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Pre-Pathologists’ Assistant Track Fundamentals

Mercer University
Office of Academic & Advising Services
Academic and Advising Services appreciates your input regarding this publication. Readers who note errors or inconsistencies in this handbook are urged to notify Dr. Carol Bokros (Bokros_c@mercer.edu) so that the appropriate corrections can be made.

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Introduction

1. THE PATHOLOGISTS’ ASSISTANT

Pathologists’ assistants (PathA’s) are allied health professionals who provide pathology-related services under the direction and supervision of a pathologist (American Association of Pathologists’ Assistants; http://www.pathassist.org/?page=AboutUs_WhatIsAPA). Students who wish to become pathologists’ assistants in the U.S. must complete a 2-year pathologists’ assistant program accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS: https://www.naacls.org/Find-a-Program.aspx?program=PATH%20A). These graduate programs require completion of a relevant bachelor’s degree before matriculation (e.g., Biology, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, or Chemistry).

Graduates of an accredited program must then pass a certification examination administered by the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP; http://www.ascp.org/Board-of-Certification/GetCertified#tabs-1). To maintain their certification status, Path.A.’s must submit documentation of the completion of 40 hours of continuing medical education every two years (http://www.pathassist.org/?page=CME_Cert).

Currently, only one state requires state licensure to practice as a pathologists’ assistant (http://www.pathassist.org/?AboutUs_StateFedLaw), but students are advised to keep checking the Web site of the American Association of Pathologists’ Assistants and/or the Web sites of the states in which they are interested in practicing for licensure regulations.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics currently groups pathologists’ assistants with physician assistants. According to this government body, the median income of a physician assistant in 2015 was over $101,000 and there is a positive outlook for the field: http://www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes291071.htm. The Web site www.explorehealthcareers.org reports the mean salary for PathA in the U.S. to be $90,000, but this depends on location and setting (http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/Career/119/Pathologists_Assistant).

2. BUILDING A STRONG GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION

Mercer University undergraduate students who plan to pursue a career as a pathologists’ assistant are considered to be on the “pre-pathologists’ assistant” track.

Pre-PathA students must plan ahead carefully in order to create a competitive application “portfolio” during their undergraduate years. This means taking the appropriate coursework, performing well academically, and participating in appropriate extracurricular activities that will develop the skills and characteristics required of a successful pathologists’ assistant program applicant. Students should bear in mind that pathologists’ assistant programs are looking for individuals with the following characteristics:

- a good base of knowledge about pathologists’ assistants and the health care field in general;
- a strong academic background with a firm foundation in the sciences;
- competitive Graduate Record Examination or Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) scores;
- good reasoning ability and strong critical thinking skills;
- effective team-work and interpersonal skills;
- excellent communication skills (both written and oral);
- integrity and high ethical standards; and
- a positive attitude, able to function effectively under stress.

There are also minimum technical standards that applicants must adhere to in order to be qualified for the PathA field (e.g., proficiency in observation, motor skills, intellectual/ conceptual/ quantitative abilities, and behavioral/emotional/ social abilities required for the job).
3. DEVELOPING A BACK-UP PLAN

Because the pre-pathologists’ assistant track is challenging and graduate schools are so selective, all pre-pathologists’ assistant students should **develop an alternative plan to implement in the event that adequate progress is not made on their track** (i.e., GPA’s below 3.5) or acceptance to PathA school is not achieved.

An effective back-up plan is one that addresses any perceived “weak spots” in an applicant’s portfolio. For example, it would be appropriate for a student with GPA’s below 3.0 to take more classes and earn high grades before applying again to PathA school, while a student with high grades and very little health care experience should spend more time working or volunteering in a clinical setting before applying again. Students without a strong desire to follow this career path should consider a complete change of career goals; they may investigate their options using the Web site, [https://explorehealthcareers.org/](https://explorehealthcareers.org/), and consult the advisors in the Center for Career & Professional Development (Mercer-Macon).

**Pre-Professional Advising and Resources**

4. ACADEMIC & PRE-PROFESSIONAL ADVISING AT MERCER UNIVERSITY

**Academic Advising for the Degree Plan.** Like all Mercer University students, each pre-health professions student at Mercer-Macon has an assigned **primary academic advisor who should be the first stop for most advising questions** (first-year students have their UNV 101 instructor advising them during their first year, and all students who have declared their major have a major advisor). This handbook provides the answers to common health vocations advising questions, and familiarity with this information is part of the training for advisors at Mercer University.

**Pre-Health Professions Track Advising.** Pre-health professions students enrolled in one of the traditional undergraduate programs on the Macon campus also have access to a secondary advisor for all questions pertaining to their pre-professional tracks, Dr. Carol Bokros, who is the Assistant Director of Pre-Health Professions Programs. Her office is in the Office of Academic and Advising Services in the Penfield Hall Annex on the Macon campus (**Bokros_c@mercer.edu**).

Dr. Bokros provides support for pre-health professions students and their advisors through information sessions, workshops, and materials available on the Mercer Web site, emails, and a Facebook fanpage ("MercerPreHealth").

Students must read this handbook before making an appointment. Students may make (and change) their own appointments using the Starfish program, which is accessible through MyMercer. ([https://my.mercer.edu/](https://my.mercer.edu/)).

**Career Advising.** The Center for Career & Professional Development on the Macon campus offers advising for students who are investigating careers in the various health-related professions, students who are preparing for interviews with professional schools or potential employers, and students requiring alternative career advising ([https://career.mercer.edu/](https://career.mercer.edu/)). See also the document in Appendix B, Internet Resources for Exploring Careers in Health Care.

**The Orangeprint.** Students are encouraged to use Mercer’s college and career-planning guide, The Orangeprint, to help them identify their strengths, define their goals, and make a plan to achieve them; [https://aas.mercer.edu/for-students/orangeprint.cfm](https://aas.mercer.edu/for-students/orangeprint.cfm)
5. UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATION WITH PRE-HEALTH STUDENTS

Email: Students should note that official Mercer business is always conducted on Mercer University email, and so must check their MU email account regularly or forward their Mercer email to their personal email account.

Social Network: Students who subscribe to the social networking site Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/pages/MercerPreHealth/365563379357) are encouraged to become a fan of the MercerPreHealth fanpage to receive electronic reminders about events and deadlines. Note that this site is linked to Twitter, so students who subscribe to Twitter will receive this information via “tweets”.

Mercer Science & Pre-Health Google Calendar. All pre-health advising events, pre-health and science-related student organization events, and science department seminars and events are listed on the Mercer University Science & Pre-Health Google Calendar available at http://tinyurl.com/ns95vb7.

Your Online Presence. Pre-Pathologists’ Assistant students are cautioned to maintain a respectable online presence, being mindful that their posts and activities could have a negative impact on their acceptance to Pathologists’ Assistant school and/or on their professional lives in the future. See https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/article/how-social-media-can-affect-your-application/ and http://thedo.osteopathic.org/2011/06/writing-on-the-wall-crude-behavior-online-can-jeopardize-a-students-future/.

6. THE PRE-HEALTH PROFESSIONS RESOURCE LIBRARIES

Two library collections are maintained on the Mercer-Macon campus for pre-health students: the Pre-Health Collection in the Tarver Library and a smaller Pre-Health Resource Library in the Academic Resource Center. The Pre-Health Collection in Tarver library contains materials about the health-related professions in general, entrance exams, personal statements, and professional school interviews. Also included are works of fiction and non-fiction that encourage students to consider various aspects of the practice of medicine. This collection is located on the first floor of Tarver; a content listing can be found on the Web site at http://libraries.mercer.edu/tarver/subject-guides/pre-health/pre-health. The Pre-Health Resource Library includes materials on study skills, test-taking, and preparation for standardized tests. Students are free to use these materials any time during ARC hours, but may not remove them from the ARC.

