



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### 1. What is the length of the PA Program?

The PA Program's curriculum is 30 months (eight terms) in duration beginning in early July each year. The program includes three summer sessions and graduation is in December. The first five terms are primarily didactic (classroom and laboratory) and the last three terms are the clinical phase. Recently, the program has added some opportunities for clinical exposure (primarily observational) during the first year. There are 47 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 [www.su.edu/pa](http://www.su.edu/pa).

### 2. What are the prerequisites/requirements for entrance?

The entrance requirements include a bachelor's degree, cumulative grade point average of 3.0, a biology, chemistry and physics (BCP) GPA 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 [www.su.edu/pa](http://www.su.edu/pa) but include human anatomy, human physiology, microbiology, general chemistry, biochemistry, abnormal psychology, child or life span 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 may meet the anatomy and physiology prerequisites by taking a semester course in each topic or by taking the entire sequence of combined anatomy & physiology courses at a single college. The combined courses must cover all of the body systems. Animal physiology, comparative anatomy, vertebrate anatomy, functional anatomy, anatomy and physiology designed for specific disciplines, or fundamentals of anatomy and physiology courses are not counted toward the two-semester requirement. Organic chemistry courses cannot be substituted for biochemistry. Courses combining general or organic chemistry with biochemistry in a single course generally are not acceptable. Introductory or General Psychology cannot be substituted for Abnormal or Child/Life Span Psychology. Prerequisites may be taken at any college or university (accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education) including community colleges. Distance education formats are not encouraged 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 May 15 of the year you plan to attend. Official transcripts documenting completion are to be received by May 31. 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 [portal.caspaonline.org/](http://portal.caspaonline.org/) and the phone number is (617) 612-2080. CASPA's Customer Service Representatives are available M-F, 9:00 am - 5:00 pm, Eastern time or you may email CASPA at [caspainfo@caspaonline.org](mailto:caspainfo@caspaonline.org).

**5. When should I have my materials in to CASPA in order to meet Shenandoah deadlines?**

CASPA recommends having your application completed 4 weeks prior to the January 15 deadline. You may complete your application later but you risk further delays in processing and this could jeopardize the consideration of your application and your admission status. See CASPA's FAQs for their definition of "completed" application.

**6. I have retaken a class; do Shenandoah and CASPA look at the new grade or the average of both?**

CASPA does their overall GPA calculation based on every course taken, including repeated courses. Shenandoah takes the newer or better grade for your prerequisite coursework. Shenandoah does not recalculate GPA other than for 1) additional coursework taken after application is submitted to CASPA, 2) professional coursework where transcripts are required by Shenandoah or 3) independent evaluations of foreign transcripts.

**7. Does the program require a supplemental application?**

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

**8. What is a relevant graduate degree?**

A relevant graduate degree is one that shows a candidate's aptitude for handling the didactic portion of the physician assistant program which is heavy in the sciences. Generally a relevant degree may consist of graduate level biology, chemistry and physics courses which awards an MS. An MPH would be relevant, but not an MBA or a master's in education. In some cases the program will consider a professional degree (e.g., DPT) as relevant. The graduate degree must be awarded by a university accredited by an institution recognized by the U.S. Department of Education. The SU PA Program will determine the relevancy of a master's degree.

**9. 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 in evaluating the 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.ets.org/gre](http://www.ets.org/gre).

**10. 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. In addition, it is advisable to contact Shenandoah International Admissions if you have questions regarding TOEFL or visa requirements. The phone number is 540-665-4581.

**11. I have a foreign medical degree; do I need to complete the entire program?**

Yes. There is no test which an international medical graduate (IMG) can take to challenge the Shenandoah PA program, obtain a PA license or become nationally certified as a PA. All IMGs accepted into the program must complete the entire program. Courses previously taken in medical school cannot be substituted for courses taken in the Shenandoah PA program. Candidates with a foreign medical degree should also review the PA Program's policies on transfer credit and advanced placement. These are available in the Admissions Guidelines posted on the web site. IMGs are not given priority consideration.

**12. 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.

**13. 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 technician 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.

**14. 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 with whom they share a personal vs. professional relationship.

**15. Am I too old to apply?**

The SU PA Program's admissions policies do not discriminate on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, national or ethnic origin, age, physical or mental disability or sexual orientation. 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.

**16. If I do not have a 3.0 grade point average or BCP, is there any point in applying?**

An applicant with an undergraduate cumulative grade point average (GPA) or biology, chemistry, and physics (BCP) GPA less than 3.0 but greater than 2.80 and who has not completed a minimum of 15 semester hours of relevant graduate work with a 3.0 or better GPA, as specified earlier, may be admitted with conditional status. The student must achieve a 3.0 by the end of the first fall semester of the physician assistant curriculum or may be subject to dismissal. Given the competitive nature of the applicant pool, the admissions committee rarely offers acceptance to candidates with GPAs less than 3.00. Candidates with GPAs (overall or BCP) that are over 2.80 and less than 3.0 who wish to be considered for conditional acceptance must submit a written request (letter or email) for consideration within two (2) weeks of submitting the application to CASPA. The letter must include an explanation for the lower GPA and rationale for why the admissions committee should consider the individual for conditional acceptance. Candidates who do not send a written request within the two week period or whose GPAs (overall or BCP) are lower than 2.80 may receive a denial email upon review of their application. The SU PA Program Web site provides a profile for the last class accepted.

**17. Will you evaluate transcripts or courses before I apply?**

Due to the volume of applications received each year, we are unable to offer this service to candidates who have yet to apply. Once your application is filed with CASPA, you may initiate a request. The prerequisite courses are fairly universal in nature. Be sure to read the entire section on prerequisites in the admissions guide for further guidance. 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 and email is pa@su.edu. Be sure to attach a note explaining your request and contact information so we can reply.

**18. 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 Winter. 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.

**19. 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.

**20. 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.

**21. 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, in-depth knowledge regarding the PA Program and PA profession as well as excellent communication skills. Candidates may request a general review of their application by email.

**22. 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).

**23. What is the pass rate on the national certification examination?**

The pass rate for first-time takers over the past eight years (2003-12) is 98 percent. The national pass rate for the past five years is 93 percent. The SU PA Program overall pass rate is 100 percent. Additional information is available on the Web site.

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

We average 20.5 applications per seat and the number of seats is determined on an annual basis. We typically admit 42 students annually. The mean grade point average for students accepted in 2012 was 3.53.

**25. 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.

**26. Do you participate in the College-Level Examination Program (CLEP)?** Yes.

Students who have applied to SU must submit official copies of test results for review and approval. To review the minimum passing scores and credit eligibility for individual tests, refer to the SU Undergraduate Catalog.

**27. 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.

**28. 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](http://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 an opportunity to sit in on classes upon request.

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

American Academy of Physician Assistants <http://www.aapa.org>

Physician Assistant Education Association <http://www.paeaonline.org>

National Commission on Certification of PAs <http://www.nccpa.net>

Student Academy of the AAPA [http://www.aapa.org/your\\_pa\\_career/pa\\_students.aspx](http://www.aapa.org/your_pa_career/pa_students.aspx)

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Hours of Operation: M-F, 8:00am – 5:00pm (EST)

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