PRE PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT CURRICULUM

The “prephysician assistant curriculum” is just a list of courses that are required for admission to a Physician Assistant (PA) Program. It is NOT an academic major, a minor, or an emphasis area.

WHAT SHOULD I MAJOR IN?

Physician Assistant (PA) schools require that students have a Baccalaureate degree (eg. B.S., B.A., etc) yet PA schools do not require a particular major. Although most pre-PA students choose a major in one of the sciences, other majors are acceptable including those in the humanities, social sciences, or business. Students should select the major in which they feel the most comfortable and in which they would like to work if they are not accepted into a PA school. Regardless of major, students are advised to take more than the minimum number of medicine-related science courses.

Progress toward a Baccalaureate Degree
Course work toward a baccalaureate degree at Southern Miss must be planned so the student meets all the requirements for the preprofessional curriculum, a major, a minor if appropriate, and the University General Education Curriculum. At Southern Miss, a minimum of 124 hours is needed for most baccalaureate degrees, with 45 of these hours from courses at the 300-level or above.

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAMS

For information about the PA Profession, visit the American Academy of Physician Assistants website: http://www.aapa.org/.

There are ~266 accredited PA programs nationwide in different stages of accreditation. See http://directory.paeaonline.org/ for a directory of those programs. For more information about PA schools, visit the Physician Assistant Education Association: http://www.paeaonline.org/
The PA professional program typically takes about 27 months to complete.

REQUIREMENTS FOR APPLICANTS

Admission to a PA program is very competitive; successful applicants typically exceed the minimum criteria for admission. Although there may be accommodations for early admission at some schools, students wishing to apply typically must earn a baccalaureate degree and must complete a series of prerequisite courses as part of a preprofessional program, for example at Southern Miss.

The prerequisites for admission to PA programs are somewhat different, depending on the school, so the student will need to determine the specific preprofessional curriculum to be followed. Students must consult the specific admission requirements and application deadlines for the school(s) to which they plan to apply.

Typical requirements for admission:
At a minimum, applicants must complete two years of undergraduate courses in basic and behaviorally sciences as prerequisites.

Almost all PA schools require that applicants complete a baccalaureate degree prior to the starting a PA program, with a minimum overall undergraduate GPA of 3.0 on 4.0 scale. Highly competitive applicants will have an overall GPA of 3.5 or higher.

Completion of prerequisite course work with a grade of C or higher in each course is a minimum requirement. Courses should be taken within the last ten years.

Some PA schools will accept online courses taken at a regionally accredited college, but others do not.

Completion of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) typically within the past five years (requirements vary with the school). Link: [www.gre.org](http://www.gre.org)

Required scores vary, but are typically in the range below:

- GRE score of 150 in Verbal and 150 in Quantitative and 3.5 in Analytical Writing

Three letters of evaluation/recommendation. At least one typically must be from a clinician [Medical Doctor (MD), Doctor of Osteopathy (DO), or Physician Assistant (PA)] who has personal knowledge of the student’s character and work habits.

Many PA schools require applicants to have completed at least 6 months (1,000 hours) of hands on patient care experience. Experience in hospitals, clinics, and private practices offers exposure to a wider range of patients and providers than does experience in nursing homes and with home health organizations.

Criminal history background check and/or drug tests typically are required before or after matriculation, depending on the school.

Must meet technical standards of school (eg. physical and other abilities)

**Mississippi College** in Clinton, Mississippi has the only PA program in the state; applications are available about May 1 for the following year; application deadline is March 1, with classes starting in late May. A Bachelor’s degree is required for admission. Students earn a Master of Science in Medicine degree: [http://www.mc.edu/academics/departments/pa/](http://www.mc.edu/academics/departments/pa/)

**Mississippi College PA Program**

**Required courses with USM Course prefixes and numbers listed by the requirements**

- two courses in Human Anatomy and Physiology (BSC 250/L; BSC 251/L)
  
  NOTE: Southern Miss students are strongly recommended to take general biology (BSC 110, 111 and L) before attempting the Anatomy and Physiology sequence

- one course in Microbiology (BSC 380/L)
  
  NOTE: admission to upper level biological sciences classes at Southern Miss requires two general biology courses (BSC 110/L; BSC 111/L)

- two courses in General Chemistry with laboratory (CHE 106/L, CHE 107/L)

- one course in Organic Chemistry with laboratory (CHE 255/L)

- one course in statistics (PSY 360 recommended, depending on student’s major)

- online courses, with the exception of statistics, are not accepted for required courses

**Recommended**

- additional upper level science classes, at USM these might include courses such as Genetics (BSC 370), Cell Biology (BSC 360), Molecular Biology (BSC 476, BSC 478L), Biochemistry (CHE 420) or (CHE 421, 422, 424), Histology (BSC 461 and L), Human Physiology BSC 451, and other health related Biological Science courses.

