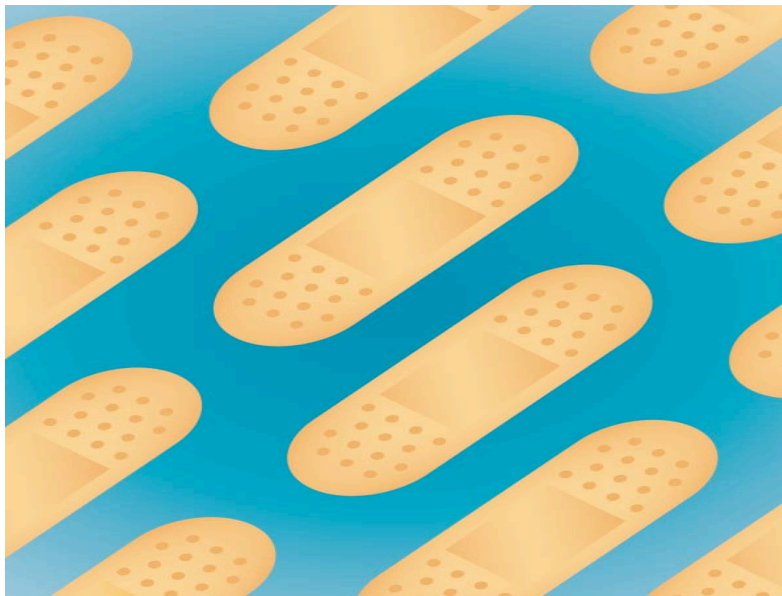


# Pre-Physician Assistant Guide



UT Austin  
PAI 5.03  
512-471-3172  
Visit our Website



## Table of Contents

Selecting a Major.....	<a href="#">3</a>
Pre-Physician Assistant Self-Assessment.....	<a href="#">3-11</a>
Prerequisite Timeline .....	<a href="#">12</a>
Taking Courses Away from UT .....	<a href="#">13</a>
Studying Abroad.....	<a href="#">13-14</a>
Claiming AP/IB Credit .....	<a href="#">14-15</a>
Q-Drop or Pass/Fail .....	<a href="#">16-17</a>
Academic Assistance .....	<a href="#">17</a>
PA-CAT Information .....	<a href="#">18</a>
GPA Boosters/Post-Bacc Programs .....	<a href="#">18-19</a>
Research Schools.....	<a href="#">20</a>
Timeline for Applying to Physician Assistant Studies Programs.....	<a href="#">21</a>
Application Services & Resources.....	<a href="#">22</a>
Letters of Evaluation .....	<a href="#">22</a>
Personal Statements .....	<a href="#">22</a>
Interview Tips & Preparation/ Research Current Events .....	<a href="#">22-24</a>
Financing Your Education .....	<a href="#">24-25</a>
Pre-Health Professions Services.....	<a href="#">26</a>

## Preface

The information presented in this document provides important resources for UT Austin undergraduate and graduate students planning on applying to Physician Assistant school. Remember it is important to research Physician Assistant programs and evaluate their fit before you apply.

Additional Pre-Health Professions resources including pre-requisites, timelines and application information for the following Health Professions: Medical, Dental, Pharmacy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Optometry, and Veterinary can be found on our [HPO Pathways Page](#).

## Selecting a Major

Pre-Physician Assistant students may choose to major in biology. However, other popular majors are psychology, kinesiology, human development and family sciences, and nutritional sciences. Choose a major that you are passionate about, and keep in mind that not all degrees may cover the Pre-Physician Assistant prerequisites. Also, Physician Assistant schools also accept students who show broad interests in their academic coursework through a non-science major.

### Explore a Physician Assistant Career further:

- AAPA's "How to become a PA" is a great resource for those on the path to a career as a Physician Assistant: [How to become a PA](#)
- The American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA) - <http://www.aapa.org/>
- AAPA's "what's a PA?" Video [What's a PA?](#)

### Explore Majors/Health Professions further at one or more of the following resources:

- Occupational Outlook Handbook <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home.htm>
- Explore Health Careers: <http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/home>
- Way finder <https://wayfinder.utexas.edu/>
- My Next Move <http://www.mynextmove.org/>

## Pre-Physician Assistant Self-Assessment

*The assessment below is designed to assess Physician Assistant Studies Programs application strengths. New Pre-Physician Assistant students can use this assessment as a planning guide for their Pre-PA Pathway. (Check out the New-Pre Health Students page under Current Students at the Health Professions website: <http://cns.utexas.edu/health-professions>.)*

## Work toward submitting a well-rounded application!

### Start by Developing Your Personal Qualities

Individuals who are successful in their pursuit of a health care career possess a set of qualities that they develop as young adults. These include qualities such as: Good Judgment, Self-Discipline, Maturity, Compassion/Empathy, Integrity, Intellectual Curiosity, Strong Work Ethic, Leadership, Accountability, Reliability, Motivation/Persistence, Honesty, and Cultural Competency. Develop these qualities through the experiences and activities you choose to get involved in.

I want to develop the following qualities:

---

---

---

I will develop these qualities by getting involved in (Be specific):

---

---

---

## Get Involved & Gain Experience

Get involved in what you are interested in - this is key! There are many things you can do to become better prepared for professional school and professional careers. For example: volunteering, shadowing, studying abroad, and/or participating in a summer program. Get involved on campus, tutor, mentor, teach, participate in Rec Sports. If you are considering studying abroad, check out the study abroad section in this guide. Always remember to be yourself and do what you enjoy.