Academic Preparation for Pathologists’ Assistant Graduate Programs

7. MINIMUM REQUIRED COURSEWORK FOR ADMISSION TO PATHOLOGISTS’ ASSISTANT PROGRAMS

All PathA graduate programs in the U.S. require the completion of a bachelor’s degree in any discipline plus the completion of at least a one year of general chemistry, one year of organic chemistry, one semester of biochemistry, one year of general biology, college-level mathematics, and other biology coursework such as anatomy, physiology, and microbiology. Other admission requirements and recommendations vary by program. Pre-PathA students must investigate the different programs available and make themselves aware of the particular requirements for the programs in which they are interested (see next section).

Pass/Fail, AP, CLEP, and Audit Credit. Students should consult the Web sites and admissions personnel of the individual PathA programs they are interested for their policies regarding AP credit, CLEP credit, audited courses, and courses graded on a pass/fail basis.
8. THE IMPORTANCE OF MATHEMATICS TO THE PRE-HEALTH TRACKS

**Math Placement.** To enroll in the first semester of general chemistry (CHM 111) and/or introductory physics (PHY 141), a student must demonstrate a minimum mathematics competency that is equivalent to pre-calculus (MAT 133) or above; this competency may be demonstrated through credit (college, AP, or CLEP) for MAT 133 or its equivalent, or through a score of 15 or higher on the math placement test.

Information about the math placement test can be found online here: [http://aas.mercer.edu/for-students/placement-exams/](http://aas.mercer.edu/for-students/placement-exams/).

**CLEP Exam for Pre-calculus.** A student who scores 50% or higher on the CLEP pre-calculus exam may submit his or her test official transcript to the Mercer registrar and receive MAT 133 credit. Information about the CLEP pre-calculus exam can be found here: [http://clep.collegeboard.org/exam/precalculus](http://clep.collegeboard.org/exam/precalculus).

9. ACADEMIC MAJORS AND MINORS FOR PRE-PATHOLOGISTS’ ASSISTANT STUDENTS

All but one of the accredited PathA programs in the U.S. require applicants to complete a bachelor’s degree before they matriculate, and they all express a preference for degrees in one of the biological or chemical fields. Pre-pathologists’ assistant students must investigate their graduate school choices early in their undergraduate careers to learn the requirements of their preferred graduate programs. A pre-PathA student who chooses to major in a non-science field should bear in mind that most PathA programs require a year of general biology, a year of general chemistry, a year of organic chemistry, microbiology, and biochemistry, so they must find a way to fit those classes into their academic program as well as their degree requirements. Students who do not major in Biology or Chemistry but complete the courses listed here may claim the Biology and Chemistry minors:

**Chemistry Minor:** While pre-pathologists’ assistant is not an academic major or minor, those students who complete 16 credit hours in chemistry (with 6 or more hr in courses numbered 200 or higher in residence at Mercer) fulfill the Mercer University College of Liberal Arts requirements for a minor in chemistry.

**Biology Minor:** Students who complete 17 credit hours in biology (with 6 or more hr in courses numbered 300 or higher in residence at Mercer: BMB 465, BIO 303) fulfill the CLA’s requirements for a minor in biology.

10. SCHEDULING OF PRE-PATHOLOGISTS’ ASSISTANT COURSEWORK

Scheduling of the core science coursework for the pre-pathologists’ assistant track is shown in Appendix A. These plans chart the minimum science coursework for students on a pre-pathologists’ assistant track over the four years that students are expected to be at Mercer University. (Remember, students must check the admission requirements of the pathologists’ assistant schools to which they are likely to apply so as not to overlook any admission requirements specific to those schools!) A student’s actual scheduling of these courses depends on factors such as a student’s initial mathematics placement and the availability of required courses for the student’s academic major.

When arranging their course schedules, students are advised to plan ahead and review the published lists of Mercer University course offerings; this is important because not all of the required courses for a student’s major and/or the pre-PathA track will be offered every semester, and a one-semester delay along the pre-PathA track could turn into a one-year delay in starting graduate school due to complications involving prerequisites.

**Mathematics Placement.** To enroll in chemistry and physics course sequences, a student must demonstrate a minimum mathematics competency that is equivalent to pre-calculus (MAT 133) or above; this competency may be demonstrated through credit (college, AP, or CLEP) for MAT 133 or its equivalent, or through a score of 15 or higher on the math placement test. Information about the math placement test can be found online here: [http://aas.mercer.edu/for-students/placement-exams/](http://aas.mercer.edu/for-students/placement-exams/). Note that to enroll in the accelerated general chemistry course, CHM 115, students must have credit for or co-enroll in calculus, MAT 191. Students
who are not ready to take calculus their first semester should consult the plans in Appendix A about how to schedule courses beginning from the algebra or pre-calculus level. Note that this situation requires summer coursework to catch up or the completion of at least one “gap year” before matriculation into graduate school.

**Course Load.** The pathologists’ assistant school curriculum is quite rigorous, so admissions committees will look to an applicant’s ability to carry a full academic load as s/he completes the undergraduate studies as an indicator of how well he or she might handle the PathA school curriculum. Unless there are extenuating circumstances that prevent him/her from doing so (e.g., employment, family circumstances), a pre-PathA student is expected to take 15 to 17 hours each semester.

**Transient Coursework at Non-Mercer Institutions.** The official University policy on transient coursework can be found in the University Bulletin (“catalog”). The section from the 2016-17 University catalog is shown below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Transient Status for Mercer Undergraduate Students</strong></th>
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| An undergraduate student who wishes to take academic courses elsewhere as a transient student and apply those credits toward a Mercer degree must obtain written approval in advance from the student’s advisor and the Registrar’s Office. The student must have been enrolled and attended classes at Mercer for at least one semester prior to requesting permission to study elsewhere. Transient Permission Forms are available in the Registrar’s Office. Failure to obtain written approval in advance may preclude acceptance of the transfer credit. A student normally will not be permitted to attend another institution as a transient student for more than two consecutive academic terms. No correspondence work will be accepted for credit toward a degree. Mercer University does accept courses from the Independent Study Programs of the University of Georgia for transfer credit; the maximum credit accepted is 9 semester hours. A student must be in good academic standing to be approved to take courses as a transient student. Ordinarily, the last 32 semester hours of degree work must be earned in residence at Mercer University. At least 12 semester hours of upper division work in a major, concentration, or specialization and 6 semester hours of upper division work in a minor, if elected, must be done in residence. Courses that are equivalent to courses offered at Mercer will transfer as long as the host institution has regional accreditation and the student earns grades of C or better in the courses. Course outlines (syllabi) and catalog information may be required before approval for transient status is granted. Courses taken at another institution will in no way affect the Mercer cumulative grade point average; however, all transfer credit attempted will be considered when determining University honors at graduation. Transient credit from two-year colleges is limited to 64 semester-hours (refer to section on transfer credit). If 64 hours have previously been transferred from two-year colleges, transient credit will displace previously transferred course hours that are not needed for the student’s program completion. It is the student’s responsibility to request that a transcript from the other institution, containing final grades, be sent to the Registrar’s Office at Mercer University. No credit will be awarded until an official transcript is received from the institution attended.

