What should I do as a

Pre-PA Student?

GVSU Pre-PA Club

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Becoming a PA can be overwhelming and exciting – this may help!

Introduction

Dear You,

There are so many requirements and each school is a little different. Knowing where to start and what is important versus optional can be difficult, and it may have you feeling like it is an impossible goal to achieve. Good news – it's not! We've been there, and now that we are on the other side of things we want to help give you the tools and resources that we didn't have, but that would have been helpful. This booklet is full of information – but this journey is yours. Take what you need, and leave the rest. Everyone's journey to becoming a PA is slightly different, and that is okay!

Brought to you by –

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When you decide you want to become a PA:

01

Congratulations! This is the time to GET ORGANIZED. This includes a few different things, which will be outlined below. Take this process one step at a time – it looks much more overwhelming than it is.

First – begin looking at PA program information and deciding which schools you may want to attend (out of 200+ programs).

This is important so you can determine which schools are the best fit based on tuition, GPA and patient care requirements, previous student profiles, and more.

Four basic, but very important pieces!

Second – Find Patient Care Experience Hours!

- Most schools require 0-2,000 hours, minimum!
- This is often an important part of the application.
- Competitive applications often have **more** than the minimum.
- Consider certifications if possible (CNA/EMT/RN/RT) – this is not required.
- Additional information can be found at:
  - https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/14RuC_Ez WqDXPLXbVOcopKYXMTmIAcc4r7rsZSYwFNyU/ed it?usp=sharing
- Do **not** sacrifice your GPA to get more hours!

Third: meet with an academic advisor to make sure you have all the prerequisites in your schedule .
See the following resources:

✓ **Prerequisite coursework powerpoint -**
https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1m8PN1pYMVras6F 1cuHTnFcB0KN8i0Zuadse0RjllF3l/edit?usp=sharing

✓ **Prerequisite coursework four-year timeline -**
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1J_iJX_y6gRStBy5VaQWTAI7Sv _8zSzyCxsqZzdwhFqE/edit?usp=sharing

Fourth: optional, but beneficial, things to consider:

- Join the Pre-PA Club – this will serve as a valuable resource throughout undergrad
- Tour schools of interest – some will give you extra applicant points for doing so
- Obtain Interprofessional Student Certification – more info in section 06. This does take about a year to complete.
- Consider taking a second language

Additional Opportunities to Consider

Leadership Role

- Join a club board
- Be a group leader for a community group, youth group, or sports team
- Take advantage of opportunities to advance at your job to higher level positions, if possible

Begin looking into volunteer opportunities

- Some schools have a required minimum, but even if they don't they want to see you're dedicated to the community!
- Non-healthcare volunteer hours are important, too! It shows a well-rounded individual behind the application.
- Focusing on a few organizations consistently can help form relationships and increase the number of people who may be willing to write a letter of recommendation.
- Think about your passions to find the right starting place, spreading yourself across all areas may be unrealistic.

CONSIDER JOINING PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, INCLUDING:

MAPA & AAPA

Undergraduate research is another great way to set yourself apart! Consider research in an area of interest, or in one of the sciences. Start early if you would like to have a leadership role in the lab, or even your name on a published project at some point – imagine being able to talk about that!

Begin finding PAs to shadow

- 20–40 hours is often recommended or required – but having more never hurts!
- Your place of employment, friends, or family may be a great place to start looking.
- Shadowing in primary care is highly recommended, since this is where PAs are needed the most.
- Shadowing in more than one area is also recommended (hospitalist, specialist, and more)!

Six Months to a Year Before CASPA Opens

Start thinking about who you want to do your recommendation letters/rubrics. Some schools have requirements for this, so be sure to check!

- Consider having 2 supervisors, 2 professors, and 1 PA or MD who can speak to your understanding of the profession.
- When you speak to these individuals, try to narrow down what they should focus on (for example, ask your professors to write about your academic abilities and your personality and professionalism in the classroom).

Begin working on your CV/Resume if your schools require one.

Take the GRE!

- Aim for the 50th percentile or higher in each category.
- You can only take it once every 21 days, so make sure you give yourself enough time to retake it if you choose to.
- The test costs roughly $200, but there is a 50% fee reduction waiver if you qualify based on income: https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/reductions/
- There are several very helpful prep books on the market. Many people find Kaplan to be most helpful, but read reviews and information before deciding which would be best for you.
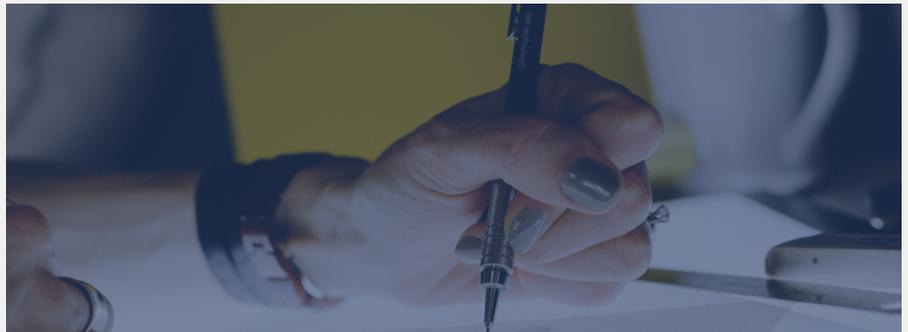
Start working on your personal statement!

