

# PRE-PATHOLOGIST ASSISTANT

Pathologists' assistant is a small but growing career track for students interested in the medical field, specifically pathology. Similar to how a physician assistant helps doctors, pathologists' assistants help pathologists with the tasks of their job. Duties may include gross examination and description of surgical specimens, assistance with intraoperative consultations, autopsies, laboratory management, data compilation and reporting, research, and inventory and lab maintenance according to industry standards. A pathologists' assistant can be found working in community and university hospitals, private laboratories, medical schools, morgues, and medical examiner offices.

The pathway to becoming a pathologists' assistant includes a four-year undergraduate (bachelor's) degree, followed by a two-year graduate program (master's) that includes both classroom education in medicine and pathology as well as clinical training. Admission to these graduate programs is very competitive, and there are only 13 pathologists' assistant master's programs in the U.S. There is one master's program in Wisconsin at Carroll University in Waukesha.

Typically students will have earned a 3.6 GPA or higher while in college, and will have scored above the 70th percentile on the standardized test for graduate school. Some pathologists' assistant schools require the MCAT exam, while others require the GRE, either of which is usually taken the latter half of junior year.

In addition to strong academic credentials, pathologists' assistant programs will be looking to see whether you have accumulated significant experience related to pathology while in college as part of their admissions process. This can include internships, lab work, related research projects, job shadowing, or part-time jobs. Students who declare an intention to take a pre-pathologists' assistant track will be assigned an advisor who specializes in advising pre-health students and can assist with finding these types of opportunities.

Pathologists' assistant schools do not require any specific major but do expect that students will have taken the necessary preparatory math and science coursework needed to succeed in their program. This includes multiple courses in chemistry, organic chemistry, and biochemistry; multiple classes in biological sciences including genetics and anatomy; math, generally through the first semester of calculus; and statistics. For this reason, many students choose to major in biology, chemistry, or biochemistry, but that is not a requirement. As long as a student takes the required preparatory coursework, they can major in any subject area.

Because science coursework is very sequential and must be taken in a specific order, students interested in pre-pathologists' assistant should express their intentions early so that the advisor can help the student with course selection. Taking the right courses beginning in freshman year is vital to staying on track and avoiding a delay in graduation.

## Requirements

Entrance to a pathologists' assistant program is very competitive – there are only 13 programs in the United States. Students are advised to work closely with the advisor for the program to ensure they are able to present the strongest possible application packet with exceptional grades, standardized test scores, and experiential learning.

Pathologists' assistant schools require that applicants take the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT) or the Graduate Record Exam (GRE). Students normally should arrange to take this test at the end of their junior year. The advisor can provide information regarding the administration of one of these tests.

Minimal coursework preparation while in college would include:

- One year of English
- Math through precalculus and statistics
- Two to two and one-half years of chemistry, including inorganic, organic, and biochemistry
- Two and one-half years of biology, including anatomy and physiology and microbiology

Code	Title	Credits
<i>Recommended Science Courses</i>		
BIO SCI 150	Foundations of Biological Sciences I	4
BIO SCI 152	Foundations of Biological Sciences II	4
BIO SCI 202	Anatomy and Physiology I	4
BIO SCI 203	Anatomy and Physiology II	4
An additional upper level lab course in Biological Sciences		3-4
CHEM 102	General Chemistry	5
CHEM 104	General Chemistry and Qualitative Analysis	5
CHEM 343	Organic Chemistry	3
CHEM 344	Organic Chemistry Laboratory	2
CHEM 345	Organic Chemistry	3
CHEM 501	Introduction to Biochemistry	3

The courses listed above are mandatory for admission to almost all pathologists' assistant schools. Some of these graduate programs require that students major in a science while in college; others leave open the possibility of majoring in something else as long as the necessary science coursework is taken.