“Gap” Year(s). Students who are not ready to matriculate to graduate school immediately after completing his or her undergraduate degree may delay application, but should continue working to strengthen their application portfolio during that time.

Students who take a gap year between undergraduate studies and PathA school should discuss an appropriate timeline for completing their coursework, taking the GRE or MCAT, and applying to graduate school with a pre-health advisor.

Students who are competitive applicants to PathA school may simply want to increase their life experience before starting their professional training (e.g., earn a non-PathA graduate degree, travel, or work).

Students who are not competitive applicants to PathA school should use their gap year(s) to make themselves more attractive to admission committees, by taking more science coursework, obtaining more shadowing or work experience in health care, taking (or re-taking) the GRE or MCAT, or any combination of these things.
11. WHERE TO FIND INFORMATION ABOUT PATH.A. PROGRAMS

There are currently 11 accredited PathA programs in North America. Links to these programs can be found on the Web site of the American Association of Pathologists’ Assistants here: http://www.pathassist.org/?page=AboutUs_NAACLS.

Pre-PathA students should consider the following information to help them decide if a particular school would be a good match for them:

- pre-requisites;
- location;
- mission and focus;
- program structure (e.g., curriculum delivery style);
- structure of clinical training program and availability of externships and research opportunities;
- academic and clinical resources;
- student services (e.g., academic assistance, clubs and associations, housing);
- matriculant statistics (e.g., the mean or median GPA’s and GRE scores of accepted students); and
- tuition and financial aid information.

12. EXPECTATIONS ABOUT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Pathologists’ assistant programs will assess an applicant’s learning ability and work ethic by looking at his/her grade point averages (cumulative and science) and GRE scores (see section 21). Admissions committees will also look to an applicant’s ability to carry a full academic load as they complete their undergraduate studies, as the ability of a pre-pathologists’ assistant student to handle a full course load that includes multiple science classes is a good indicator that s/he is ready for the rigors of PathA school.

Calculation of Grade Point Averages.

Mercer University GPA’s. Mercer University displays semester and cumulative grade point averages (GPAs) on student MyMercer accounts. The grading system used by the University is described in the University Bulletin under “Academic Information”. Mercer uses a “4 point” grading system in which quality points are assigned per academic credit unit in the following scale: A = 4.0; B+ = 3.5; B = 3.0; C+ = 2.5; C = 2.0; D = 1.0; F = 0. A student’s Mercer GPA includes only Mercer coursework. Mercer’s policy is to exclude the first grade earned if a course is repeated. Courses taken on a pass-fail basis and audited coursework are excluded from GPA calculations.

BCPM GPA’s. Students must calculate their own BCPM (biology-chemistry-physics-math) GPA’s. A BCPM GPA calculator can be found in the “Pre-PathA E-Portfolio” spreadsheet available from Dr. Bokros.

Professional School GPA’s. Professional schools vary in the way they calculate official grade point averages (GPA’s), but most will include all coursework taken at all post-secondary institutions.

Grade Point Averages. Most PathA programs list the minimum GPA required for application as 3.0. Pre-PathA students must therefore strive to balance their studies and extracurricular activities so that they may maintain GPA’s well over that minimum in order to become competitive applicants.

Repeated Coursework. Pre-pathologists’ assistant students need to be aware that, while some programs accept the second grade earned of repeated coursework, others may calculate the mean of all grades earned for any course that has been repeated.

Pass/Fail, AP, CLEP, and Audit Credit. Students should consult the Web sites and admissions personnel of the individual PathA programs they are interested in for their policies regarding AP credit, CLEP credit, audited courses, and courses graded on a pass/fail basis. Some schools accept this type of credit for pre-requisite coursework, while others do not. Most graduate schools exclude these types of credit from the GPA calculations.
A Warning About Auditing Courses. Students should not consider auditing required pre-PathA coursework before actually enrolling in those courses. According to the University Bulletin, “Courses that a student audits may not later be taken by that student for credit, nor may student receive credit-by-exam for these courses.”

Course Withdrawals. Professional school admissions committees review applicants’ transcripts carefully to assess the students’ academic abilities and levels of commitment and motivation. While withdrawing from a course is unquestionably preferable to earning a D or F, students should be aware that multiple withdrawals on a transcript can signal that the student has difficulty with either commitment or with time management. Pre-PathA students should therefore withdraw from courses only on rare occasions and in extreme circumstances. Pre-PathA students are urged to follow the steps outlined in Appendix C of this document if they are unsure about their most prudent course of action.

Students should keep in mind that earning one or two C’s might be acceptable in the long run if the rest of the application portfolio is strong, but improvement in academic performance over time is important; earning many C’s and/or grades lower than a C - especially in core science prerequisites - is a warning sign that a student is not yet ready for the rigors of professional school. Mature evaluation of career goals and/or academic strategy is the appropriate response to such a warning; career counseling is available from the Center for Career & Professional Development. Students should remember that some PathA programs (Case-Western Reserve University, U of Colorado) do not accept pre-requisite coursework unless grades of B- or higher are earned in those courses.

Extracurricular and Summer Activities for Pre-Pathologists’ Assistant Students

When evaluating applicants, PathA schools look for candidates with integrity who are highly motivated, naturally curious, and good at solving complex problems. They look to the candidate’s academic record for evidence of a strong work ethic and the ability to master specific sets of knowledge, and to a candidate’s record of extracurricular activities for evidence that:

- s/he is compassionate and caring;
- s/he has excellent interpersonal skills and can relate well to many different types of people;
- s/he is an effective communicator in both written and oral formats;
- s/he is an effective leader and team member; and that
- s/he has taken the appropriate steps to prepare him/herself for a career as a pathologists’ assistant.

Pre-PathA students should remain cognizant that a balance between extracurricular activities and academic progress must be maintained. Pre-PathA students should therefore participate in extracurricular activities that help them develop the aforementioned qualities, but that do not distract them from academic excellence. Students should recognize that genuine commitment to a few activities will result in a more positive outcome than maintaining a large number of short term commitments to a large number of activities.

13. PATHOLOGY EXPERIENCE

Most pathologists’ assistant programs require or recommend that applicants be familiar with the practice of pathology and therefore require applicants to spend some time (10 hours or more) in a pathology department before application to graduate school. Pre-PathA students are advised to check the admission requirements of their preferred graduate programs for the number of hours required and for advice about where and how to find a facility that will allow such shadowing.

Advice About Approaching Facilities for Pathology Experience. When possible, students should visit in person the office or clinic where they plan to request pathology shadowing experience. Students should follow the advice for interview dress and comportment (section 22), and take along a professional-style resume (see Center for Career & Professional Development for help with resumes).
Many health care facilities (including the hospital of Navicent Health in downtown Macon) require observers to have a criminal background check, training in patient privacy laws and policies, a physical exam, up-to-date immunizations, and/or have a negative tuberculosis test before they will be allowed near patients. Students should therefore contact the facility for their requirements and policies so that these things may be taken care of well in advance of the scheduled shadowing experience.

Some medical practices require certification of college enrollment before they will allow student shadowing. Students should inquire exactly what is required, as the following options are available from the University: Official certification of enrollment can be obtained from the University registrar, and a simple letter of introduction with unofficial verification of enrollment can be obtained from Dr. Bokros in Academic & Advising Services.

**Dress and Behavior in the Clinical Setting.** Students who are observing a pathologist will be expected to adhere to the facility’s safety and infection control guidelines. If they are not informed ahead of time what those policies are, the student should inquire before the shadowing begins. And of course, students who are ill should refrain from entering the health care facility.