## Volunteering

Professional school admissions committees will look favorably upon any experience in which you are giving back to the community. A community service activity where you are directly helping people face-to-face is of the most value, and making an ongoing commitment to that service gives you time to grow and gain real value from the experience.

## Track your Volunteer Hours

Track your volunteer hours, as most professional school applications will ask for details of the time you spent volunteering. UT Austin's ["Give Pulse"](#) is a great way to find volunteer opportunities, track hours, and become a part of a great service community. When tracking your volunteer and health care experience keep a record of your volunteer supervisor(s), including name(s) and title(s). The sections below are examples of how the CASPA application system defines and tracks volunteer and hands on health care experience. ***\*Using programs like Microsoft Word or Excel to make and keep track of tables can be helpful.\****

### Quick Tips:

*When deciding where/how to volunteer and get hands on experience, you should investigate how each school you are interested in defines volunteer, healthcare, and hands-on experience, and what each individual school's requirements are, and if your experience will fulfill these requirements.*

*Be sure to check each individual school's site as they do vary between schools.*

## Community Service

Volunteer work done outside of the health care field; for example, working for Habitat for Humanity, tutoring children, participating in or working for a fundraiser walk or blood drive, etc.

Community Service	Dates (list time period or individual dates)	Hours	Responsibilities

What have I learned about myself through these volunteer experiences?

---

---

---

Have I involved myself in a diverse set of experiences? What skills have I enhanced/gained through these experiences? (For example: "I have become a better communicator through my volunteering experiences at the local hospital" – then, explain how you have done this.)

---

---

---

I want to explore the following volunteer activities:

---

---

---

### Health Care Shadowing

Time spent officially following and observing health care professionals at work.

PA Name or Name of Experience	Specialty	Hours	Type of Experience: Shadow/Volunteer/Paid

What have I learned from these experiences?

---

---

---

I want to reach out to the following Physician Assistants to ask about shadowing:

---

---

---

---

**Quick Tip:**

*Finding a healthcare provider who is willing to allow you to shadow can be a challenge, but it is worth the effort. Many students start with their own health care providers. You may also network with other pre-health students to see where they have shadowed. Check out our [Shadowing Resources](#)*

**Get Direct Patient Care!**

It can be good to gain some hands-on experience in a health care setting to add to your application. You can do so in many different ways. You can get a phlebotomy certification, go through an EMT Basic course, become a Certified Nursing Assistant, or become a scribe, among other things. Find one that you are interested in by doing informational interviews. Speak to a Pre-Health Professions coach about these different ways to gain experience. See our [PA Volunteer Resources](#).

Name of Experience	Specialty	Hours	Type of Experience: Shadow/Volunteer/Paid

What have I learned from these experiences?

---



---



---

What skills have I enhanced/gained through these experiences? What do I like and dislike about my experiences in this setting?

---



---



---



---

**Awards and Honors**

Relevant awards or honors earned as a college student or post-college. High school honors should not be included. Professional Memberships and Leadership refers to your membership in a professional organization, such as the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), or leadership roles you performed in a professional position or organization.

Award/Honor	Date Received	Duties/Activities

What relevant awards and honors have I earned as a college student or post-college?

---



---



---

What is the most important thing I have learned about myself from these experiences?

---



---



---

### **Leadership**

Leadership can be developed in many different ways. Leadership needs to be demonstrated. Think about how you are developing your leadership qualities and skills. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Teaching/ TA a course
- Get involved in student organizational leadership

Name of Organization	Position/Title (ex: Communication Director, President, Member, etc.)	Total participation time (ex. 2 years, 3 semesters, etc.)	Duties/Activities participated in with this organization/group

What is the most important thing I have learned about myself from these experiences?

---

---

---

---

---

Brainstorm some specific ways you can develop your leadership skills.

---

---

---

---

---

### Other Healthcare or Work Experience

This could be working in the health or a health-related field but when you are not directly responsible for a patient's care; for example, performing clerical work, delivering patient food, cleaning patient rooms, working as a hospital volunteer, etc. Any paid work done outside of the health care field; for example: a retail or restaurant job.

Name of Organization	Position/Title (ex: Communication Director, President, Member, etc.)	Total participation time (ex. 2 years, 3 semesters, etc.)	Duties/Activities participated in with this organization/group

What did I learn from non-direct health care experience:

---

---

---

What did I learn from my paid experience outside of healthcare:

---

---

---



## Research

Research projects done in addition to classroom work that you have had an active role in.

I want to explore the following research topics and activities:

---

---

---

How are you going to explore these topic and activities? (Be specific):

---

---

---

## Academics

Academics include your GPA and GRE Scores. How well are you doing? Are you taking between 14-17 credit hours per semester? Are you keeping your grades up? Use the GPA calculator in your UT Direct account to figure out your GPA.

### Quick Tip:

CASPA calculates several GPA types, including 1) Year-Level GPAs, 2) Course-Subject Category GPAs, and 3) Science and Non-Science GPAs. For more information on how this is done, visit its instructions page [here](#).

Overall GPA \_\_\_\_\_

\*This includes all course taken at UT and other institutions

Prerequisite GPA (Math+Science) \_\_\_\_\_

\*To see how this is calculated, check with the school you're applying to.

