

# **The Spreadsheet for Physician Assistant (PA) Programs' Information and Requirements Study USERS' GUIDE**

The Spreadsheet is the data collection instrument for a study on PA program information of interest to potential applicants and their Health Professions Advisers (HPAs) and their admission requirements. It was made possible by a grant from the National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions (NAAHP) to the team from the National Alliance of Research Associates Programs (NARAP).

## **TIMELINE FOR THE SPREADSHEET'S DEVELOPMENT**

During the fall semester, 2023, we created The Spreadsheet in Excel from information available on the websites of the PA programs on the list of “Entry Level Accredited Programs” by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA) [[Entry Level Accredited Programs – ARC-PA](#)]. ARC-PA is “the accrediting agency that protects the interests of the public and PA profession by defining the standards for PA education and evaluating PA educational programs within the territorial United States to ensure their compliance with those standards.” [[About ARC-PA – ARC-PA](#)].

These accredited PA programs form the y-axis (rows) of The Spreadsheet. In addition, if PA programs were identified as Pending accreditation, but allowed to recruit an initial cohort class, they are included in The Spreadsheet. This resulted in a total of 320 programs by the fall semester, 2024.

During the fall semester, 2023, we searched each PA program's website to identify common basics that formed the elements of interest to prospective students and Health Professions Advisers (e.g., tuitions, application timelines, required courses, etc.) These became the 212 elements of the x-axis (rows) of The Spreadsheet.

In the spring semester, 2024, The Spreadsheet was populated from a second run-through of the PA programs' websites. The populated Spreadsheet was offered for inspection, correction and critique at NAAHP's annual meeting in Cincinnati, June, 2024. We attempted to contact PA programs to confirm the data we found for their programs.

Over the summer semester, 2024, we organized The Spreadsheet into searchable tables with tabs grouped by topics. Into the fall semester, 2024, The Spreadsheet was checked by a cadre of HPAs, both current and emeriti, and other experienced reviewers.

The next step in the process is crowd-proofing [attached document on the NARAP website] from now until 31 December 2024 when the spreadsheet will be closed to produce the academic paper. This process will be ongoing.

We look to submit the paper to a peer-reviewed journal during the spring semester, 2025.

## **CAVEATS**

In a spreadsheet of 67,840 cells, there are bound to be errors from several sources.

1. Simple mistakes

Transcribing that much data from websites onto the spreadsheet is bound to include a certain number of human errors

2. Errors of interpretation

The Spreadsheet attempts to categorize the verbiage from each PA program site into a category for analysis in the final paper prepared for submission to a peer-reviewed publication. In many instances, this is akin to stuffing a square peg into a round hole. There is some inherent subjectivity involved in making such interpretations.

3. Timing

As The Spreadsheet clearly demonstrates, PA programs matriculate and graduate their classes without uniform times across all three academic semesters, fall, spring and summer. Their application timelines vary across a wide range of dates for both CASPA and various specific aspects of their individual requirements. Graduates take the PANCE over various test administration dates.

4. Website changes

We also found in the time between producing the elements of The Spreadsheet and populating the spreadsheet, and as expected, PA programs often made changes to the information on their websites.

All of these and other unforeseen sources of error make a perfect assessment at any given point in time impossible. Even with projected updates, the Spreadsheet is at best a snapshot of a constantly evolving, moving picture

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE SPREADSHEET**

We believe the Spreadsheet in its current form is probably about 90+% accurate. We make it available here on the NARAP website for downloading without charge to anyone who wishes to do so. After this download, it is

yours to change, filter, arrange, “slice and dice” as you wish. Neither NARAP, nor NAAHP are responsible for the contents of your downloaded spreadsheet. We encourage you, however, to use it as a screening device to point you to the PA programs that best fit your parameters and qualifications. Their individual websites will provide the most up-to-date information at the time you access them.

