Physician Assistant Program FAQs

Academics

Can I apply if I still need to complete a course prerequisite?

Technically, all course prerequisites need to be completed prior to applying in order to be competitive. Depending upon the completeness and competitiveness of your entire application, the Admissions Committee will consider an applicant who is completing one and only one course prerequisite during the fall semester. If you are completing one final course during the fall, be sure it is listed under “Courses in Progress” on the CASPA application. It is your responsibility to send an official transcript directly to the PA Program as soon as the final grade is available so we can include it in the review of your application.

What should I do if I submit my CASPA application in the spring and still plan to take courses during the summer?

Be sure to list all “in progress” and “planned” courses in the CASPA application. As soon as final grades are available, it is your responsibility to notify the program and promptly send an official transcript directly to the program office so we can update your file. We do not have early decision or rolling admissions, so there is no advantage to submitting your application early. If you are still taking courses in the spring and summer semesters, you might consider waiting to submit your CASPA application so that the grades appear on your application. Otherwise, it is your responsibility to send official transcripts directly to the program office once the final grades are available. All applications be considered as long as they are complete and submitted prior to the September 1 deadline.

Does Northeastern have a supplemental application?

We no longer have an actual separate supplemental application. Additional required program-specific questions are now completed through CASPA. The only material that needs to be mailed directly to the PA Program is:

* Northeastern PA Program Data Sheet only if you are not a current Northeastern senior or alum.
* $75 Northeastern PA Program application fee only if you are not a current Northeastern senior or alum
* 2nd clinical reference if you have not already submitted to clinical references through CASPA.

Please refer to How to Apply for additional information.

What should I do if my Anatomy & Physiology courses were taken more than 5 years ago?

If your Anatomy and Physiology coursework is over 5 years old, you will need to re-take it. The Admissions Committee will accept re-taking A&P courses either online or in-class at either a regionally accredited 2-year or 4-year institution. A one-semester Anatomy and Physiology course is not adequate.

What if my Anatomy and Physiology courses did not include a lab and are only 3-credit courses?

An Anatomy and Physiology lab is not required. The Admissions Committee does not evaluate the Anatomy and Physiology prerequisite based upon course credits. Rather, it is the course content that is important. Anatomy and Physiology must cover the entire body from head to toe, including all body systems.

What type of biology and chemistry courses are acceptable?

All biology and chemistry lecture and lab courses must be the “hard core” science courses that are considered “pre-med” or “science major” courses by the 4-year regionally accredited school offering them. Biology and chemistry courses intended for non-science majors are not acceptable.

Biology and chemistry courses taken at a community college do not fulfill our prerequisites even if they were accepted to fulfill requirements for your bachelor’s degree.

Will courses taken during the summer term fulfill prerequisites?

Yes, as long as these courses are considered equivalent courses by the school offering them and adhere to our guidelines regarding the type and content of the course and where they are taken.

How do I calculate the time limits on course prerequisites?

The time limits apply to when you actually took the course and not when you graduated.

Hands-on Patient Care Experience

What does hands-on patient care experience mean?

The Admissions Committee defines hands-on patient care experience as working one-on-one with patients and involving skills that require touching patients yourself. Verbal interaction (counseling, recruiting, consenting, etc.) alone is not adequate. Examples of hands-on skills include, but are not limited to: taking vital signs, doing EKGs, drawing blood, changing bandages and dressings, splinting, casting, removing sutures, bathing and toileting. Counseling patients, consenting and enrolling patients in studies, and dispensing medication are only a few examples of duties that do not require any “hands-on” activity and are therefore not considered “hands-on” patient care experience. The job title is not as important as the specific duties performed.

Does volunteer work count as hands-on patient care experience?

Because of liability concerns, volunteers are usually unable to provide the type of hands-on patient care we require. However, there may be some circumstances in which volunteer situations may provide an opportunity for hands-on patient care, most notably that of a volunteer EMT. Volunteer experience will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Will taking care of a family member be considered sufficient to fulfill the hands-on patient care prerequisite?

While you may be performing hands-on patient care procedures, caring for a relative will not fulfill the hands-on patient care prerequisite. The Admissions Committee considers full-time paid employment in a medical setting to be the most appropriate type of experience.

What if I have not completed the necessary hours of hands-on patient care experience by the application deadline?

The Admissions Committee will consider fewer hours depending upon the type and intensity of your experience. For example, having 1600 hours of hands-on patient care experience as an EMT doing only patient transfer would not be as competitive as an applicant who has 1400 hours of hands-on patient care experience working as an ER tech. The latter provides a greater opportunity for a variety and intensity of patient care experience.
Does patient care experience done in the past count?
The Admissions Committee will consider hands-on patient care experience done in the recent past. However, in order to be a competitive applicant, you also need to have current and ongoing hands-on patient care.