### Quick Tip:

To be competitive for professional school, you will need a GPA in the range of 3.6 to 3.8 and above. This means you need to be making A's and B's with more A's than B's. If you feel that you are behind in your classes, don't wait until you get your first poor test score to ask for help. There are numerous resources on campus to help you with tutoring and coaching! Start with visiting your faculty members & teaching assistants during office hours. Also check out [Sanger Learning Center](#)

## Get in the Habit of Personal Reflection

Your insights about who you are as a person and how your experiences have shaped you will be of tremendous benefit when it is time to write your personal statement (a required part of your professional school application.) Keep a journal handy so you can jot down your thoughts and observations!

### Track Your Progress

What characteristics do I have that make me an excellent Physician Assistant?

---

---

---

---



## Get to Know Your Faculty

This can be challenging at UT Austin—the campus is huge, and most of the classes in your first year have large numbers of students. Even though the professors can sometimes seem tough or intimidating, most of them are very approachable one-on-one. Visit your professors during office hours, even if you are doing well in their class. It will make your request for a future letter of evaluation much easier! Get to know your faculty, check out the video on the HPO YouTube page for some tips!

### Who are your letter writers?

I would like to ask the following faculty for letters of evaluation:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_

I would like to ask the following third letter writer for a letter of evaluation; this letter will add a different dimension to my application:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_

#### Quick Tip:

*It is essential to determine what requirements, if any, your PA programs have regarding letter writers' roles and relationship to you BEFORE listing ANY references on your CASPA application. Many programs have strict guidelines for this, and once a reference is completed on the CASPA application, it can NOT be removed or replaced. You should also investigate the types of letters each school you are interested in requires. Some programs require letters from professors, health care providers, employers, or supervisors, while others only recommend or prefer specific types.*

***\*Keep in mind that some PA programs require one letter be written by a PA.***

[CASPA instructions](#)

***Once you have completed this self-assessment, if you have not made an appointment with a Health Professions Coach, we recommend that you do so in order to discuss these topics as well as your application strengths as a whole. Make sure to track your progress!***

Notes:

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Pre-Physician Assistant Time Line

### A Note from Your HP Coaches:

Your personal time line may differ from this sample. Work with your academic advisor to incorporate these courses into your personal degree plan. If you start pre-health professions after freshman year or are in a major that requires you to spread the prerequisites over more semesters, it is common to have a bridge year or years between undergraduate school and professional school during which you complete your preparation and apply. Regardless of when you begin, plan on at least 3 years to prepare for professional school

**[Requirements can change at any time. Check often for updates and review school web sites for changes that may occur between updates.]**

See the [prerequisite courses page](#) for details and options for these courses.

<b>FIRST YEAR</b>	<u><b>Fall</b></u> College Algebra or higher Biology I Chemistry I	<u><b>Spring</b></u> Biology II Chemistry II Chemistry Lab Psychology	<u><b>Summer</b></u>
<b>SECOND YEAR</b>	<u><b>Fall</b></u> Genetics Biology Lab Organic Chemistry I	<u><b>Spring</b></u> Organic Chemistry II Organic Chemistry Lab Statistics	<u><b>Summer</b></u> Microbiology Microbio Lab
<b>THIRD YEAR</b>	<u><b>Fall</b></u> Anatomy Psychology (3 hrs)	<u><b>Spring</b></u> Physiology Physiology Lab (GRE: Graduate Record Exam)	<u><b>Summer</b></u> (Apply)
<b>FOURTH YEAR</b>	<u><b>Fall</b></u>	<u><b>Spring</b></u> (BLS certification)	
Continue in course work and activities that will prepare you for professional school.			

**Important Notes:** Some schools require the completion of all prerequisite courses and hours of experience by the application deadline. Carefully consider the experience requirements of the individual programs when planning your preparation for professional school.

## Can I Take Courses Away From UT?

Completing your coursework at UT (your home institution) is considered best preparation for health professions schools. For students who find it necessary to take courses away from UT, we offer the following recommendations.

**KEY:** UT: Take classes at UT Austin  
 4YR: If necessary, okay to take class at other 4 year institution  
 CC: If necessary, okay to take class at community college

	Pre-Medical	Pre-Dental	Pre-Veterinary	Pre-Optometry	Pre-Pharmacy	Pre-Physician Asst	Pre-Physical Therapy	Pre-Occupational Therapy
<b>Biology &amp; Chemistry</b>	UT	UT	UT	UT	UT	UT	UT	UT
<b>Physics</b>	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR or CC	Not Required	4YR or CC	4YR or CC
<b>Statistics, Calculus</b>	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR or CC	4YR or CC	4YR or CC	4YR or CC
<b>English &amp; Rhetoric</b>	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR or CC	4YR or CC	4YR or CC
<b>Other Pre-requisites</b>	Generally, it seems to be okay to take other prereqs away from UT Austin, if needed; however, students should contact individual professional schools' admission offices for questions about specific courses.							

**General Recommendations:**

1. Taking courses away from UT can give the impression that the student is avoiding UT Austin's rigorous courses; therefore, it is important to earn excellent grades at both community colleges and other four-year institutions.
2. It generally appears to be okay with professional schools to take government and history requirements at other four-year institutions or community colleges.
3. For other general requirements students can check with professional schools' admission offices.

## Studying Abroad?

Most health professions schools require that prerequisites be taken at U.S. accredited schools, and some will accept credits from Canadian accredited schools.

Although exchange program courses and some affiliated program courses are counted as in-residence credit by UT Austin, according to Texas state law, foreign course work cannot be counted in the GPAs for application to graduate and post-baccalaureate professional schools. The rules and policies can vary among the professional schools. Students who plan to study abroad should research this carefully for the schools and application services they plan to apply to. Look in the education requirements, transcripts, and FAQ sections of their web sites for information about foreign course work and study abroad.

