Physician Assistant FAQs

Q: What should I major in?
A: PA schools do not prefer one major over another, so major in whatever subject interests you. There is no general, pre-PA major offered at Texas A&M. Majors like Allied Health, Biology, and Nutrition are the most common for applicants because many of the prerequisite courses are included in the degree plan. A non-science major does not put you at a disadvantage, but you will have to work with your academic advisor to incorporate some of the prerequisite classes into your schedule. Your GPA in the prerequisite and science courses is particularly important because schools will use these indicators to compare between applicants of all majors.

Q: Can I take a course at a community college?
A: It is not recommended to take a prerequisite course at community college, though non-science courses are less problematic (History, Political Science, English, etc). Use caution when taking any science course at community college. Know that while the grade earned at a community college does not count on your TAMU transcript, the grade earned will be calculated into your GPA when you apply to PA school. Use this to your advantage and get A’s in any courses you take at community college to help raise your GPA. You want to take as many of your sciences as you can at TAMU because TAMU has an excellent reputation for the rigor of academic courses. Taking a class at TAMU is more impressive than taking the same class at community college. If you are particularly worried about your success in a class at TAMU, consider registering for the course during the summertime when classes are smaller and tutoring services are less crowded.

Q: When should I take the GRE?
A: Students should take the GRE the spring they apply to PA school. For students looking to begin their professional program immediately after graduation from TAMU, they would apply the summer between junior and senior year. Some students take the GRE in the spring semester of their junior year. Visit this website for more information on the GRE.

Q: I made a 3/4/5 on my AP test. Should I accept the credit?
A: Accepting AP credit can be beneficial. Talk to your professional school AND academic advisor before accepting any AP credit. You want to make sure the credit you are accepting counts towards your degree. Note that once you accept AP credit, you cannot un-accept it so make sure you meet with your advisors before making your final decision.

Q: I used freshman grade exclusion to exclude a grade on my TAMU transcript. Will the professional schools that I apply to be able to see it?
A: While freshman grade exclusion can help your TAMU GPA, the class is still recorded on your transcript, which means professional schools will be able to see it. While the class will not affect your TAMU GPA, professional schools consider all classes taken when looking at your grades, meaning they will calculate in the excluded grade. If this grade is in a science course, this could be particularly important. Note that freshman grade exclusion does not affect students entering A&M after Fall 2013.

Q: What factors do physician assistant school application committees consider other than my GPA when I apply?
A: Besides GPA, PA experience is the next significant element of your application. PA schools want to see that you have spent time shadowing, volunteering, or working with a PA. You need at least 50 hours of shadowing experience, but competitive applicants often have more than 200 hours. PA schools want to see you have had significant patient contact. Leadership and community service are important factors as well. A competitive resume will include work history, leadership skills demonstrated through on and off campus involvement, community service and involvement, and academic achievements and awards. Your application should paint a picture of you as an individual, highlighting your professional, academic, and personal qualities.
Q: How do I get shadowing hours?
A: Seek opportunities over the summer or winter breaks to shadow a PA from your hometown. It is often easier to get hours this way due to the large number of students pursuing limited spots in College Station. Volunteer programs at hospitals are a common way to get shadowing hours, and this is a good way to work in shadowing hours over a semester. Hospitals commonly ask you to commit 4 hours per week for a whole semester. Privately owned medical practices or clinics are another source to look at for shadowing opportunities. Contact an establishment directly with your interest in shadowing and ask if they have a process set up for shadows or volunteers.

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