## **DATABSE DEVELOPMENT AND ISSUES (by Tabs)**

### **Programs**

Programs are those listed as Accredited on the ARC-PA website, plus those identified through various means as Pending but approved to begin accepting applications for planned initial classes.

If you know of a PA Program not on this list, please contact Keith Bradley, MD, NARAP’s CEO/CMO at [KBradley@theNARAP.org](mailto:KBradley@theNARAP.org) .

### Website

Best landing spot for each PA program

### Pending first class to matriculate / graduate

As these milestones occur, The Spreadsheet will be updated.

## **ARC**

### ARC-PA website pages

[Entry Level Accredited Programs – ARC-PA](#) and

<https://www.arc-pa.org/entry-level-accreditation/accreditation-process/accreditation-actions/>

(initially updated through the September, 2024 meeting

### **Class Size**

(will be updated each summer semester or at any time by a PA program representative)

### Maximum # of seats allowed

ARC Accreditation History for each program

### Last reported entering class size

From each program’s ARC Attrition Chart published on each program’s website

### Program’s website

Data here may reflect class size for upcoming cycles

## **Outcomes**

### Graduation rate

(will be updated each summer semester or at any time by a PA program representative)

Date from ARC Attrition Chart or a program's website

Average of the average graduation rates given (usually over 3 years)

Future yearly updates will be changed to total # of graduates / total # of matriculants

PANCE (Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination): from each program's website

(will be updated each summer semester or at any time by a PA program representative)

First-time takers pass rate: average of average pass rates for all data given

Future yearly updates will be changed to total # passed / total # of first-time test takers over preceding 5 years

### Class range for PANCE

All data given on a program's website was included on the initial spreadsheet

Future yearly updates will be limited to the preceding five (5) years or less to give more immediacy and uniformity across programs.

## **Tuition**

### Tuition

Where possible, tuition alone was obtained. This common factor allows for more precise data across programs.

### Tuition +Fees

On some programs' websites, tuition could not be separated from tuition + fees.

What was covered by "fees" could be quite variable across programs, so this is considered less consistent data.

## **Timeline**

### CASPA deadlines

has a separate highlighting convention followed from the CASPA website

[CASPA Participating Programs and Eligibility - Liaison](#) and is found at the bottom of the Timeline tab

## Rolling Admissions

While most programs recommend applying as early as possible in their application cycle, some specifically mention “rolling admissions” as their enrollment strategy.

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All further data come solely from PA program websites or direct communications with PA programs.

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## **Grades**

### Low range

In terms of decisions to apply to a particular program, only the low end of the range of grades is given.

### Pre-requisites

Required courses for application

### Science averages

While pre-requisite courses always include science courses, some PA programs separate out the science courses under a separate category for GPA statistics.

### Last credits / semesters considered

Some PA programs separate out most recent credits or semesters, either as a substitute for total GPA or as an additional requirement.

## **Tests**

### Are any required?

“no” = PA program website specifically says no standardized tests are required  
(as opposed to x = not mentioned)

Each standardized test may be:

required

an option to fulfill a requirement

recommended

optional

## GRE averages

as given or calculated from a series of averages given

## GRE low range

In terms of decisions to apply to a particular program, only the low end of the range of GRE is given

## **Clinical Experience**

### Clinical hours

Almost all PA programs generally encourage clinical experience, a great many give a specific number of hours.

Most make the point that the minimum number of hours is just a starting point, with more always better.

CASPA makes a distinction between Patient Care Experience (PCE) and Healthcare Experience (HCE)

### Experiences - Liaison

PCE: you are directly responsible for a patient's care.

HCE: you are not directly responsible for a patient's care, but may still have patient interaction

While some PA programs make those distinctions in their requirements of clinical hours, most do not.

Unless otherwise indicated, "Clinical hours" covers both types of experiences.

## Shadowing

Most PA programs endorse shadowing with many saying explicitly this should be with a PA.