UT Austin faculty-led courses are "in-residence" courses as well as U.S. credits, and so courses like Organic Chemistry II (CH 320N) taught in Spain by UT Austin faculty can be used to satisfy a prerequisite; however, for many students taking these rigorous courses in only 5 weeks may not be recommended. It is important that pre-health professions students master these courses and retain this knowledge for success in entrance exams and in advanced studies. On CASPA's instructions and FAQs page there is a section titled "[Study abroad and Overseas U.S. Institutions Transcripts](#)" under "Sending Official Transcripts to CASPA". This section details how to report study abroad course credits and transcripts.

The UT Austin Health Professions Office very strongly recommends that our students satisfy their health professions prerequisites at UT Austin. Use the study abroad opportunity to study the culture and language of that country and to satisfy general education requirements if approved by your academic advisor. Science courses that are not considered direct preparation for the health professions can be considered as well.

(Examples: research, ecology, environmental science; but NOT cell, molecular, microbiology, anatomy, physiology which figure heavily into your preparation and readiness for professional school and the admissions committee's assessment of your application.

## **FAQ - Foreign Applicants, Coursework from Foreign Schools and Study Abroad**

### **Do Schools accept foreign coursework?**

No! State law requires that academic work taken at foreign colleges, universities or preparatory schools shall be excluded from the calculation of the grade point average for students seeking admission to graduate or post-baccalaureate professional school. Schools vary on accepting foreign coursework to satisfy pre-requisites, check with specific schools to see.

### **Foreign coursework will often not count towards satisfying any of the required coursework.**

Undergraduate foreign coursework that appears as transfer credit on the transcript of a regionally accredited US college will count towards the 90-hour requirement. Each individual transfer course credit granted by the US school must be listed on the transcript. Lump sum credit with no specific course and hour identification will not be accepted. Be sure to check each individual school regarding their policies on foreign coursework.

## **What about Claiming AP/IB Credit for Prerequisites?**

While we generally recommend that as a Pre-Health Professions student you not "claim" AP/IB credit for prerequisite courses such as Biology, Chemistry, English, Physics, and Mathematics, these are important decisions that you must make for yourself that require your careful consideration.

It may seem like a convenient way to eliminate hours from your degree plan and accelerate your path to professional school, but claiming credit can actually be detrimental to your preparation for success on entrance exams and in professional studies. Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses vary in rigor, and they are generally not equivalent to the rigor of UT Austin courses. However, your AP/IB courses can be very good preparation for taking these courses at UT Austin, providing the opportunity to master that material, become better prepared, enhance your GPA, and demonstrate your academic ability and readiness for advanced study in health professions schools.

Unless you are academically very well prepared, it is best to start with the introductory courses. Please consult with your academic advisor for help in determining your readiness for higher level science courses. Most schools that accept AP/IB credit will expect you to take additional upper-division course work in that area of study.

### **Here are some specific recommendations:**

#### **Science Courses**

##### **Biology and Chemistry**

If you claim credit in courses like BIO 311C and BIO 311D you may not be adequately prepared for the rigorous next course here at UT Austin, BIO 325 (Genetics). If you claim credit for CH 301 and CH 302, your first college level chemistry course at UT Austin will be CH 310M (Organic Chemistry I).

Honors students in Biology and Chemistry may claim test credit, register in the honors sequence for Biology or Chemistry, and will take additional upper-division credits in those areas, making up for the lack of first-year hours in those disciplines.

Your UT Austin faculty will expect you to be prepared to learn and understand the material conceptually and theoretically in order to understand test questions well enough to earn A's on your exams. They will teach material beyond the textbook that was not presented in your high school courses. You will be in second year courses with many students who took General Biology and General Chemistry here and are well prepared to handle the exams in the more advanced courses. They will set the standard for the grade scale or curve in your classes.

## **Physics**

Physics is required to prepare for some health professions schools. In some cases, you will be tested on Physics in your professional school entrance exam. We strongly recommend taking physics at the college level if you are preparing for a professional school that requires physics.

## **Calculus and Statistics**

For the Texas medical schools, if you take statistics in the classroom here at UT Austin, you can use statistics to satisfy the math prerequisite. Then if your degree plan or any of your science courses require calculus, you can decide with your academic advisor whether to use credit-by-exam or take the course(s) in the classroom.

For all health professions schools, both in Texas and out-of-state, it is important to check their admissions web sites for any restrictions and preferences on credit-by-exam.

## **Non-Science Courses**

It is usually acceptable to claim credit-by-exam for general education or core curriculum requirements such as history and government. Claiming this type of credit may give you time to take the courses that will prepare you for professional school and school entrance exams. On the other hand, critical thinking skills and an understanding of ethics, society, community, cultures, history, and human behavior are important for your success now and throughout your professional and personal life. Taking college level non-science courses is a good way to develop these.

## **English Literature, Rhetoric, Writing**

If you claim credit for freshman writing and literature courses, we recommend taking additional courses in the classroom at the college level. Even if your high school verbal skills were strong, this type of academic skill weakens over time if you do not use it.

Verbal skills are extremely important to your success in your undergraduate course work, your entrance exams, in professional school, and as a health care professional. You must be able to read efficiently, at a good rate, with high comprehension and critical thinking skills. You must develop and maintain a good vocabulary, not just for the sciences but also for social and behavioral sciences, ethics, policies and regulations, and procedural information. Many admissions deans recommend reading well-written novels in addition to your textbook material.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

PA Schools vary in their policies and perspectives on credit-by-exam. Check individual school admissions web sites or contact their admissions offices to be sure about each school's expectations. Taking courses in the college classroom will help you to compete for admission and to succeed in professional school. We strongly recommend that you use these courses as building blocks that will be the foundation for your future career.

