

Academic Preparation for PA School

Minimum Required Coursework for Admission to PA Programs. The minimum required coursework for admission to PA programs varies, but most schools 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 semester or one year of organic chemistry, one year of general biology, and one year of anatomy and physiology (all with lab components), plus one semester each of microbiology (for BIO majors, with lab), biochemistry (lab not required), statistics, general psychology, along with various coursework in the humanities and social sciences. Many require or recommend genetics. The College of Liberal Arts & Sciences equivalents of these courses are shown in the table below.

General chemistry	CHM 111 and CHM 112 (8 hr)
Organic chemistry	CHM 221 and 222 (8 hr)
General biology	BIO 171 and 172 (8 hr)
Biochemistry	BMB 465 (3 hr; prereq = CHM 222 and BIO 172)
Microbiology	BIO 303 (4 hr; prereq = 280) (Note that BIO 102 does not substitute at most PA schools)
Genetics	BIO 310 or BIO 280 (4 hr)
Human Anatomy and Physiology	BIO 131 and 132 (8 hr)
Statistics	STA 126
General psychology	PSY 101
<p><u>Medical terminology</u> is required by some schools; Mercer does not offer this course. However, many accredited online institutions offer this class (e.g., Geneva College's online programs, https://portagelearning.com). Students should be able to find an affordable course by searching the internet or asking their target schools if they have a preferred institution for that class.</p>	

Pre-PA students must investigate the different programs available and make themselves aware of the particular requirements for the programs in which they are interested. The Physician Assistant Education Association maintains a directory of member programs for easy searching: <http://directory.paeonline.org/>.

AP, IB, and CLEP Credit to Fulfill Science Prerequisites. An increasing number of medical schools (including Mercer University School of Medicine) do not accept AP, IB, or CLEP credit to fulfill the core science prerequisites. Students who use such credit to fulfill a degree requirement for a core science will still need to complete two semesters of that science in college to fulfill the admission requirement for medical school (e.g., a student who uses AP credit to fulfill CHM 111 must then take CHM 112 and CHM 311 or 241). In most cases, it is in the student's best interest to decline AP, IB, or CLEP credit for general chemistry, general biology, and physics, and take the actual college courses instead.

Online Science Coursework. Most medical schools do not accept online coursework for the core science requirements. Many medical schools relaxed the requirement for "in-person" science courses for students at institutions that did not offer students a choice due to the pandemic, but most medical schools have returned to requiring "in person" lab coursework.

Pass/ Fail Grading Options. Although many medical schools relaxed the requirement for graded prerequisite coursework for students due to the pandemic, medical schools have returned to the policy of accepting only prerequisite courses taken for a letter grade.

Academic Majors and Minors for Pre-PA Students. Physician assistant programs look for individuals who come from various backgrounds and possess a variety of skills and interests. Most PA programs require applicants to complete a bachelor's degree before they matriculate, but they may not express a preference for any particular academic major when reviewing applications. Pre-physician assistant students may therefore major in any academic discipline that they are interested in, as long as s/he also completes the required courses for admission to his/her preferred PA programs as well. Because a successful pre-physician assistant student must demonstrate a superior level of motivation and exceptional academic performance, the chosen academic major should interest the student sufficiently to catalyze such performance. Physician assistant programs also look for students with academic records that reflect their commitment to life-long learning.

Chemistry Minor: While pre-physician 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 & Sciences' requirements for a minor in chemistry.

Biology Minor: Students who complete 18 credit hours in biology (including 6 hour in residence at Mercer) fulfill the CLAS' requirements for a minor in biology.

The Importance of Mathematics to the Pre-PA Track. To enroll in the first semester of general chemistry (CHM 111), a student must demonstrate a minimum mathematics competency that is equivalent to pre-calculus (MAT 133) or above. This competency may be demonstrated through a "math index" (calculated upon entry as a first-year student using the high school GPA and math score on the SAT or ACT) of 980 or higher; college credit for MAT 133 (transfer, AP, or CLEP), or by scoring 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/>.

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>.