- There is a 5,000-character limit
- The sooner you start, the better! This allows you to review it in the writing center before they get busy, meaning more one-on-one time!
- Choose two to three other people to review it. Consider a PA and a friend or family member. Having too many can lead to the loss of your voice, but not enough can lead to missed mistakes.
- Have a central theme/idea that you relate every point in your paper to - this helps establish a focus and maintain clarity.
- Read it out loud without emotion - this can help you find lapses in clarity.
- DO NOT repeat general things like, "you want to help people" - think about what makes you stand out. What unique experiences and traits do you bring to the table, and how will they help you as a student and future PA?

Six Months to a Year Before CASPA Opens – Continued

Organize your experiences. Google sheets or excel are great platforms for this!

Things to track may include facility address, supervisor, phone number, and the number of hours. This will make filling our the CASPA application easier when the time comes.

You may also want to include a section to write down what happened each day. This will help you with your personal statement and possibly with interviews since you can glance through to remember lessons, patient interactions, stories, and more.

Begin finding answers to the following common additional application (or interview) questions:

1. What are the differences between a PA, NP, and MD. Why do you want to be a PA specifically?

2. What is the scope of practice and what are the current laws surrounding the PA profession?

3. What are some current events or issues going on within the PA profession?

4. What have you done to prepare yourself to be a PA?

5. Why do you think you'd make a good PA?

6. Research the schools you want to attend to determine their vision, mission, and values, as well as anything else unique about their program. Be prepared to articulate why you selected their program specifically. Also think about what you have to contribute to their program, and how you will embody their programs values.

The AAPA and MAPA websites are great places to find out about current events in the profession, and they often have tips for Pre-PA students as well!

A Few Weeks Before CASPA Opens

First – Look at the programs you are planning to apply to and find out a few important things:

Do they have a supplemental application? How and when should you fill it out? Is there an additional application fee? How and when should you pay this? Where should you send your GRE scores (what is the code)?

Lastly, double check that by the time you apply, you will have met all the application requirements and prerequisites for each program!

Also, are they rolling admissions?

- Some programs list this on their program websites – check before contacting the school.
- If they do not list it on the website, do not be afraid to email the program and ask.
- I recommend this because it helps you prioritize your time when the application opens. It is often to your benefit to apply to schools with rolling admissions as soon as possible.
- Consider making a spreadsheet for each school that lists what you need to do for the application, the deadline for admission, and whether they have rolling admissions or not. This will make it easier to keep track when the time comes.

You are getting closer to the finish line, and it is time to get everything in order. There is a lot to remember, but taking it one step at a time and prioritizing things will help **save you** some stress and overwhelm.

Second: make sure that you have access to everything you will need:

✓ **_Reach out to the people writing your recommendation letters -_**
Make sure they are still willing and able to write them and fill out the rubric and explain to them how it works and what they should be watching for (when you put their contact information into the application system, they should receive an email from CASPA with instructions on what to do from there).

✓ **_Make a folder on your computer of any documents you'll need to upload -_**
This may include, but is not limited to, licenses, certifications, military papers, and syllabi.

✓ **_Solidify your personal statement (and CV/Resume) -_**
Before you submit your personal statement (CV and/or resume), read it over out loud without emotion. This will help you confirm your statement conveys what you want it to convey. **Also,** *check your character count and make sure it is less than 5,000 characters. The purpose of this exercise is to add final touches or make minor editorial changes.*

When CASPA is OPEN

Make an account

- Go to CASPA and make yourself an account
- Add the desired schools to your account (you can add additional schools later).
- Input as much of your personal information as possible.

Make sure you fill out & submit any supplemental applications, as well as pay any additional fees.

Top things to think about when CASPA opens

- **Request the transcripts from UNDERLINE ALL colleges and universities you have attended.**
  - They need to be from the original school attended, not transfer credits. The exception is AP or CLEP credit, which just needs to be on your transcript somewhere.
  - If you're finishing any prerequisites it may be worth it to wait a week or two for the grades to show up before requesting the transcripts.
  - Some schools require that an electronic request be made as well, so mail out your CASPA form to the school and when you are reasonably sure it has gotten there you can submit the electronic request as well. Not all schools will reach out and tell you they need this if you do not ask, so I recommend doing it anyway just to be safe.
- **Input the contact information for the individuals completing your letters of recommendation.**
  - I also recommend letting them know, that way the request does not get lost in their inbox, and they have adequate time to complete it.
- **Request your GRE scores be sent to CASPA.**
  - Check the program websites for a code (if they require a GRE score). Some schools request you send it directly to the school graduate program versus to CASPA, so make sure you do what each school requests.

