



SMU PRE-HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Suggested Pre-Physician Assistant (PA) Plan

Note: Some science courses may be completed in summer terms.



Individual program requirements may change at any time, and this plan may not reflect the most current information. It is the student's responsibility to review, understand, follow, and remain [up-to-date](#) with the policies, guidelines, and requirements (including pre-requisite coursework) of each individual PA program and CASPA (Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants). Based on significant variations in program requirements, students should compile a list of potential programs (for future application) and research program requirements before finalizing course selections.

This plan could vary depending on the major chosen. Consult your advisor and check individual degree plans for suggested sequencing of courses. **Grades of C (not C-) or better** are required to meet specific science (and math) pre-requisites for admission to PA school. A few programs require a B or better. [Consult with your advisor before advancing to the next level course.](#) Science pre-requisites include courses coded as Biology (including Anatomy & Physiology), Chemistry, Physics, and Math (including Statistics). A few PA programs may continue to use the PA-CAT (Physician Assistant College Admissions Test) instead of the GRE exam. [See additional details on the second page.](#)

1st Year Fall

1st Year Spring

CHEM	1303	General Chemistry I		CHEM	1304	General Chemistry II
CHEM	1113	General Chemistry I Lab		CHEM	1114	General Chemistry I Lab
BIOL	1301	Introductory Biology I		BIOL	1302	Introductory Biology II
BIOL	1101	Introductory Biology I Lab		BIOL	1102	Introductory Biology II Lab
DISC	1312	Discernment and Discourse (UC 2016)		DISC	1313	Discernment and Discourse (UC 2016)
WRTR	1312	Introduction to Academic Writing (CC 2020)		WRTR	1313	Writing and Critical Reasoning (CC 2020)


2nd Year Fall

2nd Year Spring

CHEM	3371	Organic Chemistry I		STAT	2331	Statistics
CHEM	3117	Organic Chem. I Lab		PSYC	1300	Introduction to Psychology
BIOL	3304	Genetics				

3rd Year Fall

3rd Year Spring

BIOL	2441	Anatomy & Physiology I (see notes below)		BIOL	2442	Anatomy & Physiology II (see notes below)
BIOL	3370	Microbiology				
BIOL	3170	Microbiology Lab	GRE 			

Students can choose any major, however, the most competitive applicants will have completed a **significant number** of upper-level Biology courses beyond the minimum requirements listed above. The following advanced-level courses are strongly recommended (or required) by various PA programs: Immunology, Cell Biology, Human Physiology, Histology, Molecular Biology, Virology, Biochemistry, and Neuroscience. Popular majors for students interested in PA programs include APHM (Applied Physiology and Health Management), Biological Sciences, B.A., Psychology, and Health & Society.

Anatomy & Physiology (8 credit hours) is generally required by most PA programs. Consult individual PA programs to determine the appropriate courses to meet this specific requirement. APSM/BIOL 2441 and 2442 are the Anatomy and Physiology courses offered at SMU that are most widely accepted by PA programs. **Biology majors** should consider additional upper-level (3000+) courses offered in the biology department to meet the degree requirement.

While the APSM/BIOL 2441/2442 sequence has been accepted by multiple PA programs, it is the student's responsibility to confirm acceptable coursework and provide any necessary documentation if requested.

Students pursuing the B.S. in Biological Sciences are required to complete additional coursework including Calculus I, Physics I & II, and Biochemistry. Biochemistry will require the completion of Organic Chemistry I & II. Consult the websites of individual programs for PA pre-requisite requirements and meet with a faculty advisor for requirements to complete the degree.



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Behavioral and social science courses including Psychology, Sociology, and Anthropology are also recommended. Some programs require up to six credit hours. Medical Terminology and Pharmacology are often recommended (or required) but are not offered at SMU.

Students MUST refer to individual PA programs for specific pre-requisite courses. Some courses are required while others are strongly recommended. Some programs require that all pre-requisites are completed at the time of application while other programs will accept applications with one (or two) pre-requisites in progress. **Currently, Biochemistry is not required by most programs, but this may change before the time of application. The addition of the PA-CAT by more programs may increase the number of programs requiring Biochemistry.** The PA-CAT covers subjects including, *Anatomy, Physiology, General Biology, Biochemistry, General and Organic Chemistry, Microbiology, Behavioral Sciences, Genetics, and Statistics.*

It is the student's responsibility to understand the specific requirements for individual programs. Most PA programs strongly recommend or require direct patient care (DPC) hours. Refer to individual programs for the required (or recommended) number of direct patient care hours (DPC) and other types of healthcare experiences (HCE), including shadowing, expected. Many programs require specific documentation of experiences. Consult the websites of individual programs for specific documentation requirements.

Pre-PA students should plan to apply using CASPA (Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants) <https://caspa.liasoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login> and take the GRE no later than April of the year they intend to apply (usually May of the junior year/Year 3). CASPA opens yearly in April and **early application (by June) is recommended.**

The GRE is offered multiple times during the year. Visit [ETS-GRE](#) for more information.

Although not an exhaustive list, *below are examples of experiences that may count as PCE (patient care experience) or HCE (healthcare experience).* For most PA programs, the most relevant experiences include working directly "hands on" with patients (DPC).

CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant)	Medical assistant
EMT-B (Emergency Medical Technician)	Medic or medical corpsman
EMT-P (Paramedic)	Medical Scribe (not considered DPC by some programs)
Emergency Room Technician	Patient care technician
Hospital/Hospice (or clinic) volunteer with direct patient care	Phlebotomist

Important Steps for Pre-PA Students

1. Compile a list of schools - Is the PA-CAT required or recommended? Is the GRE required or recommended?
2. Research individual programs – What pre-requisites are required?
3. Complete pre-requisites
4. Seek DPC (Direct Patient Care) and Healthcare Experiences (HCE) – How many hours are recommended or required?
5. Document experiences, including shadowing
6. Attend virtual or in-person PA program fairs/information sessions
7. Take the GRE or PA-CAT (March/April in the year of application)
8. Apply using CASPA

Application Timeline (begin process in January of the year of application) for PA School

1. Create a CASPA account - Applications open in early April for submission
2. Request 3 Letters of Recommendation (minimum) and craft essays (Personal Statement and Life Experiences)
3. Request transcripts
4. **Submit applications early – by June** (however deadlines extend to September)
5. Register for CASPer, if required - <https://takecasper.com/> Computer-Based Assessment for Sampling Personality Characteristics and submit results
6. Submit Supplemental Applications
7. Prepare for Interviews (usually during the fall of Year 4 or year of application)

Important Resources

- [National PA Organizations](#)
- [Six Steps to Become a PA](#)
- [PA Education Association](#)
- [American Academy of Physician Assistants](#)
- [AAPA Student Academy](#)
- [Texas Academy of Physician Assistants](#)
- [CASPA Quick Start Guide](#)