri-Beta (Biology Honorary), Biology Club, Health and Human Performance Club, Phi Epsilon Kappa (Health and Human Performance Honorary), Pre-Health Club, and Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

Some physician assistant programs require a minimum amount of work experience for admission. For example, students who intend to enroll in Union Adventist University's PA program are required to complete a minimum of 480 hours of direct patient healthcare experience by the time they enter the program (240 of which must be completed and reported when the application is submitted).

## PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION

There are over 200 accredited Physician Assistant programs in the United States. Schools in Nebraska offering such programs include UNMC, Creighton University, Union Adventist University, and College of Saint Mary. The total number of credit hours required for degree completion varies by school. Some institutions offer joint degrees, post-graduate residencies, and fellowships. Practical experience is important, so many PA programs have dedicated time spent on clinical education and other training opportunities, rather than focusing solely on classroom and lab study.

## APPLICATION & ADMISSION

1. Many physician assistant programs accept applications through a centralized application called the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA). Through CASPA, you can select the specific schools you would like to apply to and send your applications directly through the site. Applications and recommendation forms may be obtained from [portal.caspaonline.org](http://portal.caspaonline.org).
2. Some PA programs require applicants to take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Consider taking the GRE 12-16 months before you intend to start PA school. More information can be found at [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org).
3. Note that many schools require documented work experience, letters of recommendation, a personal statement, and interviews for admission.

| Regional Schools           | Credit Requirement | Entrance Exam Requirement | Average GPA | Length of Program | Degree Offered |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------|-------------------|----------------|
| UNMC                       | Bachelor's Degree  | Not required              | 3.68        | 28 months         | MPAS           |
| Union Adventist University | Bachelor's Degree  | Not required              | 3.64        | 33 months         | MPAS           |
| College of Saint Mary      | Bachelor's Degree  | Not required              | 3.0 minimum | 24 months         | MPAS           |
| Creighton University       | Bachelor's Degree  | Not required              | 3.81        | 28 months         | MPAS           |

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

<http://explorehealthcareers.org> (Explore Health Careers)

<http://www.aapa.org>

(American Academy of Physician Assistants)

<http://paeonline.org>

(Physician Assistant Education Association)

<http://portal.caspaonline.org>

(Central Application Service for Physician Assistants- CASPA)

### How do I connect with NWU alumni in the PA profession?

Visit [career.nebrwesleyan.edu](http://career.nebrwesleyan.edu) and scroll down to "Career Assistance Network". Use this database to find alumni in this profession and see their current position titles and employers.

Feel free to reach out!