**Quick Tips:**

Check with each school you plan to apply to and see if they accept AP/IB for the classes you would like to claim credit for. Some Schools will not accept AP/IB credit for biological science prerequisites, but will accept them for English and social/behavioral science classes.

## To Q or Not to Q (or to switch to pass/fail)

No admissions committee for any health professional school likes to see “Q drops” on a transcript. This is an indication that something became too much for you to handle and that you chose to drop the course rather than see it through. There are times when the Q-drop is the best course of action, however, keep reading to see how your choice may affect your competitiveness for professional school.

**More of a problem if:**

1. **Q-dropping is a pattern on your transcript.** Two Q-drops can signal a possible pattern; three Q-drops create a definite pattern.
2. **It occurs in a context of inconsistent grades.** To be competitive for professional school, you should be making A's and B's with more A's than B's. If you have semesters which include B's and C's – even one or two C's, your grades are “inconsistent” by a professional school's standard.
3. **It's one of your prerequisite courses for professional school.** In this case, you might consider sticking with the class on a pass/fail basis. Then you only need to earn a D to earn credit. **Check with your academic advisor** about whether you can use the pass/fail option.
4. **It's any science-based course,** since the bulk of professional school curriculum will be science based.

**Less of a problem if:**

1. **It's the only Q-drop on your transcript at time of application to professional school.** You will want to choose wisely however, depending on the course. If you are taking a lower division or introductory course, keep in mind that upper division courses will be more challenging. You may want to hold on to that “one and only Q-drop” for later.
2. **It's a non-science course.** While professional schools want you to do well in all classes, they are likely to be less concerned if you dropped a sociology or business class.

## What if there are non-academic reasons for needing to Q-drop?

Sometimes personal or family emergencies and other special circumstances make it difficult to find time for and focus on your studies. Sometimes, especially for new students, it is difficult to make the transition to UT. If you are dealing with something that is getting in the way of your school work, it is very important that you get help.

1. Talk to your academic advisor and/or an advisor in your college student division office
2. Check out the support services at the Counseling and Mental Health Center

## When is switching to pass/fail a better option?

This should really only be undertaken when you are reasonably certain that you can pass the class, in other words, earn at least a D. An F from a pass/fail course is just the same as an F from a letter grade course. If you are taking a pre-requisite course that you must repeat (and you meet the above criteria of being reasonably sure you can pass), you should consider the pass/fail option. This will allow you to continue your



exposure to the material for the entire semester. This will create a much stronger foundation when you repeat the course.

### What if I keep the class and then I make a C or lower?

No one wants to explain a poor grade in a class, but there is actually much to be learned about being responsible for your grades (see exercise below) Talking about how you might change your strategy going forward can be not only a sign of maturity and integrity, it can also demonstrate your resilience. All of these qualities are important to future health professionals.

### What did you learn from this experience?

While it can be tempting to blame others for the need to Q drop a class, you must understand that the responsibility is 100% yours. To help you identify your responsibility, ask yourself these questions.

1. Could I have met with the professor to see what I could do to improve my understanding?
2. (If my professor was difficult to understand or hard for me to follow) Did I look for other sections of the courses to sit in on so that I could learn the material in a different way?
3. Could I have identified that I needed assistance earlier in the semester? (In time to have possibly salvaged my grade)
4. Could I have managed my time better so that I had appropriate time to devote to the class?
5. Could I have checked out resources for tutoring through the Sanger Learning Center?
6. Could I have adjusted my priorities (lowering especially those which are non-academic) to allow focus on my studies?

### Preparing for the possible professional school interview question

You will want to spend some time reflecting on what you could have done differently so that you did not have to drop the class (see above). If you are asked about the Q-drop, you should be able to explain where things went wrong, what you learned from the experience, and how you might choose differently in the future. Remember the Health Professions Office does provide tips in the Interview Prep appointment and can help you practice your response.

## Academic Assistance

[Sanger Learning Center](#) is great place to go if you need assistance succeeding academically. They have tips and appointments centered around the following:

Academic Support  
Utilizing Faculty Office Hours  
Visiting with Your Teaching Assistants (TAs)  
Improving Your Study Skills  
Course-specific Study Groups

## PA-CAT Information

The Physician Assistant College Admission Test (PA-CAT) is a specialized test that is designed to measure applicant knowledge and application in key prerequisite science subjects typically required for PA school. The PA-CAT measures general academic ability and scientific knowledge necessary for success in the demanding Physician Assistant curriculum. The PA-CAT has been developed specifically for use by PA educators and admissions experts as part of a holistic admissions process. The PA-CAT is a 240-item assessment covering 9 science subject areas. The PA-CAT will be available as of May 2020 at over 5,000 Prometric testing centers. The cost of the exam is \$228, which includes an available free practice test.

### Scheduling Your Exam & Preparation

Individuals applying to PA schools that require or recommend the PA-CAT for admissions consideration should register and schedule their test early in the application process. Registration involves purchasing a ticket to take the test and then the candidate schedules the exam at a testing center convenient to them. It is recommended that applicants register for the PA-CAT 4-6 weeks before they intend to take the test. A free PA-CAT practice test, including detailed question rationales for extra study, is available to all candidates.

