

# PRE-PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

*JMU Pre-professional Health Programs*



## GENERAL INFORMATION

Working with supervising physicians, physician assistants (PAs) provide medical services traditionally performed by physicians. These services include taking medical histories, performing physical examinations, ordering and interpreting tests, diagnosing and treating medical conditions, educating and counseling patients, performing minor medical/surgical procedures, and, in most states prescribing medications. PAs practice in the same settings as physicians, i.e., outpatient facilities, private and public clinics, managed care and other systems in rural and urban areas.

PAs are needed from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds to serve a widely diverse population. The employment outlook for PAs is projected to remain very strong. The Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics places physician assistant in its highest growth category. It projects the need for an increase of 27% percent in PA positions during the 2006 – 2016 time frame.

There are 157 accredited physician assistant (PA) programs nationwide. The average PA program curriculum is 26 months in length. The vast majority (127 of 157) of programs are master's level programs; others are quickly transitioning to the master's level. The focus of PA education is primary care medicine. This broad education provides a base from which graduates practice in primary care and other medical specialties. An *Online PA Programs Directory* is available at [www.paeaonline.org](http://www.paeaonline.org).

## CHOOSING A MAJOR

**Programs do not generally require a specific major.** They all require prerequisite courses, but these are not uniform among programs. Some majors may include prerequisites and thus reduce the total number of courses a student is required to take in order to meet both the requirements of a major and the prerequisites of specific PA programs.

## EARLY PLANNING IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS

Students planning professional health careers should discuss these goals with their pre-professional health and undergraduate major advisers. It is important to begin this planning process when you begin your studies for several reasons:

- You may be able to select courses that will meet requirements of your major and of specific PA programs to which you want to apply.
- You will need time to meet all the requirements including health care experience.
- Admission to PA programs is competitive. You should allow time to explore and plan for several career options.
- Each PA program specifies its own requirements and procedures.

The admissions requirement information presented here should be used only as a guide when planning your pre-health curriculum. It is important that you do not interpret these guidelines as definitive statements regarding the admission requirements or policies of individual PA programs.

## JMU ADVISING RESOURCES

An important first step toward preparing to apply is to identify the PA program(s) to which the student is best suited. Seek advice early from a pre-PA advisor. Valuable resources for information about the PA profession and about PA programs nationwide are as follows.

### **Pre-Physician Assistant Advising:**

Pre-PA advising appointments: 568-2395

### **PA Profession:**

American Academy of Physician Assistants:

[www.aapa.org](http://www.aapa.org)

Virginia Academy of PAs: [www.vapa.org](http://www.vapa.org)

### **JMU Physician Assistant Program (master's level):**

Website: [www.jmu.edu/healthsci/paweb](http://www.jmu.edu/healthsci/paweb).

### **PA Educational Programs:**

Physician Assistant Education Association: [www.paeaonline.org](http://www.paeaonline.org)

Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA):

[caspaonline.org](http://caspaonline.org)

## PREREQUISITES

Prerequisites generally include undergraduate coursework in anatomy, physiology, chemistry and sometimes genetics, microbiology, statistics, or medical terminology. The required coursework is often school-specific. You are

encouraged to consult the *Physician Assistant Programs Directory* for comparative information on PA programs nationwide.

## **ACADEMIC RECORD**

Academic performance is a critical criterion for evaluating applicants. Typically programs review the overall Grade Point Average (GPA) and the GPA for science courses. Some programs require a minimum GPA of applicants. In general, programs expect competitive applicants to have GPAs above 3.0. They may also examine the transcript for evidence of academic consistency, course load and improvement in grade performance.

## **PREPARATION TIMELINE**

Programs generally admit one group of students per year. Most programs' annual date to begin a new group is in the fall; others start in summer or in January. The due date for applications is typically 6 – 9 months prior to the start of classes. Some programs require that all prerequisites be met at the time of application; others require prerequisites to be met by time of enrollment.

## **REQUIRED STANDARDIZED TESTS**

The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is the most commonly required standardized test. You are encouraged to consult PAEAonline.org for comparative information on required standardized tests for participating PA programs.

## **EXPERIENCE AND EVALUATION**

Many programs require or prefer health care experience prior to entry. Each program defines the type and amount of experience it requires. The average amount is about 1000 hours of direct-contact, patient-care experience. It may take some time to acquire the experience, so advanced planning is important.

PA programs require letters of recommendation as part of the application. Letters from people who can comment on the applicant's academic preparation and health care experience are usually preferable to those from personal friends. Students should establish relationships early with professionals at the university and in the workplace.

## **JMU's MASTER OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDIES**

JMU offers a Master of Physician Assistant Studies program. Specific information on this program is available at [www.jmu.edu/healthsci/paweb](http://www.jmu.edu/healthsci/paweb). The JMU Pre-PA advisors assist students preparing to apply to the JMU PA program or to PA programs at other universities.

**TO MAKE AN ADVISING APPOINTMENT: Phone 540-568-2395 or stop by HHS Building Room 3100.** All four PAs on faculty serve as pre-PA advisors. Professor Pamela Bailey is the Coordinator of the Pre-Physician Assistant Program.

The Pre-PA Club and the JMU Virginia Epsilon Chapter of Alpha Epsilon Delta (Health Pre-professional Honor Society) welcome students to their meetings and encourage students to become members. Pre-professional student organizations provide health career information that is invaluable to the pre-professional student. Active involvement in student organizations is evidence of students' desire to enhance their undergraduate experience.

Note: Students planning professional health careers should discuss these goals with their pre-professional health program and undergraduate major advisors. It is important to begin this planning process when students' studies are initiated; it is imperative that students plan career options. The admissions requirement information presented above should be used only as a guide when planning students' pre-professional health curriculum. It is important that students do not interpret these guidelines as definitive statements regarding the admission requirements or policies of the individual schools and colleges of professional health. Each institution specifies its own requirements and procedures. It is essential that students become familiar with these requirements and make appropriate course selections in consultation with their pre-professional health and academic advisors. Absolute admission requirements are limited to provide necessary flexibility in the undergraduate program. The course requirements for most professional health programs are similar and usually specify minimum credit in biology, chemistry and physics. Schools of professional health recognize the desirability of students having a variety of interests and diverse backgrounds. Applicants are urged to obtain a broad cultural background in such fields as literature, social science, psychology and the fine arts.

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