

Shenandoah University
Division of Physician Assistant Studies

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is the length of the PA Program?

The PA Program's curriculum is 27 months (seven semesters) in duration beginning in late August each year. The program includes two summer sessions and graduation is in December. The first four semesters are primarily didactic (classroom and laboratory) and the last three semesters are the clinical phase. Recently, the program has added some opportunities for clinical exposure (primarily observational) during the first year. There are 46 weeks of clinical rotations. The Program is only offered on a full-time basis. Because of the rigor of the Program, students are discouraged from working either part-time or full-time while enrolled. Additional information regarding the curriculum is found at <http://www.su.edu/pa>, <http://www.su.edu/pa/sequence.asp> and <http://www.su.edu/pa/descriptions.asp>.

2. What are the prerequisites/requirements for entrance?

The entrance requirements include a bachelor's degree, cumulative grade point average of 3.0, and completion of certain courses with at least a letter grade of C (B is preferred). The course requirements are detailed on our web site <http://www.su.edu/pa/requirements.asp> but include anatomy, physiology, microbiology, chemistry, general psychology, developmental psychology, medical terminology, and mathematics (statistics preferred). Science courses must be current within 10 years and all but biochemistry must include a laboratory component. Candidates taking anatomy and/or physiology over a two semester sequence should complete the sequence at the same college/university to ensure that all body systems are covered. Functional anatomy, anatomy and physiology designed for specific disciplines, or fundamentals of anatomy and physiology courses are generally not counted toward the two semester requirement. Organic chemistry cannot be substituted for Biochemistry and Abnormal Psychology cannot be substituted for Developmental Psychology. Prerequisites may be taken at any accredited college or university including community colleges. Distance education formats are discouraged for the science courses that require a laboratory component.

3. Can I apply before my prerequisites are complete?

Yes. You may apply if you are confident that you will be able to complete the prerequisites no later than June 30th of the year you plan to attend. This includes completion of the bachelor's degree requirement. Due to the rigor of the Program, candidates are not permitted to complete prerequisites after matriculation in the PA Program.

4. How do I apply?

The SU PA Program participates in the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA). The web site is <https://portal.caspaonline.org/> and the phone number is (617) 612-2080. CASPA's Customer Service Representatives are available M-F, 9:00am - 5:00pm, Eastern time or you may email CASPA at caspainfo@caspaonline.org.

5. Does the program require a supplemental application?

No. However, the SU PA Program requires that you submit Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores directly to Shenandoah University. Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) scores cannot be substituted for the GRE. Graduates with a related graduate degree (e.g., MPH) do not need to take the GRE.

6. Why does the PA Program require the Graduate Record Examination (GRE)?

Most graduate level educational programs require the GRE in order to determine if a candidate has the aptitude to be successful in an intensive program of study that requires higher order thinking and problem solving. The GRE scores assist the Admissions Committee evaluate candidate's academic ability and supplement the information we can gain from review of the overall grade point average and transcript. Additional information about the GRE can be obtained at www.gre.org.

7. I have a foreign medical degree; do I still need to complete the prerequisites or GRE?

Yes. Candidates with transcripts from another country must submit them to a recognized service for translation and evaluation. If the evaluation shows a prerequisite as completed, it will generally be accepted by the program if it meets the time, credit hour and grade requirements. If a candidate's medical school curriculum is evaluated at the bachelor's level, the GRE must be taken. Candidates with foreign medical degree are also urged to review the PA Program's policies on transfer credit and advanced placement. These are published in the Admissions Guidelines posted at www.su.edu. In addition, it is advisable to contact our Director of International Admissions if you have questions regarding TOEFL or visa requirements. The phone number is 540-665-4520.

8. Why must science courses be current within ten years?

The fields of science are rapidly changing on a regular basis. For example, there are many new diseases that have emerged as little as two years ago. The PA Program faculty believe 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. If a candidate can demonstrate that he/she has worked in a science-related discipline which has allowed him/her to remain current, then the candidate may petition the program to substitute work experience in lieu of repeating the course(s). Generally this requires formal documentation including a letter from a work supervisor. Contact the PA Program if you feel you may qualify.

9. Do you require health care experience and if so, what type and how much?

We do not require health care experience or PA shadowing as an entrance requirement. However, points are awarded in the selection process based upon the type and length of experience(s). Generally speaking, direct patient care higher level of experience is rated higher than indirect health care experience. However, type of experience is factored by length of experience such that a nurse's aide or patient care experience with several years experience could accumulate more points than a registered nurse or paramedic with a lesser amount of experience. It is suggested that candidates contact local hospitals and other health care agencies to obtain information on how to gain experience as a volunteer or in an entry-level position. Often, even entry-level positions require some additional training. The SU PA Program is unable to provide placement assistance to assist candidates with gaining pre-program experience or PA shadowing contacts.