<https://www.pa-cat.com/purchase-and-register-for-the-pa-cat/>

### Your PA-CAT Score

PA-CAT is not an exam with a passing score. PA programs using the PA-CAT as part of their admissions process will receive the following information:

- Candidate Scaled Score
- Candidate Subject Raw Scores
- National Scaled Score Percentiles

Essentially, the PA program using your PA-CAT will use your results to see how they compare to the results of other candidates applying to the same school(s) as you, and how your results compare to a national sample of exam takers.

## Need a GPA Booster?

A Post-Baccalaureate program is for students who have already completed an undergraduate degree and are interested in a health professions career. They often need to finish prerequisite courses and/or need to improve their academic standing for a more competitive professional school application. A few options of the types of Post-Bacc programs for Physician Assistant students are given below.

### What Different Post-Bacc Programs are Available?

There are a few different types of Post-Bacc programs for students hoping to attend PA school, these programs usually come in the form of pre-med Post-Bacc programs that accept PA students, Science focused certificate programs, and graduate programs:

**Basic Sciences:** This type of program is for students who have not completed the basic requirements for PA school. Generally this is for “career changers” who have decided to pursue a career in healthcare as a Physician Assistant. The coursework can be done in a formal Post-Bacc program or individually at a local university.

**Advanced Sciences/GPA Boosters:** This type of program is designed for students who were science majors or have completed the basic science requirements. These are for students who:

- Want to stay academically engaged during a gap year while applying to PA schools.
- Need to raise their GPA to become a more competitive PA school applicant.

**Graduate Degree:** This type of program is applicable to various students. Some students may choose to pursue a graduate degree to boost their GPA, provide basic science requirements, or offer knowledge in areas that will complement their future Physician Assistant education. Examples of these programs would be an MPH in Public Health, or MS in Medical/Biological Sciences.

## How Do I Get In?

Selection criteria vary around the country. Most programs require at least a 3.0 GPA. Applications for the fall semester are usually due by March of that year. Check with individual programs so as not to miss deadlines. Also try and Google Post-Bacc PA Programs as other out of state schools do have programs that are not part of a centralized list.

## Examples of Post Baccalaureate Programs

- [The University of North Texas: Master of Science Degree in Medical Sciences](#)
- [Northwestern University: Pre-Physician Assistant Post-Baccalaureate Program](#)
- [Texas Tech University: Graduate Medical Sciences - MS in Biomedical Sciences](#)
- [The University of Vermont: Post-Baccalaureate Physician Assistant \(PA\) Program](#)
- [The University of Texas School of Public Health: Master of Public Health](#)

**Quick Tips:** Investigate each Post-Bacc you plan on applying to.

Ask questions like

**What GRE help is provided?**

**Do you provide a preceptorship?**

**How much does your program cost?**

**Example:** The University of North Texas offers a Post-Bacc program. They help pre-PA students find preceptorships if they are accepted into the program, but do require them to do their own GRE prep, with the programs support.

## Research Schools Before You Apply!

Thinking about what type of Physician Assistant school you are looking for? Not sure what you want in a school? Check out the following possible criteria for evaluating a PA school's fit for you!

### What type of PA school am I looking for?

1. Size of the school's learning cohort
2. Prestige of the institution
3. Training facilities
4. Opportunity to do research
5. Support programs –tutoring, counseling, student health services, childcare
6. Community building – student organizations
7. Options for financial aid/scholarship
8. Outreach/Service to Community
9. Family/Friends (Support in close proximity)
10. Lifestyle - outdoorsy, athletic, cultural arts, etc.
11. Centers/ Institutes /Programs that align with your PA School Goals

### Texas Physician Assistant Schools (Public)

- [Texas Tech University Health Science Center Physician Assistant Program \(Midland\)](#)
- [University of North Texas Health Science Center Department of Physician Assistant Studies \(Ft. Worth\)](#)
- [University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio Department of Physician Assistant Studies](#)
- [University of Texas Medical Branch \(UTMB\) at Galveston Physician Assistant Studies Program](#)
- [University of Texas Rio Grande Valley - Physician Assistant Department \(Edinburg\)](#)
- [University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center Physician Assistant Studies Program \(Dallas\)](#)

### Texas Physician Assistant Studies Programs (Private)

- [Baylor College of Medicine Physician Assistant Program \(Houston\)](#)

### Provisionally Accredited Physician Assistant Studies Programs (Newer Programs)

- Check our [PA schools list](#) on our pathways page for updates

### Rank the schools you wish to apply to in order of interest:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_
- 6) \_\_\_\_\_
- 7) \_\_\_\_\_
- 8) \_\_\_\_\_
- 9) \_\_\_\_\_
- 10) \_\_\_\_\_

## REMEMBER

It is important to make sure to do your research on the PA Schools you plan to apply to before. Check out [CASPA's participating PA programs](#), and [the PAEA program directory](#) to help you get started and answer school specific questions. [CASPA Quickstart Guide](#) Also visit schools at our HP Fair each spring, watch our HPO website for the date.

Time  
Line

## for Applying to PA School

### Fall Semester before Application Cycle

- Begin compiling list of experiences; include details such as dates, hours, tasks and responsibilities
- Begin drafting personal statement and read HPO's online [Personal Statement Resources](#)
- Ask evaluators for letters of reference
- Research schools to determine where to apply

### Spring Continued

- [CASPA Application Link](#): The application opens in April. Open CASPA application link, and begin application process
- Print and read application service instructions; Make a plan or "to do" checklist
  - Notice most Texas schools use the CASPA application system. Use the application provided on the website of any school that doesn't use CASPA.