Application Deadlines
Do you have early decision or rolling admissions?
No. All applications will be given full consideration as long as they are complete and are submitted by the September 1 deadline and we receive the verified CASPA application by November 1. Applying early does not necessarily mean your application will be reviewed earlier. Notification about interviews are generally sent out via email starting in late September and continues through the fall. Final decisions regarding interviews and acceptance are usually finalized by mid-January.

Can I apply while I am still a senior in college?
The Admissions Committee will consider an application from a college senior as long as he/she has successfully completed all of the course prerequisites and has significant hands-on patient care experience prior to the September 1 deadline.

Will I still be considered if I submit my CASPA application by the September 1 deadline but the program does not receive it for another 2 to 6 weeks?
As long as your CASPA application is submitted to CASPA by September 1 and verified by CASPA by November 1, the program will still consider it even if we do not receive it right away. However, your CASPA application will not be reviewed if your Northeastern application fee of $75 (if applicable) is not received by the program by the September 1 deadline. Complete applications are necessary for further consideration. Remember that around the September 1 CASPA submission deadline, it can take over 6 weeks for CASPA to verify and forward the material to us.

Application Evaluation
What criteria are used to evaluate applications?
The evaluation of applications has two phases. Applications are initially screened to ensure that an applicant has satisfied the basic prerequisites (bachelor’s degree, 3.0 overall and science GPAs, specific coursework with grades of solid B or better, and approximately 2000 hours of hands-on patient care experience). All components of the application are equally important. The next phase of the evaluation involves comparing all applicants who meet the basic prerequisites with one another.

What is the profile of the ideal candidate?
There is none. We look at the entire application to get a sense of the whole individual. Students accepted into the program have a wide array of personal, educational, and employment backgrounds. No one background is better than another. The diversity of our classes creates an exciting and stimulating learning environment for both students and instructors. The application pool varies from year to year making it difficult to predict what an applicant can do, above and beyond satisfying the basic prerequisites, to stand out.

How many applications are typically received?
Last year, the program received close to 1200 CASPA applications.

What is the average GPA of the most recently admitted class?
Focusing on average GPA can be misleading. Students who are accepted to the program need to have at least a 3.0 overall GPA. Applicants with the highest overall GPAs are not necessarily more competitive than those with GPAs closer to the minimum 3.0. Many factors besides overall undergrad GPAs are taken into consideration including science GPAs, specific prerequisite courses and grades, type and amount of hands-on patient care experience, clinically-related personal references, the two application essays, and the personal interview. All of these criteria are important, and one does not take the place of another.

What if my overall or science GPA is slightly below 3.0?
Application to the program is extremely competitive. Strong preference is given to applicants whose GPAs are 3.0 or better. The program reserves the right on a case-by-case basis to interview and accept individuals whose GPAs and patient care experience hours are outside the defined ranges of those stated as prerequisites if the Admissions Committee considers that these individuals demonstrate potential.

How are GPAs calculated?
We use the overall and science GPAs as calculated by CASPA. Your overall CASPA GPA may differ slightly from what appears on your official transcript.

If accepted, can I defer enrollment for a year?
No, we do not offer deferments. If an applicant is accepted but does not matriculate, he/she would have to reapply with no guarantee of future acceptance.

Student Schedule
What is the typical student schedule?
The program is a full-time day program. There is no part-time option. During the first year, students will have classes Monday through Friday, generally from 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. Occasionally, there may be a special evening lab or demonstration which students are made aware of well in advance. While on rotation during the second year, students will go to a new rotation site every five weeks and are expected to fulfill the hours required at different sites, including evenings, weekends, and on-call coverage.

Is it possible to work while enrolled in the program?
During the first year of the program, it may be possible to work very limited hours as long as full attention is first given to your school work. During the second year while doing clinical rotations, it is not feasible to work. Besides the hours you need to spend at the rotation site, you will be expected to do outside reading and may be given written assignments by some clinical preceptors. Some rotations require weekend, evening, or on-call coverage, thereby making it unfeasible to plan on having the same schedule throughout the year.

International Applicants
Do applicants who have a medical degree from another country have to take any additional courses before applying to the program?
Yes. All biology and chemistry prerequisite courses must be taken in-class at a regionally accredited 4-year institution in the United States prior to applying regardless of whether these courses or others were taken in your native country as part of your medical education. No exceptions are made by the Admissions Committee. Anatomy and physiology must also be taken in the United States in-class or online at either a regionally accredited 2-year or 4-year institution prior to applying regardless of whether these courses were taken in your native country. No exceptions are made. Grades of solid B or better are required in all prerequisite courses. Hands-on patient care experience in the US is strongly recommended.

Can I transfer credits or coursework to the program if I took equivalent courses at another school?
No. All students accepted into the program must go through the entire 2-year curriculum regardless of previous coursework or training. Advanced placement will not be awarded to any applicant to the Physician Assistant Program, regardless of prior education or experience.