10. Where should I obtain references?

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 (e.g. not just one course in the case of a college professor). Candidates should not obtain references from family members or others they share a personal vs. professional relationship.

11. Am I too old to apply?

The SU PA Program's admissions policies do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, ethnicity or disability. Candidates are urged to review the Technical Standards and consult the SU PA Program to determine if the University can provide reasonable accommodations to meet the Standards for practice.

12. If I do not have a 3.0 grade point average, is there any point in applying?

The PA Program will consider candidates with an undergraduate grade point average of at least 2.80 but less than 3.0 if they have completed at least 15 hours of graduate-level course work and have achieved a 3.0 or better grade point average. In addition, candidates with at least a 2.80 may apply, and if accepted, will be accepted on a conditional status and must achieve at least a 3.0 at the end of the first semester or will be subject to dismissal. Generally speaking, candidates accepted with a GPA less than 3.0 have significant health care experience. In general, students who have an overall and BCP science GPA less than 2.90 are not competitive. (BCP consists of biology, chemistry and physics grades.)

13. Will you evaluate transcripts before I apply?

Due to the volume of applications received each year, we are unable to offer this service to candidates. The prerequisite courses are fairly universal in nature. However, if you are unsure if a particular course will satisfy a prerequisite, you may email or fax a course description and/or syllabus for review. The Program's fax number is 540-542-6210. Be sure to attach a note explaining your request and contact information so we can reply.

14. Why should I apply early?

The Shenandoah University PA Program uses a type of rolling admissions. This means that highly qualified individuals are offered interviews and may be offered admission earlier in the admissions cycle. Therefore, there are more seats available per candidate early in the cycle (Fall) than in the Spring. In addition, CASPA offers a discounted rate for early applicants. Finally, candidates who apply early generally have the advantage of easier scheduling of outstanding prerequisites when they are able to plan over several semesters.

15. If I am accepted to the PA Program, may I defer my acceptance to the following year?

No. The PA Program is unable to defer admissions. Candidates who have not yet matriculated are not eligible for a leave of absence.

16. I am on the Alternate List; if I am not accepted, do I need to reapply the following year?

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.

17. I was not accepted, can I reapply and how can I improve my application?

The SU PA Program encourages reapplication and it is often viewed by admissions committees 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. Candidates may request a general review of their application via phone, in person or email.

18. Is the Shenandoah University PA Program accredited?

Yes, the Program is fully accredited by the Accreditation Review Committee on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc. (ARC-PA).

19. What is the pass rate on the national certification examination?

The pass rate for first-time takers over the past five years (2003-08) is 98.5 percent. The national pass rate for the same time frame is 91.5 percent. The SU PA Program overall pass rate is 100%. Additional information is available on the web site.

20. What are the typical number of applications and number of seats available?

We average fifteen applications per seat and the number of seats is determined on an annual basis. We typically admit thirty-eight (38) students annually. The mean grade point average for students accepted in 2009 was 3.56.

21. Is my application viewed more favorably if I am a Shenandoah University graduate or complete my prerequisites at SU?

While we believe that Shenandoah University has an outstanding undergraduate program, we are unable at this time to give preference to SU graduates or students. The PA Program is exploring the development of a mechanism for SU pre-PA majors to gain an early acceptance decision.

22. Where are the SU PA Program's clinical sites? May I complete clinical rotations in my hometown or home state?

Most of the clinical rotations are located within a 70 mile radius of the university. However, students may be required and should be prepared to complete rotations that are beyond this radius. Students are responsible for their own travel, meals and lodging during the clinical year. The program will work with the clinical site to help identify inexpensive or no-cost local housing when the assignment is beyond commuting distance but this cannot be guaranteed. Students may apply to complete some clinical rotations at a distance from the university. This is generally reserved for students in good academic standing and for clinical sites that the faculty have determined will be able to provide a quality educational experience.

23. Where can I find out more information about the PA Profession and the Shenandoah University PA Program?

Candidates are encouraged to visit our web site (www.su.edu/pa) where detailed information regarding admissions, the curriculum and the faculty is provided. In addition, Open House/Information Sessions are provided annually. These sessions provide candidates and their families an opportunity to meet faculty and students, tour the facilities and receive detailed information regarding the PA Profession and the PA Program and curriculum. The dates are posted on the web site. We may be able to provide individual tours including an opportunity to sit in on classes upon request.

Additional information on the PA Profession can be obtained at these web sites:

www.aapa.org

www.saaapa.aapa.org

www.paeaonline.org

www.nccpa.net

American Academy of Physician Assistants

Student Academy of the AAPA

Physician Assistant Education Association

National Commission on Certification of PAs

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