A Physician Assistant (PA) is a licensed health professional who practices medicine under the supervision of a physician. Working as members of the healthcare team, PAs take medical histories, examine and treat patients, order and interpret laboratory tests and x-rays, make diagnoses, and prescribe medications.

PAs must attend a specialized medical training program associated with a medical school that includes classroom studies and clinical experience. An academic degree and/or certificate is awarded upon graduation. Admission to PA programs is highly competitive. Admission requirements to these programs vary from a high school diploma to a bachelor’s degree.

Training programs are generally two years in length. PA training begins with a classroom or pre-clinical phase that lasts nine to twelve months. Students then spend about a year doing clinical work in areas such as family practice, inpatient medicine, general surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine, internal medicine, psychiatry, and pediatrics.

## Lower Division Subjects Required by Most U.S. Physician Assistant Schools

| **Required Subjects** | **Required Coursework** |
| --- | --- |
| One year of Biology | Biology 6 & 7 |
| One year of Inorganic (General) Chemistry | Chemistry 101 & 102 |
| One semester of Anatomy | Anatomy 1 |
| One semester of Physiology | Physiology 1 |
| One semester of Microbiology | Microbiology 1 or 20 |
| Math | Requirements vary by campus. Some schools require one semester of Statistics and others require a semester of Calculus. Your undergraduate major may also determine your choice of Math requirements. |

## Lower Division Subjects Required by Most U.S. Physician Assistant Schools

| **Required Subjects** | **Required Coursework** |
| --- | --- |
| One semester of Public Speaking/Speech | Speech 101 |
| Computer Skills | Basic computer knowledge is necessary for many physical therapy schools. |
| Two courses in Social Sciences | Psychology, Sociology, ethnic studies, women’s studies, cultural anthropology |
| One year of college level Foreign Language | Spanish is preferred |

Note: All courses should be taken for a letter grade, not Credit/No Credit. Major requirements vary, check with the individual campus for their specific requirements.

## Choosing an Undergraduate Major

For students planning to obtain a bachelor’s degree prior to applying to PA program, “Pre-Physician Assistant” is not a major at universities. You should give careful consideration to your choice of major and select an area of study that interests you. However, students should select an appropriate major that could lead to an alternative career, if necessary.

Students applying to Physician Assistant programs need to plan carefully and complete the Physician Assistant requirements. Those who plan to obtain a bachelor’s degree must also complete the requirements for their undergraduate major and the general education required by the undergraduate transfer institution.

## Physician Assistant Selection Criteria

* Some schools require the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) or the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT).
* Completion of the prerequisite coursework.
* GPA in terms of overall college grades and science grades are a major factor in the selection process. Most Physician Assistant programs require above a 3.0 GPA.
* Demonstration of hands-on health-related experience.
* Community service/leadership
* Letters of recommendation from practicing physicians or physician assistants.
* Interviews with program faculty and selection committee members.

## Salary Information

In 2021, the California wage was $137,923 annually ([labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/).](https://labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov/data/oes-employment-and-wages.html#OES) The median is the point at which half of the workers earn more and half earn less.

## Recommended Websites

| **Website** | **Website address** |
| --- | --- |
| Accreditation Review Commission on Education for Physician Assistant, Inc. (ARC-PA) | [arc-pa.org/](http://www.arc-pa.org/) |
| American Academy of Physician Assistants | [aapa.org/](https://www.aapa.org/) |
| National Commission of Certification of Physicians Assistants | [nccpa.net/](http://www.nccpa.net/) |
| State of California, Physician Assistant Board | [www.pab.ca.gov/](https://www.pab.ca.gov/) |

## Accredited California Physician Assistant School Websites

| **Website** | **Website address** |
| --- | --- |
| Charles Drew University (M) | [cdrewu.edu/](https://www.cdrewu.edu/) |
| Loma Linda University (M) | [alliedhealth.llu.edu/academics/physician-assistant](https://alliedhealth.llu.edu/academics/physician-assistant) |
| Marshall B. Ketchum University | [ketchum.edu/pa\_studies](http://www.ketchum.edu/pa_studies) |
| Samuel Merritt College (M) | <https://www.samuelmerritt.edu/programs/master-physician-assistant> |
| San Joaquin Valley College (A,B,M) | [sjvc.edu/programs/medical-and-dental?discontinued=Physicians%20Assistant](https://www.sjvc.edu/programs/medical-and-dental?discontinued=Physicians%20Assistant) |
| Stanford University School of Medicine (C,A,M) | [med.stanford.edu/pa.html](http://med.stanford.edu/pa.html) |
| Touro University – California College of Health Sciences (M) | [cehs.tu.edu/paprogram/index.html](http://cehs.tu.edu/paprogram/index.html) |
| University of California, Davis (M) | [ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/welcome/index.html](https://www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/welcome/index.html) |
| USC Keck School of Medicine (M) | [keck.usc.edu/](https://keck.usc.edu/) |
| Western University of Health Sciences (M) | [prospective.westernu.edu/physician-assistant/welcome-14/](http://prospective.westernu.edu/physician-assistant/welcome-14/) |

Credentials Awarded: A= Associate’s Degree, B =Bachelor’s Degree, C= Certificate of Completion, M =Master’s Degree.

Note: Information is subject to change without notice. Check with the individual campus for the most up-to-date information. *Web site links are provided as a convenience and for informational purposes only; they do not constitute an endorsement or an approval by the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) and/or Los Angeles Pierce College (LAPC) of any of the products, services or opinions of the corporation or organization or individual. The Los Angeles Community College District and/or Los Angeles Pierce College bears no responsibility for the accuracy, legality or content of the external site or for that of subsequent links. Contact the external site for answers to questions regarding its content.*