14. OTHER MEDICAL EXPERIENCE

Shadowing or observing a physician or other medical professional, working in a medical facility, volunteering at a medical office, or participating in on a medical mission trip are all opportunities for students to gain first-hand knowledge about the medical field. These types of experiences allow students to verify their career decisions and give professional schools confidence that the applicants have confirmed and invested in those decisions. Students are encouraged to read the article about maximizing the shadowing experience here: [http://www.kevinmd.com/blog/2010/06/tips-students-shadow-doctors.html](http://www.kevinmd.com/blog/2010/06/tips-students-shadow-doctors.html).

**Shadowing/Observing.** Shadowing exposes students to what clinical medicine is like on a daily basis, and offers the opportunity to learn about the health care professional’s life and routine.

**Seeking Permission to Shadow.** In many cases, students can contact professionals directly to ask permission to shadow. A good place for a student to start is with their own personal or family physician, as a relationship has already been established. Students should follow the advice for dress and comportment in this section, and take along a professional-style resume of their education and experience.

Another excellent way to meet physicians is to volunteer at a hospital or clinic (see next section). Once a relationship with a physician or other professional has been established and that professional has agreed to allow shadowing, arrangements for observing at that hospital can be made.

**Possible Shadowing Requirements.** Many health care facilities (including Navicent Health in downtown Macon) require observers to have a criminal background check, training in patient privacy laws and policies, a physical exam, up-to-date immunizations, and/or have a negative tuberculosis test before they will be allowed near patients. Students should therefore contact the facility for their requirements and policies so that these things may be taken care of well in advance of the scheduled shadowing experience.

Some medical practices require certification of college enrollment before they will allow student shadowing. Students should inquire exactly what is required, as the following options are available from the University: Official certification of enrollment can be obtained from the University registrar, and a simple letter of introduction with unofficial verification of enrollment can be obtained from Dr. Bokros in Academic & Advising Services.
Maintaining a Record of Experience. Pre-PathA students should keep a “volunteer journal” in which they record dates, times, contacts, and experiences. Such a journal can be an invaluable resource when the time comes to build a professional resume, and journaling about one’s experiences allows reflection about what has been witnessed and learned. The “electronic portfolio” Excel file has a tab for this purpose.

Dress and Behavior While Shadowing. Students who are observing medical professionals are advised to dress and behave as professionally as possible during the observation sessions. Unless otherwise instructed, dress should be clean, neutral, and professional (business casual) and should minimize the amount of exposed skin, including toes. Perfume or after-shave should not be worn and make-up should be minimal and conservative. And of course, students who are ill should refrain from shadowing until healthy.

The student shadower/ volunteer should show respect and gratitude to everyone in the clinical setting. A note of thanks sent to the professionals and the clinic after the experience is expected.

Health-Related Volunteerism. Volunteering at a hospital or clinic is a good way to gain exposure to the field of health care. Such volunteering not only meets a need within the facility (as so is considered community service), but it also allows students to get some practical experience with clinic operation and allows them to make connections with health care professionals who can share their experience and advice.

Students may volunteer at agencies that are health-related but not necessarily clinical. Combining personal skills or hobbies with volunteerism is a great way for students to get involved. For example, a student who swam competitively in high school might help patients with multiple sclerosis learn to swim (Multiple Sclerosis Association of America’s swim program http://mymsaa.org/), or a student who speaks another language fluently might volunteer as a translator for a hospital or clinic. Students should consult Appendix E, Career Consultant Stefanie Swanger in the Center for Career & Professional Development (swanger_s@mercer.edu), the Center for Community Engagement (http://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/campuslife/clv/), and/or use services such as Volunteer Match (http://www.volunteermatch.org) to find opportunities.

Pre-PathA students who are also considering the pre-physician assistant track should note that only service in which patients are cared for directly by the volunteer will count as direct patient care experience; please refer to the pre-PA track handbook for specific advice about PCE.

Internships. Internships are formal programs designed to provide practical experience in a given profession. Mercer offers two competitive, medically-oriented internships in which academic credit may be earned: the Patiendhood & Professionalism Internship, a one-semester opportunity in the fall for students to serve as “pre-standardized patients” at the Mercer University School of Medicine’s Clinical Development & Assessment Center. Details about the Patiendhood internship are available from Dr. Bokros in Academic & Advising Services (Bokros_c@mercer.edu). The “BearAmedics” EMT Training Internship is an opportunity for students to train as Emergency Medical Technicians with Community Ambulance in Macon. Details about that program can be found on the Community Ambulance web site (http://www.ourcommunityambulance.org/bearamedics.html); students must arrange to receive the academic credit with Dr. Bokros.

Information about how to search for other internship opportunities is also available from the Center for Career & Professional Development in Connell Student Center.

Certification in a Health Care Field. Becoming certified in a health care field such as emergency medical technician (EMT), patient care technician (PCT), or phlebotomist can open up the possibility of employment in the field of health care, which can give students both practical experience with patients and clinical exposure. Certification programs can be found at local accredited technical colleges (e.g., Central Georgia Technical College in Macon: http://www.centralgatech.edu/) or on the Web sites of professional associations (e.g., the National Association of Emergency Medical Technicians’ site: http://www.naemt.org/about_emt/degreeprograms.aspx or the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians: https://www.nremt.org/nremt/about/becomeInvolvedInEMS.asp).

Pre-Pathologists’ Assistant students who are also considering the pre-physician assistant track should note that only service in which patients are cared for directly will count as direct patient care experience, which makes certification in a health-related field an excellent choice for gaining experience. Please refer to the pre-PA track handbook for specific advice about PCE.
15. COMMUNITY SERVICE

Pre-Pathologists’ Assistant students should bear in mind their status as citizens of their communities and should strive to participate in service projects regularly. Besides demonstrating a commitment to one’s community, such experience allows students the opportunities to develop their interpersonal, communication, and leadership skills. Students are encouraged to read the article about volunteering at https://explorehealthcareers.org/volunteer-work-helps-college-application/ and http://www.medicaljobs.org/articles/value-of-volunteering.php.

Mercer University culture is very focused on service. Information about campus involvement, service activities, and leadership can be found on the Web site of the Office of Student Affairs (http://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/). The Mercer Center for Community Engagement (offices in Connell Student Center) coordinates campus-wide service events at least once a month (http://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/campuslife/clv/), and they invite all students to “like” their Facebook page for notification of opportunities (https://www.facebook.com/mercercrv?ref=aymt_homepage_panel).

Combining personal skills or hobbies with volunteerism is a great way for students to get involved. For example, a student who swam competitively in high school might help patients with multiple sclerosis learn to swim (Multiple Sclerosis Association of America’s swim program http://mymsaa.org/), or a student who speaks another language fluently might volunteer as a translator for a hospital or clinic. Students should consult Appendix E, Career Consultant Stefanie Swanger in the Center for Career & Professional Development (swanger_s@mercer.edu), the Center for Community Engagement (https://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/campuslife/clv/), and/or use services such as Volunteer Match (http://www.volunteermatch.org) to find opportunities.

16. CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

Involvement in group organizations can help students develop their organizational, communication, teamwork, and leadership skills, and is also an avenue for the formation of satisfying and supportive friendships. Students will benefit from involvement in almost any organization (health-related, non-health-related special interest, religious, Greek, etc.); a complete list of campus organizations at Mercer can be found here: http://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/campuslife/org_list.cfm.

