

Physician Assistant Studies Program FAQs 2014 – 2015 Admissions Cycle

General Questions About The Physician Assistant Profession

1. **What is a physician assistant (PA)?** PAs, as defined by the American Academy of Physician Assistants (AAPA), are licensed health professionals who practice medicine as members of a team with their supervising physicians. PAs deliver a broad range of medical and surgical services to diverse populations in rural and urban settings. For more information please refer to www.aapa.org.
2. **What are some typical PA responsibilities?** The scope of a PA's responsibilities varies according to the practice scope of their supervising physician. Generally, a PA has a set of comprehensive responsibilities including, but not limited to: conducting physical exams, diagnosing and treating illnesses, ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests, prescribing medications, counseling patients on preventive health care, performing diagnostic and therapeutic procedures, and assisting in various types of surgery.
3. **Do you need board certification to practice as a PA?** Yes. After successfully completing an accredited PA program all graduates must take a comprehensive exam provided by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). Once a PA passes the PA National Certifying Exam (PANCE), they may apply for licensure within their state guidelines. For specific questions regarding the board exam, visit www.NCCPA.net.
4. **Can PA's prescribe medications?** As of 2008, all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Guam, allow physician assistants to legally write prescriptions for patients. Contact an individual state as to what medications a PA can prescribe.
5. **Can PA's perform surgery?** PAs can perform a variety of minor surgical procedures. These procedures vary depending on what is delegated to the PA from the supervising physician. In an operating room, a PA tends to function as a first assistant for a licensed surgeon. The physician assistant can also play an integral role in both the preoperative evaluation and the postoperative care of the surgical patient.
6. **How many PA's work in the US?** According to the NCCPA, as of 2011, approximately 97,000 PAs have been certified to practice in the United States.
7. **What's the average PA salary?** According to the 2010 AAPA Physician Assistant Census Survey, the median national salary for all PAs \$90,000. The median salary for a new graduate with less than one year experience is \$77,000. For more information on PA salaries please refer to www.aapa.org
8. **Where can I work once I am a PA?** PA's can work in a variety of settings including but not limited to: hospitals, clinics, operating rooms and the outpatient setting.

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1. **Does Rush offer a Bachelor's degree in Physician Assistant Studies?** No. Rush University's program is an entry-level Masters program. You must have a bachelor's degree prior to matriculation into the program.
2. **What is the minimum grade point average (GPA) requirement?** A minimum Total GPA and Science GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale, each is required for admissions consideration. Having a total and science GPA greater than 3.3, each, is considered highly competitive for admission to the program.
3. **Do I have to take the GRE or the MCAT?** To be a successful candidate for the physician assistant program at Rush University you will need to take the GRE within the last five years prior to application.

We do not accept MCAT or other examination scores in lieu of GRE scores.

4. **What minimum GRE score do I need for admission to the PA program?** A minimal combined Verbal and Quantitative score of 1,000, or 302 in the new scoring system, is required for interview and admission consideration. Having Verbal scores around 460, or 151 in the new scoring system, and Quantitative scores around 630, or 151 in the new scoring system, are considered minimally competitive.

This score must be attained at a single seating of the exam; we will not batch or accept partial scores if you take the GRE more than once.
5. **What GRE score is considered competitive for admission to the PA Program?** A combined score of 1,200, or 309 in the new scoring system, and above with Verbal scores around 500, or 154 in the new system, and Quantitative scores of 700, or 155 in the new system, is considered very competitive.
6. **How do I apply to the PA program?** The initial application process is completed through an online system, the Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA). The primary materials required for application to the PA program will be forwarded to Rush University via the CASPA application process. Go to <https://portal.caspaonline.org/> to begin the application process.
7. **When can I start applying to the PA program?** We start accepting applications from June 1st each year, on a rolling admissions basis. You can go to CASPA (<https://caspaonline.org>) to begin your application anytime after June 1st.
8. **What is the application deadline?** December 1st of each year for CASPA application materials. The deadline for providing all other application materials is February 1st of each year.
9. **What does a "rolling admissions" process mean?** Our rolling admissions process means that we offer seats in the class to successful candidates at each interview session, until the class is full. Once the available seats in the class are full, remaining interviews are for seats on a wait list. In a rolling admissions process, the class can fill before the end of the application cycle. In order to be maximally competitive in a rolling admissions process, it is to the applicant's advantage to submit all completed application components as early as possible.
10. **Do you accept online coursework?** Yes. Courses can be taken at any accredited 2- and 4- year college or university of higher education in the US, including online courses offered through such programs. We cannot accept course work taken through non-degree granting programs.