### January

- We recommend students take the GRE by the spring semester of their junior year, no later than April, if the school requires it.
- Continue to work on personal statement/gather letters of reference

### June

- Submit when application is complete (this includes spring grades) and you're confident you've done your best! **(Earlier is better – Ideally by early summer)**
- Complete and submit secondary applications; **applications are not complete until secondary applications are submitted.**

### Spring Semester before Application (April)

- Attend Health Professions Fair, usually held in February or March to visit with professional schools.
- Obtain official transcripts from all institutions attended. Review for accuracy of information and use as reference for completing application
- Request transcripts from all institutions attended to be sent to application services
- Finish personal statement – HPO offers Personal Statement Brainstorming appointments; [UWC](#) offers Personal Statement writing consultation

### Summer/Fall Semester during Application Cycle

- Follow up to make sure application is verified
- Schedule interview prep appointment with Health Professions Office
- Interviews are done throughout the fall semester, and have the possibility of going into the spring semester.
- If you have multiple admissions offers, talk with a Health Professions Coach
- **Deadline to submit CASPA application varies by school (Earlier is better – we encourage submitting before September 1)**

**Quick Tips:**

*-**READ** and understand all application instructions for CASPA and individual programs you are applying to. Example: Instructions for Grade reporting varies based on +/- grades and study abroad credits/grades.*

*-Try to send any time sensitive application materials based on the earliest deadline for each school you are applying to. Example: If the deadline to submit any application materials is September 1<sup>st</sup>, try to finish all materials by that time, to prevent missing any deadlines.*

*-Pay attention to the interview cycle of every school you are applying to, times will vary based on when the application deadlines are.*

## Overview of Physician Assistant School Application Services and Resources

There is one application service that you will use to apply to most Physician Assistant Schools in the United States. [CASPA Online](#) application service will be used for all Texas Schools. Be sure to review the [CASPA Program Deadline Guide](#) to ensure you submit your application properly and on time. *\*Early applications are encouraged!*

### PA Schools Requiring Secondary Applications

Some health professions schools require secondary applications to be completed in addition to the primary application. **Applications are not considered complete until the secondary application is submitted.** Most secondary applications require an additional fee and the majority of secondary application fees are non-refundable. The program links provided within your CASPA application offer detailed information on each schools secondary application requirements, costs, and deadlines. *\*All Texas schools with the exception of UT-Southwestern require secondary applications.*

## Letters of Evaluation

Letters are key pieces to your professional school application. The number and type of letters vary from school to school. For additional details and guidelines check with CASPA or the application service you are using. Check out HPO's YouTube Channel for tips in a video on "Getting to Know Your Faculty Members."

- CASPA's [Letters of Reference instructions and FAQ's](#) to help applicants
- Review resources on [HPO's Pathways Page](#)

## Writing Your Personal Statement

You are welcome to come speak to a Pre-Health Professions Coach to discuss your ideas before starting your personal statement. We will help you brainstorm ideas and help you stay on track.

For the CASPA narrative and more information on the personal statement format, review this resource: [https://help.liasonedu.com/CASPA\\_Applicant\\_Help\\_Center/Starting\\_Your\\_CASPA\\_Application/Getting\\_Started\\_with\\_Your\\_CASPA\\_Application/00\\_CASPA\\_Quick\\_Start\\_Guide](https://help.liasonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Starting_Your_CASPA_Application/Getting_Started_with_Your_CASPA_Application/00_CASPA_Quick_Start_Guide)

Visit our [Application Resources Page](#) for a personal statement brainstorming worksheet, a list of action verbs, a list of words describing strengths and skills, and more!

## Interview Tips and Preparation

### Dress Professionally:

- View our [Dressing Guide](#)

### Practice Improving Your Interview Skills:

- Schedule a PA School Interview Prep Appointment with a Pre-Health Professions Coach
- You may find it helpful to reflect on how your interview went. Check out the Post Interview Self Evaluation Form on our [Application Resources](#) page.

## Prepare & Practice

Be prepared to discuss your strengths and weaknesses, obstacles and inspirations, current events and personal attributes. The following sample questions are meant to provide you with a better understanding of why the interviewer might be asking the questions that they do. By asking you certain questions, interviewers are attempting to gain a better understanding of your personality.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why do you want to be a Physician Assistant?
- What will you do if you are not accepted to PA school?
- What kind of community/volunteer work have you done?
- Compare the roles of a physician and a physician assistant?
- What characteristics does a good PA possess?
- What is the most rewarding experience of your life?
- Who is your favorite author?
- Have you worked while you have been in school?
- Have you had the opportunity to travel abroad?
- What accomplishment are you most proud of?
- Tell me about the most difficult period of your life. How did you deal with this?
- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What is the most difficult decision that you've had to make?
- How do you plan to finance your education?
- How are you going to decide which Physician Assistant school to attend?
- How do you handle adversity?
- Why should we pick you instead of someone else?
- When did you first decide that you wanted to pursue a career as a Physician Assistant? Was there a specific cause for your decision? Has anything happened since that time to strengthen or weaken your decision?
- Can you see other careers in which you could achieve the same goals or meet the same needs?
- What steps have you taken to find out more about a career as a Physician Assistant?
- Where would you like to start practicing?
- How do you study? How do you manage your time?
- What courses do you find most enjoyable, most difficult? Why?