Mercer “fosters an environment that challenges every student to engage in leadership opportunities that educate and advance them as servant leaders” (http://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/leadership/), and pre-health students should take full advantage of this. Leadership-building opportunities on campus are listed on the Student Affairs Web site here: http://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/leadership/lmu/bios.cfm.

Student Affairs connects students with different campus events on their Web site here: http://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/campuslife/events.cfm. Many of the health- or science-related organizations on campus collaborate on events throughout the year. These groups post their meetings and events on the Mercer Science & Pre-Health Google Calendar, which can be accessed here: http://tinyurl.com/ns95vb7.

17. INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

Pre-health professions students should consider participating in at least one independent research project as an undergraduate. Such projects help students develop critical thinking skills and independence, and can be a very positive addition to a student’s professional school application portfolio. See also “Summer Activities” below.

Current Research Projects at Mercer-Macon. Many of Mercer’s academic departments (e.g., Chemistry, Biology, Physics, and Psychology in the College of Liberal Arts; Basic Sciences in the School of Medicine) have ongoing research projects and faculty members who are willing to supervise undergraduate researchers. Students may visit the “Research” page of the Mercer Web site (http://research.mercer.edu/ and http://medicine.mercer.edu/research/macon/) and the Web pages of individual departments for information about current research projects.
A major benefit of undergraduate research is that the student learns to think critically and scientifically. This involves the asking of appropriate questions, the design of appropriate experiments to answer them, and the compilation and analysis of data from those experiments. These skills are then extended to the appropriate sharing of the entire experimental episode in poster and/or seminar format, and the defense of their work in question-and-answer sessions with other scientists. Mercer students are encouraged to participate in “BEAR Day”, an annual campus-wide event to celebrate research, held every spring (http://bearday.mercer.edu/).

**How to Get Involved.** The student should do some background research on the projects they are interested in before approaching the supervising faculty member. For instance, reading up on the basic biology of *Trypanosoma* and the disease processes involved in malaria would be appropriate before approaching a faculty member working on the molecular aspects of that disease. The student should then make an appointment to speak with the potential research supervisor regarding suitable projects and space availability.

A student may conduct research on a volunteer basis or for academic credit. Students interested in receiving course credit for research should know that they must commit to spending 3 hours or more on the project each week (in lab or in the field) for every credit hour being earned. End-of-semester reports or presentations are also required by many supervisors. Grading policies for research credits vary with departments and supervisors. Because of the time and effort that it takes to train undergraduate researchers, most research supervisors prefer to have students commit to more than one semester of research, with some preferring more than one year of commitment.

18. SUMMER ACTIVITIES

Pre-PathA students are advised to use their summers to participate in a variety of activities that will help them prepare for graduate school:

**Independent Research.** Opportunities exist for students to engage in independent learning and research to enhance their critical thinking skills and academic backgrounds. Students interested in doing independent research can investigate the opportunities available at Mercer through the Mercer Undergraduate Biomedical Scholars program (http://mubs.mercer.edu/program-overview/; see last section) or at other institutions across the nation. For instance, students can compete to participate in the National Science Foundation’s Research Experiences for Undergraduates programs (http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5517&org=NSF).

**Summer Camp Counselor.** Students may gain valuable citizenship experience by working at a summer camp. This experience is even more valuable when the camp is specifically designed for children or adults with special needs. Students may search for such opportunities online (e.g., Camp Twin Lakes for special needs children - http://www.camptwinlakes.org/; Georgia Lion’s Club Camp for the Blind - http://www.glec.org/) or search online for other camps: http://www.mysummercamps.com/camps/georgia-summer-camps.html.

**Summer Jobs.** For those students who need to work over the summer, consider that many professional schools value experience working with the public. Therefore, if working in a medical setting is not possible, students are encouraged to find jobs that involve customer service of some kind.

**Summer Classes.** For those students who find it difficult to stay on schedule to complete their degree requirements and the PathA school admission prerequisites by the semester s/he intends to do so, summer coursework offers an opportunity to catch up or get ahead. Pre-PathA students should pay close attention to their course schedules each semester, as well as their long-term schedules and plans, in order to determine whether or not summer classes are necessary (see Appendix A for scheduling suggestions).

Students should also remain cognizant of the importance of retaining the skills and concepts learned in the required pre-PathA courses. Since they will rely on this base of knowledge in graduate school, they should consider their individual learning style before deciding whether to take summer courses; summer courses cover material more quickly - and sometimes with less depth - than classes during the regular academic year, and pre-PathA students need to learn this material thoroughly.
Courses to Avoid Taking Away from Mercer During the Summer. Pre-PathA students are advised to avoid taking core science courses and/or courses within their majors at non-Mercer institutions. Because most PathA schools expect their applicants to provide at least one letter of evaluation from a science professor, it is to the student’s advantage to get to know their science professors during the first two years of their college careers. The most complete - and therefore influential - letters of evaluation are those written by faculty members who have formed good relationships with students through their classroom, laboratory, and extracurricular interactions. This is especially true for non-science majors at Mercer University, who have only limited opportunities to get to know these professors.

19. THE VALUE OF READING

The ability to communicate well in both oral and written form is valued highly by most health-related professional schools. The ability to read quickly, efficiently, and critically will help students succeed in college, in professional school, and in their professional lives. Reading increases a student’s vocabulary by exposing the reader to new words and phrasing and helps develop writing skills by exposing him or her to new patterns and arrangements of composition. Robert and Michele Root-Bernstein state in their 2011 article, Turning STEM into STREAM: Writing as an Essential Component of Science Education,

“Writing isn't just wordsmithing. It also teaches mastery of the creative process. Whether one is writing fiction or nonfiction, creative nonfiction or poetry, the process of taking inchoate facts, trends, feelings, impressions, images, and emotions and translating them into words requires mastery of all the tools for thinking required to perform any other creative activity. Moreover, since words are our primary means of communicating, anyone who has not mastered their creative use is simply underprepared for any discipline, including STEM [science, technology, engineering and mathematics] subjects.” (bolding mine; http://www.nwp.org/cs/public/print/resource/3522)

Pre-health students should therefore make it a habit to read at least one or two unassigned books per semester. Reading in this way will help students investigate their career choice more deeply, practice their critical reading skills, explore issues outside of their major field of study, and – of course - feed their imaginations. Students are also encouraged to participate in reading or discussion groups to help them explore themes and make connections, and to invest themselves fully in all of their college writing assignments. See the reading list on the Tarver Library’s Pre-Health Professions Collection Web site for suggested titles: https://libraries.mercer.edu/research-tools-help/research-guides-tutorials/tarver-guides/pre-health.

Application to Pathologists’ Assistant Graduate Programs

20. THE GRADUATE SCHOOL APPLICATION

Each of the eleven PathA programs in the U.S. has a separate application process; many prefer or require applicants to submit their applications online. Applicants will be asked to supply biographical information, official transcripts, an essay of some kind (e.g., personal statement, statement of purpose, etc.). Students should investigate each of their target programs’ application processes the year before they plan to apply to familiarize themselves with the requirements of each.

When to Apply. PathA program application deadlines and start dates vary, so students must investigate their options and plan out their third and fourth years carefully so as not to miss any program deadlines. In general, students should start preparing their applications around 12 months before their matriculation start date. See individual school Web sites for specific information.
Deciding Which Schools To Apply To. Students should apply to schools for which there is some special attraction for the applicant. Students should investigate each PathA program’s location, educational mission, focus, the curriculum structure, academic services, student services, and tuition rates (see also section 7). These factors might translate into a viable reason for applying to a particular PathA school. Matriculant statistics for a given PathA school can also help a student decide if his/ her own academic record fits reasonably well with the records of that school’s average matriculant.