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- 11. What if I attend a degree program outside of the US?** All degrees obtained at a program outside of the US must be evaluated by an independent agency for course equivalence. The two agencies accepted by our program are: Educational Credential Evaluators (ECE) and World Education Services (WES).
- 12. Do I need to take the TOEFL?** If English is not your native language, you are required to take the TOEFL before submitting an application to the program. Please review the CHS policy on the TOEFL, at: www.rushu.rush.edu/pa-program, for information regarding this College standard.
- 13. Can I apply even if I have not finished all of the required pre-requisites?** The program does accept applications while some prerequisite course work is in progress. You must have four of the seven prerequisite courses completed at the time of application in order to be eligible for review.

On-going course work must be completed by the time the program starts, with a minimum final grade of a “C” or higher. Students who are accepted into the program but are unsuccessful in completing the prerequisites prior to matriculation will lose their seat in the class.

- 14. Can I apply if I have not yet completed my undergraduate degree?** You must have a Bachelor’s degree prior to matriculation into the program. You can begin to apply in your senior year of college, provided that you are a successful graduate by the time of the start of the PA Studies program in June.
- 15. Are there any additional materials that need to be submitted to Rush University for interview consideration?** Yes. You must have your GRE scores sent directly to Rush University in order to complete your application file. **The Rush University GRE code is: 3263.**

A supplemental application and supplemental fee is required **only if** you are offered an admissions interview. Information regarding the supplemental application will be available with the interview offer. The supplemental application fee is \$40, payable online by credit card.

- 16. Who should I ask to write my letters of recommendation?** We suggest that recommendation letters be written by professionals you have worked with who can speak to your medical and academic performance potential. At least one of the letters should be from an MD, PA, or other health professional, and one should be from a college or university instructor. References from family, friends, colleagues, or non-medical employers are not competitive for admission to the program.
- 17. How do I know if the courses I took meet the program’s prerequisite criteria?** If the title of the prerequisite course you took is the same as listed on our requirements, it should be fine.

We do not make any course acceptance determinations without a CASPA application on file. If we have any questions regarding a courses’ eligibility to meet our requirements, we will contact you after reviewing your completed CASPA application.

If we do contact you regarding your prerequisite coursework, we may ask you to provide us with a copy of the official course syllabus, course catalog description, and a copy of the lecture topic outline. It is a good idea to keep all undergraduate course materials prior to applying to PA school.

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18. **What are some guidelines regarding acceptable prerequisite course content?** Here is a list of the minimal expected content for the program's prerequisite courses. If the course you took/are considering include these topics, it should be acceptable:

- **Human Anatomy** – covers the structure and function of the major human body organ systems, including the musculoskeletal, nervous, circulatory, respiratory, digestive, urinary, endocrine and reproductive systems.
- **Human Physiology** – discusses basic biochemical principles, such as cytology, histology, immunology, and the function and interaction of the major organ systems of the human body.
- **Organic Chemistry** – discusses the theories, structures, and reactions of organic molecules, the properties of various functional organic chemical groups, the bonding and structure of organic molecules, and the reactions of aromatic and aliphatic hydrocarbons. Includes study of structure, nomenclature, properties and reactions of alcohols and phenols, aldehydes and ketones, carboxylic acids and their derivatives, amines, polymers, and biomolecules.
- **Biochemistry** – discusses the relation of molecular structures to the processes found in living organisms such as kinetics, enzymatic reactions, metabolic pathway functions, and the genetic code. Includes the structure of amino acids, nucleotides, lipids, and sugars, and their corresponding macromolecular structures, such as proteins, nucleic acids, cell membranes, and polysaccharides.
- **Microbiology** – covers the biology of microorganisms - bacteria, fungi, protozoa, and viruses - that impact human health. Content covers the metabolism, genetics, identification, control, physiology, host defense, and the relationship of microorganisms to health and disease.
- **Psychology/Behavioral Sciences** – covers the major principles of behavioral science, including factors influencing behavior, personality, and mental processes, and the science of psychological investigation. A wide range of courses that studies the human mind and/or the psychosocial dynamic may be accepted towards meeting this course requirement.
- **Statistics** – discusses statistical reasoning and methodologies. Content should include methods for data analysis, correlation and regression, sampling and experimental design, basic probability theory, normal and binomial distributions, hypothesis testing, and confidence intervals for means, proportions, and regression parameters. A wide range of courses that discusses statistical methodologies are acceptable towards meeting this course requirement.

19. **Do you accept substitutions for the prerequisite courses?** In general, no. For example, we do not accept vertebrate or mammalian anatomy or physiology as a substitute for a human-system based course. We also do not accept combined organic and biochemistry courses, you must take one course of each. Nor do we accept molecular biology for biochemistry.

