



Prehealth Programs: Physician Assistant

CU-BOULDER ACADEMIC ADVISING CENTER, PREPROFESSIONAL OFFICE
<http://advising.colorado.edu> (click on prehealth, at left)

The Physician Assistant

Physician Assistants (PAs) are members of the fastest growing health profession. To date there are more than 46,000 practicing PAs, 55% employed in group practices and 23% employed by hospitals. PAs are academically and clinically prepared to work closely with a supervising physician to provide many of the same services. They take histories, order diagnostic tests, perform physical exams, make diagnoses and prescribe medications. The majority of PAs work in primary care such as family practice, pediatric, or internal medicine settings. The second largest group works in various surgical specialties or the ER. There are several types of PA educational programs with an average length of 26 months. All prepare the graduate to pass the National Physician Assistant Certifying exam. By doing a masters thesis, many PA programs offer an MS in addition to the PA certification.

UNDERGRADUATE MAJOR

Most PA programs require you to complete a BA/BS before entry into PA school. A few require several years of experience in a healthcare field. If you do complete a baccalaureate degree before applying, it may be in any field in which you will excel. Many choose science majors because the prerequisites for PA school and those for a science degree overlap.

There are two quite different PA programs in Colorado. Red Rocks Community College offers a 2 year certificate program that requires 2000 hours of experience with patients before admission. Articulation with the MS program at Regis University is available for those with undergraduate degrees. The Health Sciences Center offers the CHA/PA program described below.

The Child Health Associate/Physician Assistant (CHA/PA)

The CHA/PA Program is a primary care physician assistant program that prepares you to provide medical care for people of all ages, with an emphasis in pediatrics. This three-year program highlights the need for service to disadvantaged, at-risk and medically-underserved populations. Some students matriculate into an optional rural track that emphasizes rural practice in the clinical internship year. Almost all recent graduates work in primary care: 40% in family medicine, 45% in pediatrics, and 15% in subspecialties. CHA/PA graduates practice in many settings including private offices, community health centers, HMOs, school-based adolescent clinics, emergency rooms and newborn nurseries.

If you are considering the Child Health Associate/Physician Assistant Program (CHA/PA) at the University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, plan to have completed a baccalaureate degree by the time of admission. University of Colorado students most often choose biology or integrative physiology as a major, since courses in these majors overlap with the prerequisites making them a logical choice. However, you should feel free to choose any major you like, one that interests you and in which you will do well. Consider, also, which major might provide a good alternative should your plans to become a physician assistant not materialize.

PREREQUISITES FOR CHA/PA

Prerequisites for the CHA/PA program will change slightly for applicants who wish to attend in 2008 and 2009. The basic elements are listed here but we highly recommend that you regularly consult the CHA/PA website to be assured of their accuracy. Your cumulative and science GPA must be 2.8 on a 4.0 scale, and all prerequisites must be completed with a grade of C or higher. All prerequisite coursework, except

genetics, psychology and statistics, must be completed before submitting your application in the fall prior to the year you wish to enter PA school. You should also have taken the GRE before submitting your application. The remaining prerequisites must be completed by the time you matriculate. Upper-division sciences and the GRE may not be more than 5 years old when you apply. Course numbers below refer to CU-Boulder courses, while the required semester hours in parentheses hold true for most PA schools.

General Chemistry (2 sems. w/ lab)
CHEM 1111, CHEM 1131

Genetics (1 semester)
EBIO 2070 *or* MCDB 2150/2151

Psychology (2 semesters)
Any two psychology courses

Statistics (1 semester)
PSYC 3101 *or* MATH 2510 *or* IPHY 2800

You must complete at least 14 semester hours of biological sciences with a minimum of 6 semester hours of upper-division credit. Biological science courses must include:

Human Physiology (1 sem. w/ lab)
IPHY 3430

Human Anatomy (1 sem. w/ lab)
IPHY 3415

Note: For 2007 Human Anatomy is recommended but not required. In 2008 it is required.

Recommended upper-division biological sciences include biochemistry, cell biology, and microbiology. Genetics may not be included in upper-division science hours.

The website for the CHA/PA program at UCHSC is very detailed and will answer many questions. It is strongly recommended that you do not assume that a course is appropriate without consulting www.uchsc.edu/chapa

PREHEALTH PROGRAMS:

EXTRACURRICULAR EXPERIENCE

Admission committees for physician assistant programs are looking for well-rounded individuals who have a great deal of medical experience. Experience should include working with patients and interacting with physician assistants.

At UCHSC, experience in healthcare is not required, however, a successful applicant will have explored the profession and be able to show a passion for taking care of diverse patients in this particular role.

HELPFUL CONTACTS

You should take the time during your undergraduate career to nurture meaningful relationships with people who you respect, whether they be professors or professionals you meet during extracurricular work. If a professor's research excites you, try to become part of his or her team, or arrange to do independent study or research under his or her direction. If you are drawn to an individual, follow up on maintaining contact. Some physician assistant programs require letters of recommendation, and heart-felt letters of enthusiasm are evident compared to the "boiler-plate" variety that emerge when professors are asked to submit dozens of letters for students they barely know.

In addition, being part of a network of people working in the field that you consider your passion can pay off in intangible ways down the road.

GRE EXAM

Some PA programs will accept other graduate level exam scores, but UCHSC CHA/PA program requires that you take the GRE within 5 years of applying and have scores above 500 on all sections. See the website for the Educational Testing Service for further information: www.ets.org

Application Year

The majority of PA programs, including the one at UCHSC now require that applications be submitted through the online application service called CASPA. This initial application is available from mid-April until September 1. Follow the instructions carefully, particularly in regards to letters of recommendation. These may be done electronically or by paper.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

You will submit three letters of recommendation from people who are familiar with your academic and professional experience. You should consult the website of each program you are considering in order to offer the correct type of recommendation letter. Typically they come from professors, employers and practicing physician assistants. CASPA prefers electronic submissions of letters but will accept those on paper. The Credentials File Service of the Preprofessional Advising Office can assist with the collection and submission of paper references.

INTERVIEWS

Qualified applicants will be required to interview with the Admissions Committee. Interviews are offered from September to early December. Practice interviews are offered by the Preprofessional Advising Office. Call 303-735-3000 for more information.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

PREHEALTH STUDENT GROUPS

Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED) is an honors prehealth society for those interested in health careers. Contact with other students with similar interests as yours can be very gratifying. You can e-mail AED at aed@ucsu.colorado.edu or visit their web site at: www.colorado.edu/Student-Groups/AED/.

The Student Association for Prehealth Professionals (SAPP) represents a community of students at CU-Boulder who are interested in pursuing health-related careers. Its goal is to provide an organization where students interested in all areas of medicine can come together and learn more about the many professions, receive academic or personal guidance, and get detailed advice on applying to graduate schools. Membership is open to all CU students. You can e-mail SAPP at prhlth@colorado.edu or visit their web site at: <http://www.colorado.edu/student-groups/prehealth>.

Vital Statistics (from the CU Health Sciences Center Child Health Associate/Physician Assistant Program, 2006)

Applications to acceptance ratio: 4:1

Total applications received: 157

Mean age of students: 26

Average GPA: Cum: 3.67 Sci: 3.61

Size of class: 40

Colorado residents: 82%

Degree conferred upon graduation:

BS Medical Science Certificate for PA program; MS Child Health Associate

upon completion of master's project
Licensure requirements: PA National

Certifying Exam

In-state tuition: \$31,100 over three years

Average income of profession after three years: \$76,000

All information in this publication is subject to change. Please check with the prehealth advisor, or with the appropriate school for up-to-date information.

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