Fees. Application fees vary from school to school but range from $50-$100. Entrance exams also have registration fees (see next section).

Entrance Exam Scores. All PathA programs in the U.S. require applicants to take a standardized entrance test and submit their scores as part of the application process. See section 21.

Criminal Background Check. PathA programs in the U.S. require applicants to submit the results of a criminal background check. See individual school Web sites for details.

Personal Statement(s). Many schools will instruct applicants to submit a personal statement or statements as part of their application. Students must check the Web sites of their target schools: One school asks applicants to submit 5 photographs, each accompanied by a narrative; another school requires both a Personal Statement and a Shadowing Statement.

In general, the personal statement is an essay that provides the opportunity for applicants to explain why they wish to become a pathologists’ assistant and offers a way for admissions committees to get a better sense of the applicant as a person. The personal statement may also be the applicant’s chance to explain any extenuating circumstances that might have influenced their educational pursuits (e.g., hardships, obstacles, or challenges). Note that any such explanations should attempt to turn negative experiences into positive ones by focusing on lessons learned and/or on how these challenges have helped prepare them for their future.

A few general guidelines for writing the Essay/ Personal Statement:

- Students should treat their essay as any other college-level composition: it should be written in a formal style, have a central theme to unify the different ideas, and should be crafted with an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. A title is optional but can highlight the central theme.
- Being a formal statement of an applicant’s goal to become an pathologists’ assistant, the Essay should not contain slang terminology, contractions, unconventional punctuation, or acronyms. An exception can be made for an abbreviation or acronym if its use is essential for the narrative, but it must be defined fully in its first usage. Clichés, obvious exaggerations, and negativity should be avoided.
- Succinct expression of ideas is important, as schools may limit entries to a specified number of characters.
- Pre-PathA students should take advantage of the resources offered by Mercer University:
  - Personal Statement workshops offered by the Assistant Director of Pre-Health Professions Programs
  - Writing tutors at the Academic Resource Center
  - The advisors at the Center for Career & Professional Development

When to Write the Personal Statement. Applicants should not wait until the last minute to write their Personal Statement. Preparation of a first draft of the Personal Statement early in the application process (e.g., the summer before the third academic year begins) allows an applicant the time to get feedback and to make multiple revisions, and therefore submit a polished product on their Pathologists’ Assistant school applications.

Feedback on Personal Statements. Students are advised to have multiple people read and give feedback on their personal statements before submitting it as part of the application. Dr. Bokros will give comments on essays within a week or receipt if you email it to her as a Word document. Note that she will give comments on an original draft and one revision only. The writing tutors in the ARC are also a good source of feedback, as are the counselors at the Center for Career & Professional Development.
More information and advice about Personal Statements can be found in the books available in the Pre-Health Resource Library in the ARC and at the following Web sites: “Tips for Writing a Personal Statement”: http://www.cmu.edu/hpp/apply-to-schools/personal-statements/tips.html; “Preparing Personal Statements”: http://www.creighton.edu/soar/preparingapps/statements/.

**Letters of Recommendation.** Letters of recommendation or reference (LOR’s) and/or letters of evaluation (LOE’s) are often required for the graduate school application. Most PathA programs require 2 or more letters of reference; pre-PathA students should consult the Web sites of their target schools for the number and types of recommendation letters required by each.

**Etiquette for Requesting a Letter of Recommendation.** A student should contact the potential writer 2-3 weeks before the letter’s receipt deadline. If the potential writer agrees to provide a letter of recommendation, the student should provide him/her with a current **resume and a brief statement of purpose** describing exactly what s/he will be applying for and, if available, a list of the applicant characteristics/attributes that are important to address. The student should also supply a **stamped, addressed envelope** for each letter or **instructions about how to upload an electronic document**, and the **deadline** by which the letter should be submitted. It is customary for an LOR to be confidential, so a student may be asked to sign a **waiver of his/her right to see the letter**. Waiving this right is customary and expected; this practice ensures that a candid letter of evaluation or recommendation is written. The student should send a brief note or email of gratitude to their letter-writer after the letter is submitted.

21. THE GRADUATE RECORD EXAM (GRE)

The GRE, which is required by many graduate schools, is a standardized multiple choice test of general academic skills (http://www.ets.org/gre). Veterinary schools use GRE scores to help them evaluate applicants, as it has been shown to be a good predictor of performance in the first year of graduate or professional school.

**Structure and Scoring.** The GRE is administered year-round as a computer-based test at Prometric test centers across the nation. The GRE exam consists of three sections (verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, and analytical writing) and takes almost 4 hours to complete. The first two sections are scored from 130-170 in one-point increments, and the third is scored from 0 to 6 in half-point increments. More information about test content and structure can be found here: http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/content/, and a guide to understanding GRE scores can be found here: http://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/scores/understand/.

**Timing.** Students should familiarize themselves with the GRE and prepare to take it 12-15 months before the planned veterinary medicine program matriculation date. The test can be taken up to 5 times per year, but students must wait 21 days between each attempt.

**Cost.** The GRE registration fee is currently $205.

**Preparation.** The GRE is meant to test general skills that are learned over a long period of time, both in and out of academic settings, so no specific coursework is required. However, students should still plan to prepare for the test in the following ways:

- **Learn everything possible about the GRE** as early in the undergraduate program as possible.
- **Commit to intensive review through the spring and early summer of the application year.**
  - Review may be formal (e.g., participating in a commercial prep course such as that offered by Kaplan) or informal (e.g., studying alone or participating in a study group sponsored by a student organization).
  - Materials for all health professions entrance exams are available in the Pre-Health Study Skills and Exam Prep Resource Library in the Academic Resource Center.
• Develop a **test-taking strategy**.
  - Students are encouraged to read about the different strategies already developed (e.g., those taught by commercial exam preparation companies like Kaplan, Princeton Review, and Examkrackers), and to put them into practice. Effective strategies invariably include time management during the test and the identification of relevant information within passages.);

• Commit to **practicing** the full-length exam under controlled, timed conditions.
  - The GRE takes over 4 hours to complete, so building stamina is an important aspect of test preparation.

• **Analyze practice exam results methodically.** The most effective way to improve a test score is for the student to take multiple, full-length practice exams and analyze each missed question to determine why it was missed. For instance, knowing that a question was missed because an important concept is not fully understood can identify which areas need further study, while knowing that a question was missed because of mis-reading the question can help the student read more carefully and analytically next time.

22. **THE INTERVIEW**

Professional and graduate school admissions committees will invite applicants who look promising “on paper” to visit their school for an interview. The interview offers committees the chance to judge how an applicant presents him/herself in person and how well s/he communicates and interacts with Pathologists’ Assistant school faculty, staff, and students.

**Scheduling.** Interviews are usually conducted on weekdays, so applicants must be able to make arrangements to miss school or work to attend interviews.

**Structure.** Professional schools differ in the structure of their interviews. Interviews are usually highly structured, with a specified amount of time spent with each interviewer or group of interviewers. Some schools conduct a series of individual interviews, others conduct group interviews, and others use a combination of these methods.