However, we do recognize that there may be a wide variety of names for courses among undergraduate programs and we will consider the eligibility of a course once we have a completed CASPA application on file for the candidate.

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20. **Will you pre-screen my qualifications for admissions eligibility?** Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to offer individualized pre-admissions counseling. We also cannot make any definitive eligibility decisions without an official CASPA record on file for the applicant.

Candidates should review all our application information carefully to determine their admissions eligibility before applying to the program.

21. **Do you accept AP or CLEP credits towards fulfilling the prerequisite courses?** No. We do not accept any advance placement courses towards meeting any of the prerequisite requirements.
22. **Do you have standards regarding the currency of prerequisite courses?** Yes. All prerequisites should be taken within seven years prior to applying to the program. The following courses **must be taken within seven years of applying to the program**: human anatomy, human physiology, biochemistry, and microbiology.

Applicants to the 2014-2015 admission cycle should have prerequisite courses taken in 2008 and later.

23. **How many hours of healthcare experience do I need to apply?** A minimum of 1,000 hours of hands-on, direct patient contact healthcare experience is required for admissions consideration. Greater than 2,500 hours of patient contact healthcare experience is considered competitive.

The nature of your healthcare experience and your interaction with PAs and MDs in the healthcare setting should be clearly documented in your CASPA application.

24. **What does “hands-on, direct patient care experience” mean? What type of experiences count?** Having as much experience as possible taking care of patients and working with MDs and PAs in a clinical environment is the best way for someone to understand what a PA is and does.

There are many acceptable types of direct patient care experiences available. Some examples include (but are not limited to) being a registered nurse, a certified nursing assistant, an emergency medical technician, an emergency room technician, a certified medical assistant, etc. The most important considerations are that you are caring for patients in a healthcare environment and you are working with MDs and PAs as much as possible in that setting.

25. **What types of experiences do not count towards the “hands on, direct patient care experience”**

The following are examples of experiences that will not count as direct, hands on patient care experiences: Phlebotomist, Pharmacy Technician, Interpreter, Medical Scribe, Pharmacy Technician, Optical Technician, Dental Hygienist/Technician. Clerical roles, or experiences gained while a student-in-training in any profession do not count. Experiences that provide supportive care only, for example patient feeding, transporting, comforting, also do not count as direct patient care experience.

While these are important clinical roles and professions, they will not help the candidate better understand the role of being a PA.

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26. **Are there any other factors to consider when I look for healthcare experience?** Yes, here are some additional factors to consider regarding the healthcare experience requirement:
- The experience should entail working with or shadowing PAs and MDs in a healthcare setting as much as possible.
 - The healthcare experience must be done within seven years prior to application to the program, from 2008 and later. Healthcare hours accrued before 2008 will not be considered towards admissions
 - Healthcare hours attained while in a clinical training program – for example, patient contact hours during nursing or medical school – **do not** count towards the requirement
27. **Is working with or shadowing PAs required for admission?** Yes. It is essential to understand the role of PAs by working with or shadowing PAs. You must have documented working or shadowing experience with PAs in order to be considered for admission to the program. The more PA contact experience hours you have, the more competitive your application file.
28. **Does the PA program offer assistance in finding clinical work or shadowing experience?** No. We cannot offer assistance to candidates looking for clinical or shadowing experience.
29. **Are there resources to help me find patient contact work or PA shadowing experience?** Maybe. There are many factors involved in finding PA shadowing experience, such as your personal history, your professional qualifications, your schedule, etc. While no referral resource exists to find clinical work or PA shadowing, the IL Academy of Physician Assistants (IAPA) may be able to help you find PAs in the state who are willing to help PA candidates. Contact the IAPA at: www.illinoispa.org/ for more information.
30. **Once I submit all of my application materials, how long before I hear if I will receive an interview?** It can take up to six to eight weeks after all your application is received (including all supplemental materials) to be notified if you will be invited to interview at the University.
31. **How many PA students are accepted each year?** Our typical class size is about 30 students.
32. **Who can I contact to see if all of my application materials have been received?** Contact the PA program at pa_admissions@rush.edu with any questions regarding your application.
33. **Do you give preference to Illinois residents?** No. Rush University is a private institution and residency status is not a factor of consideration in admission decisions or tuition costs.
34. **Can I send my application materials directly to the program?** No. All application materials must be submitted directly through CASPA. Contact CASPA at <https://portal.caspaonline.org/> with questions regarding their application process.
35. **What is the profile of the typical successful applicant to the Rush University Physician Assistant Studies Program?** Based on the demographics for the Class of 2016: the median Total GPA was 3.49 and the median Science GPA was 3.49; the median total GRE score was 1170/304; the median number of healthcare experience hours was 2,482. The majority students in the program are from the Midwest region, with members of the classes from the following states: Arizona, California, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Pennsylvania.