Next Steps:

Begin inputting your academic history and supporting information. This can take some time, and you need to be sure to input things correctly so that there are no issues later in the process. This includes *transcript entry, documenting your shadowing, volunteering, patient care, and healthcare experience hours, research, leadership, GRE scores, and more*. Even though they will receive your scores and transcripts, you must input them yourself (or pay someone to do it for you). Be sure to input and request transcripts for every course you have taken at any school of higher education after graduating from highschool, whether you feel the courses were relevant or not.

Final Tips & Info

1. Interprofessional Student Certificate

This is a great way to set yourself apart and show that you are dedicated to and enjoy working collaboratively with others.

Information about how to complete the requirements and obtain this certificate can typically be found at your university, often within the health sciences programs. GVSU specific information can be found at: https://www.gvsu.edu/miperc/ipe-student-certificate-19.htm

2. Applying to Schools

The number of schools you apply to is a personal choice. It is not recommended to apply to schools you would never go to, as it just costs you more money. The recommendation is to apply to at least FIVE schools, and beyond that it should be based on your statistics (GPA, GRE, healthcare experience hours, and so on), as well as your ability to afford the applications.

3. Follow your own path

Just because someone else did something and got accepted to a PA program does not mean the same will be true for you. PA programs are not looking for the perfect, cookie–cutter applicant. They want diversity. They want someone who is real and has a true passion for what they are doing. Each school has a different student profile, so get familiar with your schools, and more importantly, get in touch with yourself. Take a breath and remember why you are doing this in the first place.

Example Excel Spreadsheets

This first example includes volunteer experiences and shadowing experiences. It includes many details that you may wish to remember later on to help with your personal statement, inputting information into CASPA, and answering questions at your interview!

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	Volunteer Experiences	Date/Hours					
2	Volunteer Organization 1	01/01/2019 4pm-8pm	Address	Phone Number	Supervisor Name	Responsibilities	Noteworthy experiences/lessons/stories
3		01/07/2019 4pm-8pm	""	""	""	""	
4		Continue making additional columns each day you volunteer					
5							
6	Volunteer Organization 2	02/02/2019 9am-1pm	Address	Phone Number	Supervisor Name	Responsibilities	Noteworthy experiences/lessons/stories
7		02/02/2019 9am-1pm	""	""	""		
8		Continue making additional columns each day you volunteer					
9	Make as many "groups" of volunteer experiences as you need to. You may have 2-3 regular organization you volunteer with, or 10-20 less frequent ones depending on what works for you.						
10		Total Hours: 16 hours					
11							
12	PA Shadows					Total Hours	
13	Jane Doe - Family Practice PA	5/5/2019 8am-6pm	5/6/2019 8am-6pm	5/7/19 8am-6pm		30 hours	
14	Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx	List any noteworthy experiences in this section - but be mindful of HIPAA. Even shadowing you must maintain confidentiality					
15	Email: janedoe@email.com						
16	Employer: Family Providers of the Great Lakes						
17	John Doe - Critical Care PA	6/13/2019 6pm-6:30am	6/14/19 6pm-6:30am			25 hours	
18	Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx	List any noteworthy experiences in this section - but be mindful of HIPAA. Even shadowing you must maintain confidentiality					
19	Email: Johndoe@email.com						
20	Employer: Great Lake Hospital ICU						
21	Sally Jane - Hospitalist PA	10/8/2019 3pm-11pm				8 hours	
22	Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx	List any noteworthy experiences in this section - but be mindful of HIPAA. Even shadowing you must maintain confidentiality					
23	Email: Sallyjane@email.com						
24	Employer: South Lake Hospital						
25	Peter Paul - Surgery PA	12/12/2019 8am-12pm	12/20/2019 8am-3pm	12/28/2019 11am-7pm		19 hours	
26	Phone: xxx-xxx-xxxx	List any noteworthy experiences in this section - but be mindful of HIPAA. Even shadowing you must maintain confidentiality					
27	Email: Peterpaul@email.com						
28	Employer: Trauma Surgeons of the Great Lakes						
29						82 hours	

This second example includes patient care experience hours, memberships, certifications, licenses, military experience, and leadership experience. It shows some of the important pieces you may wish to include for these, but you can choose to add to this template or take some pieces out. You may also consider writing down specific details and noteworthy experiences for each of these areas to use as talking points later on.

