

USD Physician Assistant Studies Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the difference between a PA and a physician?

A: Physician Assistants are educated in the "medical model"; in some schools they attend many of the same classes as medical students. One of the main differences between PA education and physician education is not the core content of the curriculum, but the amount of time spent in formal education. In addition to time in school, physicians are required to complete an internship, and the majority complete a residency in a specialty following. PAs are not required to do an internship or residency.

A physician has complete responsibility for the care of a patient, while PAs share the responsibility with a supervising physician.

Q: What is the length of the PA Program?

A: The PA Program's curriculum is 28 months (six semesters) in duration beginning the first part of August each year. The program includes on summer session and graduation is in December. The first 14 months are primarily didactic (classroom and laboratory) and the last 14 months are the clinical phase. The program is only offered on a full-time basis. Additional information regarding the curriculum is available on the program website.

Q: Why is it recommended that pre-requisite courses be taken within the last ten years?

A: The fields of science are rapidly changing on a regular basis. The PA Program believes that students should have a relatively current knowledge base in the sciences which will provide a solid foundation for the clinical science instruction provided in the PA curriculum.

Q: I don't have the pre-requisite courses completed yet. Can I still apply?

A: As long as you have a plan to complete the pre-requisite courses by June 1 of the year you would officially enter the program if you were accepted, you are eligible to apply right away. We encourage you to apply early. Please keep the program up to date as you finish a pre-requisite course. Due to the rigor of the Program, candidates are not permitted to complete pre-requisites after matriculation into the PA Program.

Q: Am I too old to apply?

A: The USD PA Program's admissions policies do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, ethnicity or disability. However, candidates are urged to review the [Technical Standards](#) and consult the USD PA Program to determine if the University can provide reasonable accommodations to meet the standards of practice.

Q: I have a foreign medical degree; do I still need to complete the pre-requisites?

A: Yes. Candidates with transcripts from another country must submit them to [Educational Credential Evaluators, Inc.](#) for translation and evaluation. If the evaluation shows a pre-requisite as completed, it will generally be accepted by the Program if it meets the time, credit hour and grade requirements. Candidates with foreign medical degrees are also urged to review the PA Program's policies on transfer credit and advanced placement. In addition, it is advisable to contact our [Department of International Student Advising](#) (605) 677-6679 if you have questions regarding TOEFL or visa requirements.

Q: How soon can I apply?

A: You can begin applying to [CASPA](#) as early as May 1 in the year of application.

Q: How do I know if CASPA has received all the required materials?

A: After submitting your application, CASPA allows you to track the progress of your application. CASPA will not forward your application until it is complete. Remember it is your responsibility to verify that CASPA has received all required information: transcripts, letters of recommendation, etc. Incomplete applications will not be considered for admission to the Program.

Q: Do I have to take the GRE?

A: No, The University of South Dakota Physician Assistant Studies Program does not require the GRE at this time.

Q: Where should I obtain references?

A: It is recommended that candidates seek references from individuals who are well acquainted with them academically, personally and/or professionally. It is desirable that candidates seek a variety of sources for references. In other words, references should not all come from college professors. The reference source should have been acquainted with the candidate for a significant period of time.

Q: What components of the application are most important?

A: All components of the application are important. In the admissions process we look at:

- *Cumulative GPA
- *Pre-requisite GPA
- *Age of academic experience (the most competitive applicants have completed the science pre-requisites within the past 10 years)
- *Amount and type of hands-on/direct patient care experience
- *Letters of recommendation
- *Essay questions on the USD PA Supplemental Application

*Personal interview - understanding of the profession and educational rigor.
Additionally, interpersonal aptitudes necessary for practice as a physician assistant.

Q: What types of healthcare experience are acceptable?

A: Basically any experience in which you participate in the hands-on care of sick people will count toward our requirement. Some students have backgrounds in such areas as phlebotomy, respiratory care, athletic training, nursing, nursing assistant, medical assistant, EMT, paramedic, PA shadowing, and volunteer experiences.

Q: Do you accept transfer credits toward the PA curriculum?

A: No. We do not accept transfer credits or experiential learning credits for the Physician Assistant Program. All incoming PA students must complete the entire 28 month master's program.

Q: I am on the Alternate list; if I am not accepted, do I need to reapply the following year?

A: Yes. Candidates on the alternate list who are not offered a seat for the current admissions cycle must reapply through CASPA in order to be considered for subsequent admissions decisions.

Q: I was not accepted, can I reapply and how can I improve my application?

A: The USD PA Program encourages reapplication and it is often viewed by the admission committee as an indication of motivation and perseverance. The admissions process is very competitive. As a rule, the successful candidate exceeds minimal entrance requirements in more than one area. In addition, his/her interview demonstrates a high level of professionalism, knowledge regarding the PA Program and PA profession as well as excellent communication skills.

Q: Who do I contact with questions about financial aid?

A: Questions concerning financial aid should be addressed to the Office of Financial Aid, 414 E. Clark, Belbas Center, Vermillion, SD 57069, telephone (605)677-6837.

Q: Can I work and attend PA school at the same time?

A: It is not recommended that you be employed and attend the PA Program at the same time. The time commitment for attending the PA Program is too great. It is not recommended that you be employed during the didactic phase of the program, and it is not allowed during the clinical year.

It is PA Program policy that no enrolled PA student may be employed within the program or required to work for the program.

Q: Where are the clinical sites during the second phase of the program?

A: Students can expect to do clinical rotations in South Dakota and the surrounding states.

Q: Is housing provided for students at all clinical sites?

A: Some housing is provided for students free of charge, but in most cases, students will be responsible for finding and securing housing at clinical sites. Students are responsible for their own travel, meals and lodging during the clinical year. Students are encouraged to budget for this expense when planning their clinical rotations.

Q: Will I have input to where my clinical rotations will be?

A: Students work with the clinical coordinator to ensure each student has a chance to assist picking out electives in the clinical year. Core rotations are assigned by the clinical coordinator. Students are **not allowed** to arrange their own clinical rotations.

Q: What does your typical PA Student look like:

A: Class of 2010

Average Age: 28

Average GPA: 3.39

Average Healthcare experience: 2.93 years

Class of 2011

Average Age: 24

Average GPA: 3.72

Average Healthcare experience: 1.79 years