

USC Dornsife

Dana and David Dornsife  
College of Letters, Arts and Sciences

Office of Pre-Health Advisement

# PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

## ADVISING SHEET

Physician assistants (PAs) are licensed health professionals who practice medicine with physician supervision as members of a medical team. The exact responsibilities of a PA depends upon the type of medical setting in which they work, the understanding they have with their supervising physicians, their level of experience, and the laws of their state. Physician assistants can develop treatment plans, perform physical exams, order and interpret laboratory tests, diagnose and treat illnesses, counsel patients on preventative health care, assist in surgery, and write prescriptions.



Physician assistants are educated as generalists in medicine, and their education and credentialing are based on a primary care foundation, which gives them the flexibility to be employed in all areas of medicine. PA's practice in family medicine, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology, as well as in any specialty fields such as cardiovascular surgery, orthopedics, and emergency medicine. PA's must have a license and a supervising physician before they can practice.

Most physician assistant programs award a Master's degree and the average length is about 27 months. PA's are required to complete more than 400 hours in basic sciences, 75 hours in pharmacology, 175 hours in behavioral sciences and nearly 580 hours of clinical medicine. They also need to complete 2,000 hours of clinical rotations with an emphasis on primary care in ambulatory clinics, physician's offices and acute/long-term care facilities. All states require that PA's graduate from an accredited PA program and are required to pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) certified by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA).

### COMMON PRE-PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PREREQUISITE COURSES

<b><u>Biology</u></b>	One year of coursework with lab	BISC 120Lg & BISC 220Lg	OR	BISC 121Lg & BISC 221Lg
<b><u>Chemistry</u></b>	One year of coursework with lab. Some schools may only require one semester.	CHEM 105aLg & CHEM105bL	OR	CHEM115aLg & CHEM115bL
<b><u>Anatomy</u></b>	One semester is generally required	HBIO 301L		
<b><u>Microbiology &amp; Physiology</u></b>	One semester of each course is generally required	BISC 300L & BISC 307L		
<b><u>Mathematics</u></b>	At least one semester of Math is generally required at most Physician Assistant schools. College Algebra is the typical requirement. Some PA schools also require Statistics. Contact individual schools for specific requirements.	MATH 108  Statistics: MATH 208x, BISC 305, HP 340, PSYC 274g or equivalent stats course		
<b><u>Genetics</u></b> <b><u>Organic Chemistry</u></b>	One semester of Genetics may be required at some schools. In addition, please note: there a few schools in the US that may require one semester of organic chemistry. Contact individual schools for specific requirements.	BISC 325  and/or CHEM 322aL		
<b><u>English</u></b>	One year is required for most PA schools in the country. <b>Please note:</b> Often some schools will look for and English Literature course which can be fulfilled by ARLT 100 or 101	WRIT 150 and WRIT 340		
<b><u>Humanities/ Social Science</u></b>	PA schools typically require a course in General Psychology and/or Developmental Psychology, Sociology, Anthropology and/or Public Speaking. Contact individual school for specific requirements.	PSYC 100g; PSYC 336L; SOC 200gm;  COMM 204  General Education & elective courses		

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Office of Pre-Health Advisement

University of Southern  
California

Office of Pre-Health  
Advisement  
3641 Watt Way, HNB 120  
Los Angeles, CA 90089

Tel: (213) 740-4844

Fax: (213) 740-5653

### E-Mail:

[prehealth@dornsife.usc.edu](mailto:prehealth@dornsife.usc.edu)

### Website:

<http://dornsife.usc.edu/pre-health>



## PA FACT SHEET

### Quick Facts about Physician Assistants

- ◆ There are over 224 PA programs in the US. Programs that are accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA). The ARC-PA is recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).
- ◆ The structure of education programs for PA students is similar to that for medical students, although shorter in length (average medical school education is four years, plus residency; average PA program is 26 months).
- ◆ Most PA programs take 24-27 months to complete, with about one year of classroom studies followed by 2,000 hours of supervised clinical rotations.
- ◆ The majority of PA students have earned a bachelor's degree and have nearly 2-3 years of health care experience before they are admitted to a program.
- ◆ All 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Guam and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands have enacted laws that authorize PA prescribing of drugs.
- ◆ Results of the 2019 AAPA Physician Assistant Census Survey indicate that the mean total income from primary employer for PAs who are not self-employed and who work at least 32 hours per week for their primary employer is \$107,718.
- ◆ Only graduates of an accredited PA program are eligible to take the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE). You will see PA-C, meaning "physician assistant certified," in a PA's credentials indicating they have passed the national certifying exam.
- ◆ Once a PA is certified, he/she must complete a continuous six-year cycle to keep her/his certificate current. Every two years, a PA must earn and log 100 CME hours and reregister her/his certificate with the NCCPA (second and fourth years), and by the end of the sixth year, recertify by successfully completing either the Physician Assistant National Recertifying Examination (PANRE).

## RESOURCES

- American Academy for Physicians Assistants (AAPA) [www.aapa.org](http://www.aapa.org)
- Physician Assistant Education Association [www.PAEAonline.org](http://www.PAEAonline.org)
- CASPA [www.caspaonline.org](http://www.caspaonline.org)
- National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) [www.nccpa.net](http://www.nccpa.net)
- Graduate Record Examination (GRE) [www.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre)
- Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) [www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/](http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/)
- The Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA)**  
[www.arc-pa.org](http://www.arc-pa.org)
- CASPA Participating Programs**  
<https://portal.caspaonline.org/caspaHelpPages/participating-programs/>
- Physician Assistant Programs Directory**  
<http://www.paeaonline.org/index.php?ht=d/ContentDir/pid/255>

This information is not comprehensive and should not be used as your only advising tool. Research each school for a complete listing of requirements.



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