“Multiple Mini Interviews” (MMIs) are gaining in popularity among Pathologists’ Assistant schools as a means of collecting information about an applicant’s non-academic qualities and characteristics. MMIs involve applicants visiting multiple stations to perform different tasks within a strict time schedule. More information about MMI’s can be found here:

- http://www.studentdoctor.net/2011/01/the-multiple-mini-interview-for-medical-school-admissions/
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DOVbDD9lNjE
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdXKVLTt1ZQ

**Dress & Behavior.** Applicants have limited time with each interviewer to make an impression, so dress and behavior is very important. In general, applicants should dress and behave as professionally as possible. They should smile and be pleasant to everyone they encounter (on the phone, by email, or on the phone), to know their own application well, know the school at which they are being interviewed, and show enthusiasm for its programs. Mercer students are encouraged to attend the Professionalism for Pre-Health Students workshop and/or Center for Career & Professional Development’ Dress for Success presentations as part of the preparation for their professional school interviews.

**Anticipating Interview Questions.** Applicants should prepare by anticipating some of the obvious questions and practicing their answers. Some examples of interview questions for PathA school applicants are found in Appendix D.

Pathologists’ Assistant school applicants should also be prepared to ask questions as well as answer them. Although an applicant should be thoroughly familiar with the Pathologists’ Assistant school at which they are applying, a few appropriate questions are also listed in Appendix D.
Mock Interviews. Mock interviews may be arranged with a faculty member through Dr. Bokros or with a staff member with the Center for Career & Professional Development.

Preparation Resources. More information about the professional school interview can be found in the various interview guides placed on reserve in the Pre-Health Professions Collection in the Tavner Library. Students may also check YouTube and the Web sites of their target PA schools for general information about the interview process (e.g., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfwPxdWo4o, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYNwBkBD-Tc, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAoLPtIshHy, and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Melb4DZlJgNA).

Students may also find the following resources for medical school applicants useful, as the processes for PA school and medical school application are so similar:

https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/medical-school-interviews/
http://www.studentdoctor.net/2013/12/medical-school-interviews-6-common-mistakes-that-admissions-officers-hate/
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQcORgXDog&list=PLdprizTzRD9kGldw6SBwhFOJgaB0kTvxF

Post-Baccalaureate Pre-PathA Students/ Students Re-Applying to PathA Programs

23. POST-BACCALAUREATE PREPARATION FOR GRADUATE PROGRAMS

“Post-baccalaureate” students have earned bachelor’s degrees but continue to work toward preparing successful Pathologists’ Assistant school applications. These students include:

- those who have already applied to PathA school and were unsuccessful, and
- those who have completed bachelor’s degrees but have not yet completed the required pre-PathA prerequisites.

Re-Applicants. A pre-PathA student who has previously applied to professional schools but not been accepted should, ideally, seek and follow the recommendations of an admissions official from one of his/her target graduate schools. The student should solicit feedback from the appropriate admissions official regarding which specific areas of his/her application portfolio need to be strengthened in order to improve his/her chances of being accepted. If that is not possible, students may seek Dr. Bokros’ advice about how to strengthen their portfolio for reapplication.

Applicants must keep in mind that professional schools look for applicants with the characteristics listed in section 2. Students should assess their application portfolios honestly, and make every effort to strengthen any and all “weak spots”. For example, the appropriate way to demonstrate academic maturity is to increase grade point averages by taking more courses and earning high grades, and the appropriate way to show knowledge of and commitment to the Pathologists’ Assistant profession is to work or volunteer in a clinical setting.

Post-Baccalaureate Programs. Post-baccalaureate programs can be formal or informal. Formal post-baccalaureate programs are structured graduate or certificate programs, while informal programs involve the student taking graduate or upper-level undergraduate science coursework at an accredited institution.

The Association of American Medical Colleges maintains a search engine that allows students to search by location or program focus that can be found here: https://apps.aamc.org/postbac/#/index.

Please note that professional schools will NOT consider applications from applicants who do not plan to complete a graduate program in which they are enrolled. In other words, students should not enroll in academic programs that they are not planning on completing.

Post-Baccalaureate Work at Mercer.

Record Enhancement Master’s Degrees at the Mercer University School of Medicine. The Mercer University School of Medicine offers a one-year graduate program that leads to the Master of Science in Preclinical Sciences (http://medicine.mercer.edu/admissions/preclinical/) and a two-year graduate program that leads to the Master of Science in Biomedical Sciences (http://medicine.mercer.edu/admissions/biomed/). These programs are suitable for students who have already completed the basic sciences but want to enhance their academic records and/or research experience.
**Completion of Prerequisite Coursework at the College of Liberal Arts.** Students who have not completed the basic science courses for admission to graduate school may enroll in the College of Liberal Arts as non-degree-seeking students to complete those classes, but should be aware of the following:

- The College of Liberal Arts does not offer a structured post-baccalaureate program.
- Financial aid is usually not as easy to obtain for non-degree-seeking students as it is for degree-seeking students.
- Completion of the pre-PathA coursework requires a minimum of 5 semesters of sequenced coursework. Refer to the schedule below for the proposed scheduling of coursework and applications. Note that this plan assumes that a student has already taken mathematics through the pre-calculus level or higher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>General Chemistry I (CHM 111)</td>
<td>General Chemistry II (CHM 112)</td>
<td>Organic Chem I (CHM 221)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Human Anatomy &amp; Physiology I</td>
<td>Intro. Biology I (BIO 211)</td>
<td>Organic Chem II (CHM 222)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(BIO 202)</td>
<td>Human Anatomy &amp; Physiology II (BIO 203)</td>
<td>Study for the GRE?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Intro. Biology II (BIO 212)</td>
<td>Biochemistry (BMB 465)</td>
<td>Take the GRE?*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Statistics (STA 126)</td>
<td>Microbiology (BIO 303)</td>
<td>Prepare and Submit Applications?*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Study for the GRE?*</td>
<td>* Take the GRE?*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare and Submit Applications?*</td>
<td>* Prepare and Submit Applications?*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Work / PathA school matriculation?*</td>
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* Depends on specific target school pre-requisites and deadlines
# APPENDIX A: Scheduling of Core Science Coursework for the Pre-PathA Track

## Calculus-Ready

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Fall</th>
<th>Spring</th>
<th>Summer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>CHM 111</td>
<td>CHM 112</td>
<td>Shadowing experience as required by target schools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>BIO 211</td>
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<td>Second</td>
<td>CHM 221</td>
<td>CHM 222</td>
<td>Shadowing experience as required by target schools</td>
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## Not Ready for Calculus, Option A

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* If BIO 202 is full in fall of first year, may take BIO 202 and 203 during a summer or in year 2 or 3

## Not Ready for Calculus, Option B

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* If BIO 202 is full in fall of first year, may take BIO 202 and 203 during a summer or in year 2
APPENDIX B: Internet Resources for Exploring Careers in Health Care

Mercer’s Pre-Professional Web site
- http://aas.mercer.edu/pre-professional-tracks/ and http://cla.mercer.edu/pre-professional/
  Contain information for students interested in applying to health-related professional schools.