Mississippi College recommends the equivalent of six months experience (1,000 hours) direct patient care before the student enters the program.

Another nearby PA program is at the **University of South Alabama** in Mobile, Alabama; deadline for completed applications are due September 1 and their program begins in mid-May each year. Applicants
are encouraged to submit their application months before the deadline. A Bachelor’s degree is a requirement for admission. The program requires a minimum of 500 hours of direct patient care experience. Students earn a Master of Health Science:
http://www.southalabama.edu/colleges/alliedhealth/pa/

**University of South Alabama PA Program**

**Required courses** (labs are not required for the PA program, but they are required co-requisites for most science courses at Southern Miss) USM course prefixes and numbers are listed by the requirements.

- one course in General Biology (BSC 110/L) or Cell Biology (BSC 360) or Genetics (BSC 370) or Immunology (BSC 486) or Molecular biology (BSC 476) – at USM you need BSC 110/L and BSC 111/L before taking any upper level BSC courses
- one course in Human Anatomy (or Comparative Anatomy – BSC 361 and L) and one course in Human Physiology (BSC 451) OR Anatomy and Physiology I and II (BSC 250/L and BSC 251/L)
  NOTE: Southern Miss students are strongly recommended to take General Biology (BSC 110, 111 with labs) before attempting the Anatomy and Physiology sequence
- one course in Microbiology (BSC 380/L)
  NOTE: admission to upper level biological sciences classes at Southern Miss requires two general biology courses (BSC 110/L; BSC 111/L)
- two courses in General Chemistry (CHE 106/L, CHE 107/L)
- one course in Organic Chemistry (CHE 255/L) or Biochemistry (CHE 420)
- one course in mathematics (College Algebra, MAT 101, minimum)
- one course in general psychology (PSY 110)
- one course in statistics (PSY 360 recommended at Southern Miss, depending on the student’s major)
- one course in medical terminology (MLS 201)
- online courses at lower undergraduate level are accepted from a regionally accredited school, AP courses are accepted. Online courses at 300-400 level are not accepted.
- courses not accepted by U. South Alabama are those in nursing, kinesiology or exercise science, physical education, and veterinary.

**Bonus courses** (count towards bonus points on application)
Genetics (BSC 370), Biochemistry (CHE 420 or 421,422,424), Immunology (BSC 486), Physics (PHY 111/L or 112/L (or 200 level versions), Pharmacology (BSC 460 or CHE 460), Genomics, or Pathophysiology (BSC 463)– these count as bonus as long as they were not used to meet basic requirements above.

**SUGGESTED COURSE SEQUENCE & STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS**

The suggested course sequence below is merely a guideline to complete the courses required for a PA program in a timely manner. Courses to fulfill the major must be worked into the student’s schedule. Students must consult the USM Undergraduate Bulletin, the USM Class Schedule Guide for each semester, and their academic advisor. During the last semester of the Sophomore year, students should develop a more detailed plan for the Junior and Senior years because many upper level courses in all majors are offered in specific semesters (Fall or Spring only) and/or on a rotating two-year cycle.

**YEAR 1**

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a, The order that students take the introductory Biological Sciences (BSC) courses does not matter; BSC 110/L covers molecular and cellular topics whereas BSC 111/L covers ecology and organisms.

b, Placement in mathematics (MAT) courses depends on the student’s ACT mathematics subtest score.

c, Placement in English Composition courses depends on the student’s ACT English subtest score.

- ACT English subtest score 16 or below: ENG 99E (Expanded Composition Studio) and ENG 100E (Composition I expanded)
- ACT English subtest score 17-19: ENG 100E (Composition I expanded)
- ACT English subtest score 20 or above: ENG 101 (Composition I)

d, “Other” courses include those in the General Education Curriculum and in the major and/or minor as well as any “recommended electives” suggested by the PA school.