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1. **Can I work while completing the PA program?** No. The PA program is an intensive full-time curriculum. The rigorous class and study schedule needed to succeed in the program makes working at an outside job impossible at any time during the program. For this reason, students in the program also cannot participate in any student work-study programs.
2. **Can I attend the PA Studies Program on a part-time basis?** No. We do not offer a part-time or decelerated curriculum.
3. **What is the PA Program's Mission?** The mission of the Rush University Physician Assistant Studies Program is to train qualified general and advanced practice physician assistants to practice medicine with competence, professionalism, and compassion driven by academic excellence in scholarship, research, and a spirit of service to the community.
4. **Is the PA program Accredited by the ARC-PA?** The Rush University Physician Assistant Studies program has received provisional accreditation through March 2014. We will update our website with our full accreditation status upon notification from the ARC-PA in March, 2014.
5. **What does provisional accreditation mean?** For students in the PA program, provisional and full accreditation means the same thing. Graduates of provisionally accredited programs have all the same rights and privileges as graduates of fully accredited program and can sit for the national certification examination and apply for state license to practice.
6. **How many months is Rush's PA program?** The innovative curriculum is 33-months long. The program will utilize the extensive resources available at Rush University to provide an excellent training experience. The 12-month didactic phase includes lecture and small group discussion to prepare students for clinical rotations. The unique, 21-month clinical training portion of the program prepares students to practice as primary care providers, while providing a one of a kind immersion experience in an advanced clinical practice.
7. **What is the purpose of the third year clinical rotations?** The third year rotations are an opportunity for students to refine their patient care skills through an intense rotation experience. The addition of nine-months of advanced rotations will give the student more patient management experience in a single, focused area of practice, prior to graduation.

Current areas for advanced clinical training include: orthopedics, cardiothoracic surgery, vascular surgery, emergency medicine, internal medicine, pulmonary and critical care medicine, interventional radiology, urology, neurosurgery, geriatrics, and physical medicine and rehabilitation.
8. **Will I be taking classes with other students at Rush?** Yes. As part of the core curriculum, you will be taking a number of classes with a variety of other students from the College of Health Sciences. The majority of classes in the didactic curriculum are dedicated to the PA program's students.
9. **Will I be on rotation with students from other programs?** Yes. During clinical rotations, you will function as a member of a healthcare team, and in many rotations you will be working along side students from a number of disciplines, such as medicine, nursing, as well as students from other training institutions.
10. **What is the estimated cost of the program?** Please refer to the Rush University website for program costs. <http://www.rushu.rush.edu/catalog/tuitionfinaid/tuitionfees.html>

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11. **How do I apply for financial aid?** Please visit: <http://www.rushu.rush.edu/finaid/> for further information regarding financial aid.
12. **Are there scholarships available for the Physician Assistant program?** Rush University and the College of Health Sciences offers limited scholarship awards on a competitive basis to students in the Physician Assistant Studies program. Criteria for awards include factors such as undergraduate academic performance, scholarly activity, and being from an under represented minority group in healthcare. The College of Health Sciences awarded approximately \$121,000 in scholarship funds in 2013.

For more information regarding scholarships, contact the College of Health Sciences Admissions Office at chs_admissions@rush.edu. Additionally, there are several financial aid options available for students in the program. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Affairs at: financial_affair@rush.edu or (312) 942-6584
13. **Does Rush University have dormitories?** The university does not have on campus dormitories, however there are a number of local housing options available including on-campus housing. For more information contact The Office of Student Affairs at (312) 942-6302 or visit the Rush University website.
14. **Do you accept transfer students? Do you offer advanced standing to students based on prior educational or professional experience?** No. The PA program curriculum must be completed in its entirety at Rush. We do not offer advanced standing or transfer credits into the program, regardless of prior educational or work experience.
15. **How often do classes begin?** We admit only one class of students each year. Classes start in June of each year and new students cannot enroll in the program once the class has started.
16. **What are your program's NCCPA board exam pass rates?** Our inaugural Class of 2013 had a 100% first time pass rate on the NCCPA board exam.
17. **Are your graduates employed?** All 18 graduates from the first class secured employment within 6 months of graduation. 9 are currently employed at Rush.
18. **Who do I speak to if I have more questions?** We are happy to talk with you anytime if reviewing our website does not answer your questions. You can call us at 312-563-3234 or email us at pa_admissions@rush.edu. If you have questions regarding Rush University and its general policies and procedures, you may call the College of Health Sciences Admissions Office at: 312-942-7120.

Thank You for Your Interest in the Rush University PA Studies Program