## **Courses**

Courses are arranged by subject matter, e.g., Biology, Chemistry

The Spreadsheet does not attempt to delve into the "weeds" of numbers of credit hours, course descriptions, etc.

A Course may be:

required

an option to fulfill a requirement

recommended

optional

A Course may include

Similar courses with different specific names,

e.g., Microbiology may contain courses labeled “medical microbiology, microbiology of disease, pathogenic microbiology

### Anatomy & Physiology

Unless specifically detailed as otherwise, this Course encompasses all two semester sequences whether combined as Anatomy/Physiology I and II or separate Anatomy and Physiology courses/

## **Preferences**

PA program websites often indicate what characteristics they are looking for among successful applicants.

Many of these preferences are generic, e.g., aligned with mission, academic excellence, focus on service, academic excellence, etc.

The Spreadsheet attempts to categorize only preferences more specific to individual programs.

While many Tabs require “forcing round pegs into square holes” in terms of matching specific verbiage from individual PA program websites to the elements of The Spreadsheet, the Preference Tab has probably more subjectivity than most of other Tabs.

## **Donations**

If you feel The Spreadsheet is valuable to you and to help with its continuous updating, please click the DONATE button on the lower right of the NARAP webpage and contribute to this effort.

On behalf of the NARAP team, THANK YOU!

## Appendix 1

### From Arc PA website: Entry Level Accreditation Statuses – ARC-PA

\* Accreditation-Provisional is an accreditation status granted when the plans and resource allocation, if fully implemented as planned, of a proposed program that has not yet enrolled students appear to demonstrate the program's ability to meet the ARC-PA Standards or when a program holding accreditation-provisional status appears to demonstrate continued progress in complying with the Standards as it prepares for the graduation of the first class (cohort) of students. Accreditation – Provisional does not ensure any subsequent accreditation status. It is limited to no more than five years from matriculation of the first class. Accreditation-provisional remains in effect until the program achieves accreditation-continued after its third review, closes or withdraws from the accreditation process, or until accreditation is withdrawn for failure to comply with the Standards.

\*\* Accreditation-Probation is a temporary accreditation status initially of not less than two years. However, that period may be extended by the ARC-PA for up to an additional two years if the ARCPA finds that the program is making substantial progress toward meeting all applicable Standards but requires additional time to come into full compliance. Probation accreditation status is granted, at the sole discretion of the ARC-PA, when a program holding an accreditation status of Accreditation – Provisional or Accreditation – Continued does not, in the judgment of the ARC-PA, meet the Standards or when the capability of the program to provide an acceptable educational experience for its students is threatened. Once placed on probation, a program that fails to comply with accreditation requirements in a timely manner, as specified by the ARC-PA, may be scheduled for a focused site visit and is subject to having its accreditation withdrawn.

\*\*\* Accreditation-Administrative Probation is a temporary status granted when a program has not complied with an administrative requirement, such as failure to pay fees or submit required reports. Once placed on Administrative Probation, a program that fails to comply with administrative requirements in a timely manner, as specified by the ARC-PA, may be scheduled for a focused site visit and/or risk having its accreditation withdrawn.

\*\*\*\* Accreditation-Clinical Postgraduate Program is the status of accreditation granted when a new or currently accredited clinical postgraduate program is in compliance with the Standards for Clinical Postgraduate Programs. Accreditation-clinical postgraduate program remains in effect until the program closes or withdraws from the accreditation process or until accreditation is withdrawn for failure to comply with the Standards, ARC-PA requirements or procedures.



Continued is a status that remains in effect until the program closes or withdraws from the accreditation process or until accreditation is withdrawn for failure to comply with the Standards.

(D) indicates that accreditation incorporates one or more distant campuses

(F) indicates that a program may have a focused visit prior to its next ARC-PA review

# indicates that a program was closed for a period of time since being first accredited.

Pending Final Review indicates the program has completed preliminary evaluation at a commission meeting and is awaiting a final assessment to determine accreditation status.