- Describe your hobbies and interests.
- Describe your best/least favorite course at UT and why it falls into that category.
- Why did you choose \_\_\_\_\_ as your major?
- Are there any questions you would like to ask me?
- Describe a situation where you've worked with people from different backgrounds.
- What type of person do you enjoy being with? What type of person irritates you most and how have you dealt with these types of people?
- What about yourself would you most like the interviewer to know?
- Do you have any particular populations you would like to work with? Have you worked with this type of population in the past?
- How do you handle stress?
- How would you keep health care costs down?
- What is an HMO? / What do you know about managed care?
- What current PA news/events have you heard about or been following?
- What are the advantages and limitations that you see going into a career as a PA? (Be specific)
- What problems do you predict Physician Assistants will face in the next decade?

## Research Current Events

### **The Networker**

The PAEA Networker newsletter is published in a blog format  
<http://paeonline.org/welcome-to-the-new-paeonline-org/>

### **ADVOCACY**

Learn about policy and legislation affecting Physician Assistants  
<https://www.aapa.org/advocacy-central/>

### **JAAPA ONLINE**

The Journal of the American Academy of Physician Assistants  
<http://journals.lww.com/jaapa/pages/default.aspx>

### **The Texas Academy of Physician Assistants**

<http://www.tapa.org/>

### **American Academy of PAs**

Information about PA education and training, licensure, practice settings, and continuing education  
<https://www.aapa.org/advocacy-central/state-advocacy/state-licensing/>  
<https://www.aapa.org/career-central/become-a-pa/>

## Financing Your Physician Assistant Education

The cost of your PA education varies based on which PA program you choose to attend. You should start your financial aid research at the same time as you apply to a PA program. To evaluate the total cost of completing a program, you should request information on expenses from all schools you are thinking of attending, including tuition, books, supplies, travel and lodging for rotations, and exams. Once you have that information you will want to consider how you will afford your education. Read more at: <http://www.mypatraining.com/category/getting-into-pa-school/paying-for-pa-school>

***Looking for more information?***



Grants are similar to scholarships, and availability is based on resources and financial need. When you submit your FAFSA form, you will be considered for Pell grants. Also, check your place of employment, organizations and place of worship for any grants for which you may be eligible.  
<https://fafsa.ed.gov/>

The American Legion publishes “Need a Lift?” which contains information on loans and scholarships. The section on financial assistance is especially comprehensive for veterans and their dependents.  
<http://www.legion.org/>

<b>Add It Up!</b> – Don’t forget to include all Living Costs – Cost of Attendance is often more than tuition alone!	
Tuition:	
Rent:	
Food:	
Entertainment:	
Health Insurance:	

There are also several websites which provide information about financial aid, such as FinAid. Check with the U.S. Department of Education for information on financial aid.  
<http://www2.ed.gov/finaid/landing.jhtml>

SimpleTuition offers an online student loan comparison tool that allows students and their families to make informed borrowing decisions. SimpleTuition.com contains a large online resource center full of relevant articles and blogs dedicated to preparing, paying and saving for your education.  
<http://www.simpletuition.com/>

\*links listed under “looking for more information” are sourced from “Other Resources” section of SAAAPA financial aid resources website.

\*Once accepted, work with your PA school’s financial aid services.

Laboratory Fees:	
Car Insurance:	
Gas:	
Other Travel:	
Other Expenses:	

## Pre-Health Professions Services

**Applying to Professional School? We are here to guide you!**

**See an HP Peer Coach if you have questions in one or more of the following topic areas:**

- Going over pre-requisites ("What do I have to take to get into X school?")
- Shadowing opportunities ("how to find, importance of, what is")
- Leadership opportunities ("how to find, importance of, what are")
- Patient care experience ("how to find, importance of, what is")
- Clubs/organizations
- How to ask for letters of recommendation/evaluation
- Course load ("Is this reasonable to take in one semester?")
- Study habits/tutoring resources
- Test-taking strategies
- How to use HPO services

**See a Health Professions Coach for any of the following:**

**Pre-Health Professions Coaching Appointments**

Schedule a Pre-Health Professions Coaching session to meet with a Pre-Health Professions Coach. These appointments cover:

- Progress checks ("How am I doing?" "What else do I need to do?")
- Application Strategies/resources
- Choosing letter writers ("Who should I ask?")
- Academic turnaround ("I am worried about my GPA")
- Potential gap year planning/Post Bacc discussions
- Academic dishonesty/legal issues
- Reapplication strategies
- Study abroad timeline
- Alumni or Post-Bacc Student questions

### **To Q or Not to Q Discussions**

Not sure what to do? Thinking of dropping a course? Then you can schedule an appointment with a Pre-Health Professions Coach about deciding on Q dropping or the pass/fail option. Check out our To Q or Not to Q guide in this guide before your appointment.

### **Personal Statement Brainstorming**

Come speak to a Pre-Health Professions Coach to discuss your ideas before starting your personal statement. We will help you brainstorm ideas for the content of your essays. We have additional personal statement resources [here](#).

We no longer review personal statements in the Health Professions Office. However, we have developed a partnership with the University Writing Center for personal statements. The [University Writing Center](#) is an excellent resource to utilize when writing application essays. Their trained Writing Consultants can help you at any stage of writing, from getting started to making recommendations for a polished finished product.

### **Interview Prep Appointments**

Discuss interview strategies and practice a couple of interview questions with us! You will go over any questions you have and practice a couple questions of your choice with a Pre-Health Professions Coach in this 30-minute appointment. You will receive tips and feedback to help you in your professional school interview. Dressing up for your HP Interview Prep appointment is optional, if you would like feedback on your clothing choice and you want to test whether it will be comfortable, or they can just discuss appropriate attire with you.