

Pre-Physician Assistant

What does it mean to be a Physician Assistant?

A Physician Assistant (PA) practices and prescribes medicine under the license of a physician, and can work in a variety of healthcare settings. PAs are trained as generalists (but may work in specialty areas) and are formally trained through a master's degree program to provide diagnostic, preventative and therapeutic services. PAs are not required to complete a residency and work under the authority of a supervising physician. Students prepare for entry to a PA program by obtaining a baccalaureate degree, completing the prerequisite course work for entry into specific programs, and by obtaining a broad variety of volunteer or paid clinical experience. This guide is not exhaustive, but is intended to get you started in planning your Pre-PA track while at Western.

Pre-PA Education

There is no one "right" major for gaining admission to a Physician Assistant program. Your undergraduate years offer you the opportunity to explore many academic fields, to develop basic skills and knowledge, and to demonstrate expertise and experience a field of study (major) of your choice. Pick one in which you excel and enjoy. Popular majors for Pre-PA students are Biology and Chemistry, but students have majored in a diverse range of academic disciplines including Anthropology, Behavioral Neuroscience, Community Health, Psychology, History, Philosophy, Communications, Spanish, and Fairhaven self-designed majors. Some pursue combined majors such as Anthropology/Biology, Biochemistry, and Cellular & Molecular Biology.

Core Courses

Regardless of your major, certain prerequisite courses expected by **most** schools include:

CHEMISTRY

NOTE: You must complete *Precalculus I (MATH 114)* to take CHEM 161

- General Chemistry series (includes labs): CHEM 161, 162, 163 [or Honors equivalent]
- Elementary Organic Chemistry with lab: CHEM 251
 - OR Organic Chemistry lecture series (without lab): CHEM 351, 352, 353
- Elements of Biochemistry: CHEM 375

BIOLOGY

- General Biology series (includes labs): BIOL 204, 205, 206
- Genetics: BIOL 321
- Microbiology for Health Sciences: BIOL 245
 - OR Fundamentals of Microbiology: BIOL 345, 346
- Human Anatomy & Physiology: BIOL 348, 349

MATHEMATICS

- Statistics: MATH 240 [or major equivalent; i.e. BIOL 340 for Biology majors]

OTHER (NON-SCIENCE)

- Introduction to Psychology (PSY 101), Psychology through the Lifespan (PSY 230)
- English 101, plus an additional English course

This document is for preliminary advising purposes only.

We encourage you to meet with a Health Professions Advisor on a regular basis to determine a plan that is best for you.

2020-2021

Contact Information

Pre-PA Advisor:

Anna Tognazzini, M.Ed.
360-650-3268
prehealth@wwu.edu

To meet with an advisor:
Call 360-650-4240
Old Main 280

Health Professions Advising Website:

www.wwu.edu/careers/prehealth.shtml

Keep informed

- WWU students may join the **Advisor's Pre-PA Listserv**. To join, go to www.wwu.edu/careers, click on *Health Professions Advising* (on the lefthand side of the page), and click *Join Listserv*.

Notes

ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP): Check with individual schools whether they recognize AP as college-earned credit. Not all do. *It is better to view any earned credits as qualifying to enroll in upper-division courses rather than as “testing out” of prerequisites.*

DECLARING A MAJOR: Departments vary in how to declare majors. Behavioral Neuroscience, Biology, Chemistry, and others allow students to declare as a “pre-major” while taking their specified prerequisites. Some majors require a specific GPA in a series of foundational courses. Declare early, even as a “pre-major”, to help shorten your time to degree. *While working on any pre-major content, explore many disciplines to keep your options open.*

ACCESS TO CLASSES: High demand exists for upper-division courses, especially in the sciences. Many departments grant enrollment priority to students declared in specific majors over those seeking enrollment for professional school purposes. Registration access procedures for impacted courses can change, and departments generally provide updates via their websites and email notifications, or by checking with the department’s program coordinator.

REPEATING/DROPPING COURSES: When you repeat a course, only your most recent grade is used when Western calculates your GPA. However, the class still shows up on your transcript. Although some students think that repeating a course will help them get into professional schools, this is almost always untrue. Professional schools will take into account ALL college-level coursework when performing their own calculation of your GPA, and this will include any courses you have repeated at Western. Still, in some circumstances it may be appropriate to repeat a course so talk to an advisor to be sure. Also, dropping a course can have an impact on eligibility for financial aid, scholarships, and athletic participation so consider your options carefully and speak with an advisor before making a decision.