Mercer’s Center for Career & Professional Development Web site
- https://career.mercer.edu/ Information about TypeFocus, SuccessTrak, Career Day, and other services for students

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Web site on Health Care Careers

For More Information About Careers in Healthcare
- http://www.explorehealthcareers.org/
- http://www.sowega-ahec.org (see health careers manual on web site; includes career videos)

Links for Health-Related Professional Organizations
- American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants: www.anesthetist.org
- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners: http://www.aanp.org/
- American Academy of Physician Assistants: http://www.aapa.org/
- American Dental Education Association: http://www.adea.org/
- American Dental Education Association: http://www.adea.org/
- American Dental Association: http://www.ada.org/
- American Dental Association: http://www.ama-assn.org/
- American Medical Student Association: https://www.amsa.org/
- American Medical Association: http://www.americanoptometricassociation.org/
- Association of American Medical Colleges: http://www.aamc.org/
- Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry: http://www.asaopt.org
- Association of Schools and Colleges of Allied Health Professions: www.asahp.org
- Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health: http://www.aspph.org/
- Georgia Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants: http://www.georgiaaaa.org/
- Georgia Dental Association: http://www.gadental.org/
- Georgia Public Health Association: http://www.gapha.org/
- Georgia Association of Physician Assistants: http://www.gapa.net/
- Middle Georgia Medical Society, Inc.: http://www.mgmsnet.org/
- National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences: http://www.naacls.org/
APPENDIX C: Course Withdrawals

Steps to Take in the Decision-Making Process

1. Get the Facts
   Calculate your projected grade in the class using the formula given in your syllabus for your course grade. Do the calculations using the grades you have earned so far, then project what grades you might earn for the rest of the semester and plug them into the formula. Do this to create a “worst case scenario” in which you earn poor grades for the remaining exams, and a “best case scenario” in which you earn improved but reasonable grades (e.g., 75-85%). The results will give you a realistic range of possible grades for the rest of the semester. **Keep in mind that having a firm grasp of the course’s foundational concepts is often required for success. Increasing your grades to the 80% range after scoring in the 30-50% range requires backtracking to learn the concepts that you didn’t learn well the first time.**

   If your calculations reveal that there is no way you can pass the class with a C or higher, then withdrawing is recommended. If your calculations reveal that there **is** a way that you can still earn a solid C* or higher in the class, then proceed to step 2.

2. Talk with Your Instructor
   If your calculations reveal that there **is** a way that you can still earn a solid C or higher in the class, then the next step is to meet with your instructor. Talk honestly about how you are studying and how much time you are spending on the material, and get an idea from the instructor about his/her impression of whether you are likely to fall on the low side of your grading scale or on the high side.

   [FYI: Claiming that there is a “disconnect” between your learning style and the professor’s teaching style is a dangerous way to go… it can sound like an excuse. **Pre-health students must find a way to be flexible in their learning styles.** The staff of the Academic Resource Center can help students identify their best learning style and offer suggestions about how to adapt to multiple teaching styles. (Students with learning disabilities are urged to seek supportive assistance from the office of ACCESS and Accommodation: http://studentaffairs.mercer.edu/disabilityservices/.)]

3. Be Honest With Yourself
   Ask yourself how willing you are to **fight** to earn a passing grade in order to continue moving forward on your pre-health track. This will be a true test of your determination. **If you are still hypothetically able to earn at least a C, and you are willing to either double the amount of time you are spending on the class or to change the way you spend time on the class, then it is worth your while to stay in the class.**

   If you have already “moved on” mentally and won’t or can’t put forth more effort to conquer the class, then it is best to withdraw and make alternative plans to continue progressing. **Note:** If you are not willing to do what it takes academically to make yourself into a competitive professional school applicant, then you should re-examine your professional goals.

4. Consider the Consequences BEFORE Withdrawing
   A. Make a revised 4-year plan in which you have withdrawn from the class and **consider how withdrawing will affect your progress.** Does making that class up at a later date affect your ability to make progress on that track? Will withdrawal force you to take summer classes? Are you able to take summer classes (time-wise and financially)?

   B. Check with **financial planning** to make sure that withdrawing will not impact your financial aid or scholarship or loan status.

5. The Withdrawal Process
   Complete a withdrawal form. Have your instructor sign it and your primary advisor sign it. Submit the signed form to the registrar’s office by the published withdrawal deadline.

   *Be aware that some PathA programs require a minimum grade of B- in pre-requisite courses.*
APPENDIX D: Sample Interview Questions for PathA School Applicants

- How are you today?
- Tell me about yourself. Tell me about your family.
- Why pathologists’ assistant? Why not PA or medical school?
- If pathologists’ assistant didn’t exist, what would you do instead?
- What have you done to test your interest in becoming an PathA?
- What DON’T you like about the PathA position?
- When did you decide on becoming a PathA?
- How do your personal values and morals fit with the pathologists’ assistant position?
- Do you want to specialize? In what?
- What problems face the field of health care today?
- How did you study for the GRE? Organic chemistry? Biology?
- How would you be a good fit for our school?
- What other schools have you applied to and why?
- What makes you different from/ better than our other applicants?
- What will you do if you aren’t accepted?
- What was your favorite class? Least favorite? Why?
- If you were the interviewer, what question would you ask next?
- What are your thoughts about affirmative action? The ACA and the proposed replacements for it so far? Abortion? Of what is happening in the Middle East? (or any other controversial topic)
- If your house was burning, what three objects would you save? Why?
- What types of people do you have trouble working with?
- What is the biggest challenge you have faced in your life?
- What are your hobbies? What do you do for fun?
- Describe your leadership experiences.
- How do you think the people who wrote your letters of recommendation described you?
- Tell us about a time when your morals were questioned. How did you handle it?
- Where do you see yourself in ten years? Twenty years?
- Name three books that you read this year. What impact did each have on you?
- Situational questions (e.g., What would you do if you suspected a colleague was abusing drugs?)
- Describe yourself in four words.
- If you were a part on a bicycle, which part would you be and why?
- Name three people that you admire and tell me why you admire each.
- Name five people you would like to have dinner with, and why.
- What do you consider to be your life’s “calling”?
- What were the strongest aspects of your education at Mercer University?
- Were there any deficiencies in your undergraduate training?
- Teach me something not related to becoming a pathologists’ assistant.

Possible Questions for Professional School Applicants to ASK:

- Where are your most of your graduates distributed?
- What subspecialties do most of your graduates go into?
- How do your students score on the Certifying Exam for PathAs?
- Tell me more about your specialty program in XXX.
- Is there administrative training as part of your program? Legal training? Bioethics training?
- How has health care reform affected this school?
- What kind of mentor/ advisor system is used?
- Tell me about the call rooms, cafeteria, library, parking, and computers.
- What support staff is available?
APPENDIX E: Contact Information for Hospitals, Clinics, and Other Organizations in Central Georgia

Hospitals & Clinics:


The Coliseum Medical Centers. [http://coliseumhealthsystem.com/about/volunteers.dot](http://coliseumhealthsystem.com/about/volunteers.dot)


**Houston County Volunteer Medical Clinic.** [https://www.hhc.org/About-Us/Houston-County-Volunteer-Medical-Clinic](https://www.hhc.org/About-Us/Houston-County-Volunteer-Medical-Clinic)

**Houston Medical Center.** [https://www.hhc.org/About-Us/Volunteer-Opportunities](https://www.hhc.org/About-Us/Volunteer-Opportunities)

Hospice:

**Compassionate Care Hospice (Southeast).** [http://cchnet.net/southeast/georgia/macon/](http://cchnet.net/southeast/georgia/macon/), [http://cchnet.net/volunteers/how-to-volunteer/](http://cchnet.net/volunteers/how-to-volunteer/)

**Hospice Care Options, Warner Robins.** [http://www.hcoga.com/](http://www.hcoga.com/). Contact Richard Weires at [rweires@healthcoga.com](mailto:rweires@healthcoga.com)


Medical Missions. Mercer University sponsors multiple mission trips for students and faculty every year. Some of these trips have a medical focus and allow students to gain practical clinical and patient care experience as well. For more information about Mercer on Mission trips, visit the Web site: [http://www.mercer.edu/mom/](http://www.mercer.edu/mom/).