

Frequently Asked Questions: Pre-Physician Assistant Track

Q. How long is physician assistant school?

A. In general, physician assistant programs take 2 years to complete.

Q. Do medical physician assistant programs accept AP credit or classes taken Pass/No Pass?

A. Policies regarding AP credit and Pass/No Pass credit may vary from program to program. We encourage students to review the policies at each school they plan on applying to in order to determine whether AP credits may be used to meet prerequisite course requirements. Note: At UCSB, AP credits earned that have been applied to certain degree requirements *will not appear* on the official UCSB Transcript, which is required by many schools that do accept AP credit. In order to cover all bases, we encourage students to take all prerequisite courses at UCSB or another 4-year institution for *graded credit*. We do not suggest students take prerequisite courses Pass/No Pass.

Q. If I believe I am going to get a C- in a class, should I intentionally get a D or F so I can retake the class and get a better grade? What do I do if I am going to get a low grade in a class?

A. UCSB has a number of campus resources designed to help students who are struggling. We strongly encourage students to seek assistance as soon as possible to try to avoid these situations. We do not encourage students to purposefully fail courses, for any reason. If you believe that you may earn a grade that you feel is unsatisfactory, then please stop in to see a pre-health advisor during drop-in advising to discuss other options.

Q. Can courses I take abroad count as professional school prerequisites?

A. Courses taken abroad that have direct UCSB equivalents may be taken in order to meet professional school requirements; however, we caution students on taking a large number of science prerequisite courses abroad.

Q. Will participating in more experiences make up for a low GPA?

A. No.

Q. Does all prerequisite coursework have to be completed prior to applying?

A. No, but most programs do require that all prerequisite coursework be completed prior to matriculation.

Q. When should I take the GRE?

A. Students typically take the GRE prior to or during the time when they are completing the CASPA application. We advise students to begin preparing for the GRE during a time when they are able to focus on the preparation, to include taking full length practice tests under simulated test-taking conditions. For many students, the summer months are the best time for this.

Q. When should I start studying for the GRE?

A. Although the GRE does not assess competencies in specific areas of the sciences, students should still plan to take the GRE no earlier than the summer between their sophomore and junior years.

Q. Do I need a test prep course?

A. Test prep needs vary from student to student. Some aspects to consider when determining which types of test prep materials you will need include the costs associated with purchasing materials/courses as well as your own preferred learning style(s).

Q. When should I apply?

A. When you are ready and feel that you are at your most competitive as an applicant. This will be different for each student, so we encourage you to schedule an appointment to discuss with a pre-health advisor. Note: Physician Assistant programs do require applicants to have completed several hours (sometimes into the hundreds or thousands) of direct-patient contact experiences. Failure to garner these experiences may prevent applicants from being accepted into PA programs.

Q. Should I take a gap year?

A. Reasons for taking a gap year vary for each student, and choosing to take a gap year or not requires weighing a number of factors, such as current/anticipated GPAs (Overall and Science/Prerequisite), GRE score, and experiences, to name a few. Please schedule an appointment with a pre-health advisor to discuss your individual needs further.

Q. Will taking a gap year hurt my application?

A. No.

Q. When should I begin writing my personal statement?

A. Students should begin considering—and possibly writing a response to—the question, “Why do I want to be a physician assistant?” as soon as they begin considering the pre-medical track. In some cases, this becomes the precursor to a personal statement. Beyond that, students should begin drafting their personal statement as early as during the fall prior to their application season (following summer) because most personal statements will go through several edits and revisions.

Q. What is the average cost of physician assistant school?

Prep: (Exam prep, applications, interviews) GRE exam \$205, CASPA \$175 (1 school; + \$50 for each additional school)

Attendance (Tuition, Room/Board, Other Expenses): \$64,961 (Public Avg.) and \$75,964 (Private Avg.)

A. According to the PAEA’s *By The Numbers 30th Report on Physician Assistant Educational Programs in the United States*, (<https://paeaonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2015-by-the-numbers-program-report-30.pdf>), it may cost as much as \$75,964 (or more) to become a physician assistant.

Q. Is an undergraduate degree required?

A. Typically, yes.