RUSH UNIVERSITY

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Physician Assistant Studies Program FAQs
2013-2014 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 in integral role 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.

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.

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: World Education Services (WES) and Educational Credential Evaluators (ECE).

12. **Do I need to take the TOEFL?** Anyone whose native language is not English is 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 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 send 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 friends, colleagues, or non-medical employers are not competitive for admissions consideration.

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.

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

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. **Will 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.

20. **Will you review my application 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 currency requirements related to the 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.

23. **How many hours of healthcare experience do I need to apply?** A minimum of 1000 hours of hands-on, direct patient contact healthcare experience is required for admissions consideration. Greater than 1500 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 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.

Some examples of experiences that will not count as direct, hands on patient care experiences include: phlebotomist, pharmacy technician, or emergency room scribe. While these are important clinical roles, they will not help the candidate better understand the role of being a PA. Volunteer experiences that provide supportive care only – for example, feeding, transporting, comforting - also does not count as direct patient care experience.

25. **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.

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. Healthcare hours older than seven years 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. **Does the PA program offer assistance in finding clinical work or shadowing experience?** No. We cannot offer assistance to candidates looking for clinical experience.

28. **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.

29. **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.

30. **How many PA students are accepted each year?** Our typical class size is about 30 students.

31. **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.

32. **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.

33. **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.

34. **What is the profile of the typical successful applicant to the Rush University Physician Assistant Studies Program?** Based on the Class of 2015: the average Total GPA was 3.50 and the average Science GPA was 3.45; the average total GRE score was 1150; the median number of healthcare experience hours was 2,830. The majority students in the program are from the Midwest region, with members of the classes from the following states: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, New Jersey and New York, and South Carolina.

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