**Strategy for Success**

- Students should focus on doing well in their academic studies. Aim for a minimum 3.6 GPA on science and math courses.
- Students should become involved with extracurricular activities, including meaningful community service learning, volunteer activities, and leadership positions that will demonstrate effective interactions with diverse people and effective time management skills.
- Students should maintain a record of the dates and total hours spent performing such activities. This will be needed when it comes time to apply to PA school.
- Students must get hands-on exposure to medicine (sights, sounds, smells, feel). Many programs recommend several hundred hours or more of direct patient care. Other programs require a minimum of 6 months (1,000 hours) of direct patient care. Competitive applicants often have much more than 1000 hours of direct patient care.
- Students are strongly encouraged to complete the prerequisites for the Hatten Externship (BSC 392) during the first year. The Externship course is offered in the Fall semester, so students must fulfill the prerequisites by the end of the preceding Summer semester. Students may participate in the externship twice. Since students typically apply to PA school at the end of the Junior year, participation in the Externship as Sophomores and Juniors is recommended. Externship prerequisites are ENG 101, 102; BSC 110/L, 111/L; CHE 106/L, 107/L; [MAT 101, 103 OR one Calculus course], have a minimum GPA of 3.2 for USM GPA, degree GPA, and BCPM GPA.

Students may join AED (Alpha Epsilon Delta), the national Health Preprofessional Honor Society, as associate members at any time even if they do not fulfill the requirements for full membership (must be enrolled at Southern Miss for a minimum of three semesters and meet specific course and GPA requirements). Full members are inducted during the spring semester. Information and links to AED Full and Associate Member applications are available on the Southern Miss Preprofessional website.

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e, Students are strongly encouraged to take the Hatten Externship course (BSC 392) in the Fall semester of the second year; the course can be repeated in the Fall of the third year. Prerequisites are ENG 101, 102; BSC 110/L, 111/L; CHE 106/L, 107/L; [MAT 101, 103 OR one Calculus course], have a minimum GPA of 3.2 for USM GPA, degree GPA, and BCPM GPA.

**Strategy for Success**
• Students continue to focus on doing well in their studies.
• Students remain involved with meaningful community service learning, volunteer activities, and leadership positions.
• Students continue to participate in hands-on exposure to medicine.
• Students are strongly encouraged to participate in the Hatten Externship (BSC 392), which is offered in the Fall. Students may participate in the externship twice. Students typically apply to PA school during the Senior year, so participation in the externship as Sophomores and Juniors is recommended.
• Students are typically inducted into AED, the national Health Preprofessional Honor Society, in the Spring semester of the Sophomore year, but may be inducted in Junior or Senior year (must be enrolled at Southern Miss for a minimum of three semesters and meet specific course and GPA requirements).

YEAR 3
Fall
BSC 380/L 4 h
Classes to fulfill major, minor, etc. 12-14 h

Spring
Classes to fulfill major, minor, etc. 15-18 h

Students could participate in the Hatten Externship, which is offered in the Fall semester. Students may participate in the Externship twice.

YEAR 4
Fall
Classes to fulfill major, minor 15-18 h

Spring
Classes to fulfill major, minor 15-18 h

THE APPLICATION PROCESS
The application process to a PA program could begin during the Junior or Senior year, depending on the school. Check with the specific school(s) to which you plan to apply for program requirements and deadlines.

• Take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) in the Fall or earlier: www.gre.org
• Students should study on their own to prepare for the GRE or they may take one or more of the USM one credit hour GRE review classes:
  - **MLS 480 (Conquering the GRE Computer Adaptive Test)**
  - **MLS 481 (GRE Preparation: Quantitative)**
  - **MLS 482 (GRE Preparation: Verbal)**
  - **MLS 483 (GRE Preparation: Analytical Writing)**

Check the Class Schedule Guide to determine when these courses are offered.

• Students are *strongly encouraged to take an online practice GRE* before taking the GRE that they will use on their application. There are a number of websites that have practice questions or practice tests; use Google to search for “practice GRE questions”.

• Applicants typically submit applications through the online **Central Application Service for Physician Assistants** (CASPA): [www.caspaonline.org](http://www.caspaonline.org)

• CASPA applications should be submitted more than a month before the deadline for the PA schools application deadline.

**THE INTERVIEW**

Students are advised to practice their interview skills BEFORE attending their first interview.

• You may use the online **Perfect Interview**™ resource: [http://www.perfectinterview.com/usm/](http://www.perfectinterview.com/usm/)

• Or, sign up for mock interviews through **Career Services** by calling 601-266-4153: [http://www.usm.edu/career-services/about-us](http://www.usm.edu/career-services/about-us)

• **Dress professionally** and act professionally at your interview.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT A CAREER IN HEALTHCARE, CONTACT THE PREPROFESSIONAL OFFICE**

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