Your Educational Path to Becoming a Physician Assistant

Physician Assistants (PA’s) receive their training in Masters Programs across the U.S. These programs are most often offered by university health science centers and generally require 3 years to complete. UTEP does NOT offer a PA degree. The closest program to the El Paso area is in Midland-Odessa and is offered by the Texas Tech University Health Science Center.

Most applicants will need a 4 year bachelor degree to be competitive for admission, as these programs are quite selective and becoming more so each year. Each is somewhat different in the pre-requisites and admissions test requirements they hold for their applicants. Because of these differences, it is important to first identify where such programs are located, visit their websites to learn about their programs, and decide which ones you wish to eventually apply to.

After making your decision, you will be able to create a master listing of the pre-requisite courses for all the programs you will apply to (it is wise to apply to several to increase your chances of acceptance), so you can easily assess your course needs. You may do your undergraduate degree in any major area you like, as long as you also take all the pre-requisite courses before beginning your studies in a PA program. Majors in science or the social sciences will probably be most efficient time-wise. Since the total training time is approximately 7 years to be practice ready, your consideration of how long you wish to study as an undergraduate is important.

While working on your college degree, it is also necessary to develop a strong record of community service. You will also need letters of recommendation from faculty members, so you should begin early building relationships with faculty of your choice. PA programs would like for you to have a very clear idea of the profession before accepting you, so it is to your benefit to search out a shadowing opportunity with a practicing PA. This task usually requires some effort on your part to locate PA’s and approach them with your interest.

In addition to learning from your coursework, community service, shadowing, and relationships with faculty, you will need to develop yourself in communication skills, teamwork, and leadership experience. All these are part of forming a professional identity which will help you be the best PA you can be.

Many programs require the Graduate Record Exam for admission. You should research this exam and prepare for it during the spring of your junior year. The early summer months following junior year is the usual application season for students who wish to begin PA training after graduation from college. One year in advance is generally required for admission, and most programs begin in August.

At UTEP, you are encouraged to join the Medical Professions Organization, which is your best source of information and opportunities to develop yourself professionally. We offer many advantages to students interested in the top medical professions, such as PA.

To learn more, visit and explore the websites of the schools you are interested in attending.