SHADOWING: Students should gain shadowing experience with both a PA and a physician. Discuss your shadowing options with Pre-Healthcare advisors.

CLINICAL HOURS: Most PA programs require that applicants obtain a certain number of paid clinical hours (UW requires at least 2000) before applying. Some examples are work as a CNA, Medical Assistant, ER Scribe, or EMT.

GRE: The Graduate Record Examination is offered monthly at the WWU Testing Center, and assesses your verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing skills. Information is available at www.ets.org/gre.

Additional Resources

WWU Allied Health Advising: www.wvu.edu/alliedhealth

WWU Health Professions Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/wwuprehealth/

Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA): www.paeaonline.org

The PA Platform: www.thepaplatform.com

Explore Health Careers: www.explorehealthcareers.org

Pre-Healthcare Advising Events

Typical programming events offered include (but are not limited to):

Fall:

Health Professional & Grad School Info Fair (October)
Winter Registration Drop-in Advising

Winter:

Faculty Research Panel (February)
Spring Registration Drop-in Advising

Spring:

The Healthcare Professional School Application: A session overviewing the process (April)
MEDEX Info Session (May)
Fall Registration Drop-in Advising

Health Professions Advising / Career Services Center
Old Main 280 360.650.4240 Careers@wwu.edu

PROGRESS LIST FOR PRE-PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT STUDENTS

Successfully matriculated applicants typically exceed these minimal requirements

- Join Pre-PA Listserv: go to www.wvu.edu/careers, click on *Health Professions Advising* (on the lefthand side of the page), and click *Join Listserv*

Academic Foundation:

- Math 114 (5 credits) Precalculus I
- Chemistry 161, 162, 163 (5 credits each) *General Chemistry with laboratories*
- Chemistry 251 (5) *Elementary Organic Chemistry with laboratory* (RECOMMENDED)
or
- Chemistry 351, 352, 353 (4,4,3) *Organic Chemistry without laboratories*
- Biology 204, 205 (5, 5) *General Biology*
- Biology 321 (4) *Genetics* (RECOMMENDED), requires completion of Biology 206
- Biology 245 (5) *Microbiology for Health Sciences*
or
- Biology 345, 346 (3, 2) *Fundamentals of Microbiology*
- Biology 348, 349 (5, 5) *Human Anatomy & Physiology*
- Chemistry 375 (4) *Elements of Biochemistry* (RECOMMENDED)
- Mathematics 240 (4) *Introduction to Statistics*, or major equivalent such as BIOL 340
- English 101 (4) *Writing and Critical Inquiry*, plus another 1-2 English courses (required for UW)
- Psychology 101 (5), plus another 1-2 Psychology courses (230 or 250, depends on program)

WWU Degree Fulfillment:

- Complete academic major
- Fulfill General University Requirements (or DTA)
- Writing Proficiency course(s) to total 3 or more points
- Two quarters before graduation, meet with major advisor for evaluation and apply for graduation

Exposure/Experience:

- “Shadow” a PA to learn more, gain additional experience, and for letter of recommendation
- Most programs require AT LEAST 1000 hours of direct patient care experience (UW wants 2000+ hours). Options include: CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant), EMT (Emergency Medical Technician), Medical Scribe, Phlebotomist, etc
- Clinical Experience (one or more may apply)
 - Volunteer/community service _____
 - Undergraduate research [*valued but not required*]
- Teamwork/Leadership Development (does not need to be healthcare related!)
 - Athletics/Clubs
 - Other _____

Countdown to Application:

- Two quarters before application, meet with Health Professions Advisor to discuss procedures and timeline
- Research PA schools and graduate school options
- Prepare for GRE (Graduate Records Examination) if schools require it
- Draft personal statement; edit, edit, edit
- Request letters of recommendation from professor (science), professionals (one PA, one physician), clinical supervisor
- Complete CASPA application (PAEA’s centralized application service opens late April)
- Interview preparation: www.wvu.edu/careers/mockinterview_home.shtml