	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
30							
31	Patient Care Experience						
32	Place of Employment 1	Dates: 01/01/2019-Present	20 hours/week	Supervisor	Contact Info	Address	Roles/Responsibilities
33	Place of Employment 2	Dates: 01/01/2018-12/31/2018	750 hours	Supervisor	Contact Info	Address	Roles/Responsibilities
34			Total Hours: 1390				
35							
36	Memberships						
37	Pre-PA Club	Dates: xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx	Roles/Activities	Contact			
38	AAPA	Dates: xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx	Roles/Activities	Contact			
39							
40	Certifications, Licenses, Military, etc						
41	Certified Nurse Assistant	Dates: xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx	Where you obtained it	Make sure you have any documentation handy so you can upload it to CASPA			
42	Basic Life Support (BLS)	Dates: xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx	Where you obtained it				
43							
44	Leadership Experience						
45	Pre-PA Club Vice President	Dates: xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx	Contact	Roles/Responsibilities	3 hours/week		
46	Youth Group Leader	Dates: xx/xx/xxxx-xx/xx/xxxx	""	""	5 hours/week		

Example Excel Spreadsheets – Continued

This third example includes PA Program requirements and information. It can be customized for what is useful for you, but it can help you keep organized while trying to balance classes, work, and applications all at the same time. It will also make sure you stay on track with prerequisites, testing, and experience hours.

	A	B	C	D	E	F
52	School Requirements					
53		School 1	School 2	School 3	School 4	School 5
54	Prerequisites	General Chemistry	Organic Chemisry (1 semester)	Biology (2 semesters)	Biochemistry (1 semester)	Organic Chemistry OR Biochemistry (2 semesters)
55		Organic Chemistry (2 semesters)	Biochemistry (1 semester)	Organic Chemistry (2 semesters)	Pathophysiology	Microbiology (with a lab)
56		Biochemistry (1 semester)	Statistics	Biochemistry (2 semesters)	Statistics	Upper level physiology
57		Genetics	Psychology	Statistics	Upper level physiology	Statistics
58		Statistics	Physiology	Anatomy	Microbiology (with a lab)	Developmental Psychology
59		Anatomy	Medical Terminology	Physiology (upper level)		Anatomy
60		Physiology	Microbiology (with a lab)	Pathophysiology		Medical Terminology
61		Psychology (at least 3 credits)		Psychology		
62				Physics (1 semester)		
63				Microbiology		
64	Outstanding Courses	2 at the time of application	NONE	1 at the time of application	2 at the time of application	2 at the time of application
65	Tests	GRE - Code: xxxx	NONE	GRE - Code: xxxx	CASPer	NONE - can submit via code: xxxx if desired
66				CASPer		
67	Supplemental Application:	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES
68	Supplemental Fee:	$50	$35	$40	NO	$55
69	Additional Requirements:	50 volunteer hours	500 patient care experience hours	30 volunteer hours	100 volunteer hours	2,000 patient care experience hours
70		20 shadowing hours	CV/Resume	1,000 patient care experience hours	50 shadowing hours	25 volunteer hours
71		1,000 patient care experience hours		CV/Resume - optional but encouraged		25 shadowing hours
72	Application Deadline:	1-Aug	1-Oct	1-Sep	1-Aug	1-Dec
73	Rolling Admissions:	NO	YES	YES	NO	NO

This may not be the best way for you to outline and organize - that's okay!

These outlines are not required, they are just meant to help you get started organizing all the different pieces of the application process, and give you an idea of what information to include when tracking your hours. Find the organization process that works for you and use that. The best way to use this guide is to personalize it. Have fun, and remember the end goal is PA school; how you get there is only part of the journey.

Simple Summary Checklist:

First:

- Determine which PA programs you want to attend
- Start finding patient care experience hours
- Meet with an academic advisor to plan prerequisite coursework
- Consider the following application boosters:
    - *Join the Pre-PA club*
    - *Tour your schools of interest*
    - *Obtain an interprofessional student certification*
    - *Take a second language*

Second:

- Begin Volunteering
- Find a leadership role
- Begin finding PAs to shadow in multiple different areas of medicine
- Consider joining the AAPA and/or MAPA (or your home state's academy of physician assistants)
- Consider participating in undergraduate research

Third:

- Start thinking about who you want to fill out your recommendation rubrics and write letters of recommendation, and contact these people.
- Take the GRE
- Begin working on your personal statement and CV/Resume
- Organize your volunteer, patient care, and shadowing experiences for easier recall (see example excel spreadsheets on the previous pages).
- Start thinking about answers to common PA program interview questions

Fourth:

- Nail down all the finishing touches and pull together any loose ends (collect any relevant paperwork and contact your references to make sure they are still able to complete their recommendation)
- Create a CASPA account soon after it opens, and work on submitting your applications.
- Submit any additional supplemental applications, GRE scores, tests such as CASPer, and fees.