

Health Professions Advising



Office of the Provost
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON

Allied Health Orientation (PA, PT, OT)

Robert Hamilton

Health Professions Advising

About Health Professions Advising

- **Mission:** To assist UH students interested in healthcare careers.
- We offer guidance on:
 - Various healthcare career paths
 - Admission requirements
 - Application process and timelines
- Health Professions Advising vs. Major Academic Advising



About Health Professions Advising

- We are located on the 2nd floor of CBB (across from the Writing Center).
 - Email: prehealth@uh.edu
 - Website: www.uh.edu/pre-health
- Appointments can be scheduled in [Navigate](#).
 - Formal appointments are restricted to currently enrolled students.
Prospective students and alumni should contact us at prehealth@uh.edu

When should you meet with our office?

- Before making an appointment with our office, please ensure you have first:
 - Met with your major advisor to discuss your degree plan and course enrollment schedule.
 - Reviewed the information found in this orientation as well as on our [website](#).
 - Considered submitting quick questions to prehealth@uh.edu (usually much faster than scheduling an appointment).
- Actively enrolled students can schedule an appointment with our office in [Navigate](#).

Orientation Outline

- What is does it mean to be pre-Allied Health at UH?
- Choosing a Major
- Allied Health Programs in Texas
- Admission Requirements
- Application Process & Timeline
- GRE & PA-CAT
- Application Components



What does it mean to be pre-“Allied-Health” at UH?

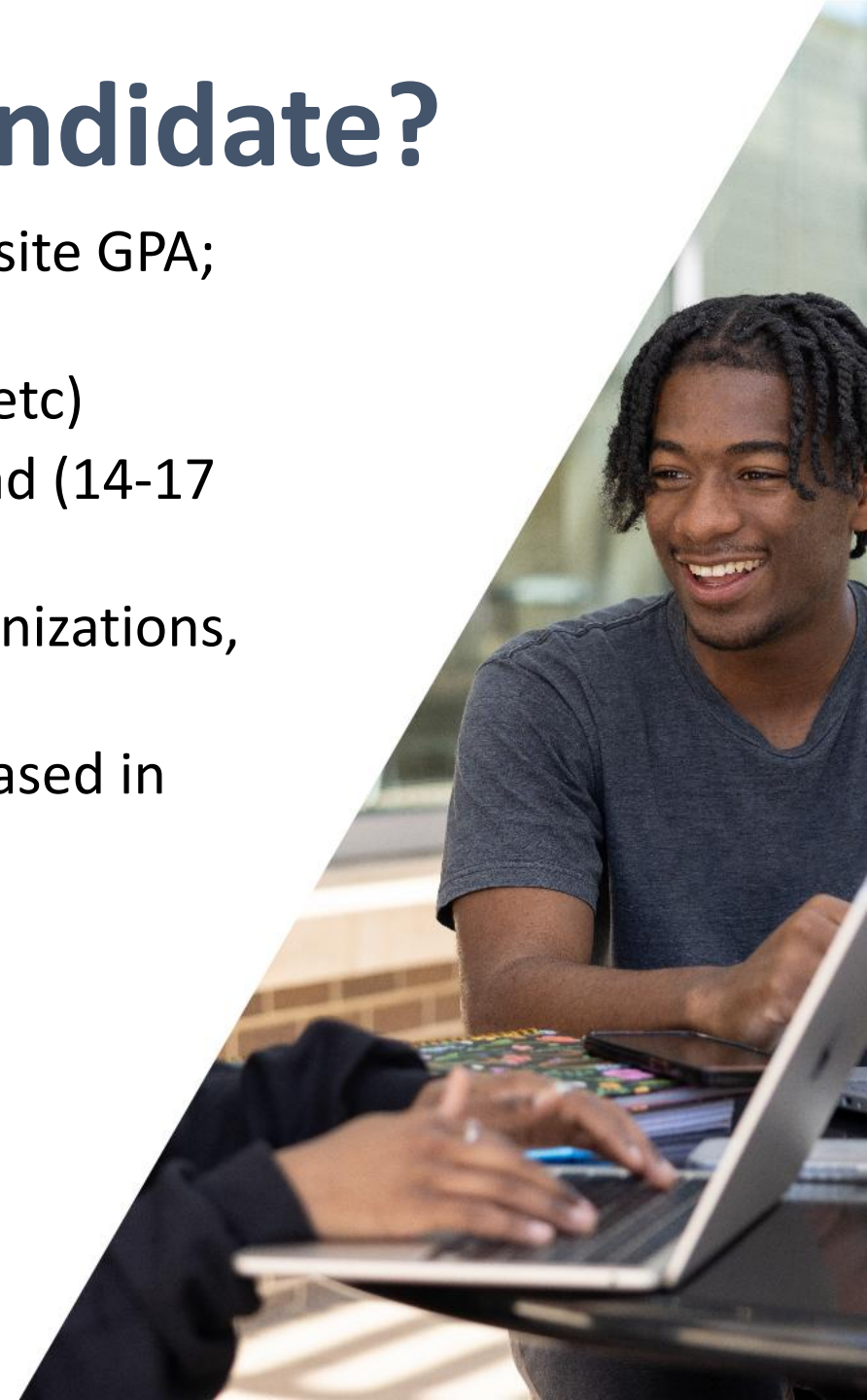
- Allied-Health encompasses several healthcare fields, including Physician Assistant, Physical Therapy, and Occupational Therapy.
- The University of Houston does not offer any formal Pre-Health or Health Professions programs.
 - You cannot major in pre-PA, pre-PT, etc. nor can you officially “declare” that you are a Health Professions concentration.
 - You are not required to meet with our office—though we strongly encourage you to.
 - Our office will not replace your major advisor—you will still need to meet with them every semester.
- Recommended first steps as a new student at UH:
 - Focus primarily on establishing strong study habits and acclimating to university-life
 - Earn strong grades (A’s/B’s) in your first-year
 - Utilize campus resources, such as LAUNCH Tutoring and SEP Workshops in NSM
 - Utilize the resources available on our website: www.uh.edu/pre-health

Key Points To Consider As You Get Started

- **Major does not matter that much!**
 - Science majors may be more practical—but they are not required nor automatically the best fit.
 - Common majors include: Health, Nutrition Science, Exercise Science, Psychology, and Biology
 - Our office encourages you to pursue majors/minors that you think you would really enjoy.
- **Challenge yourself! Explore what UH has to offer you!**
 - Avoid thinking there's only one path to PA or PT/OT school.
 - Pursue clubs, activities, minors/majors that you are interested in (*not what you think looks better*)
 - Try to take above full-time every semester (14-17 credit hours/term), unless you are working full-time.
- **Admissions committees appreciate well-rounded students who “love to learn”**
 - Do not simply look for the path of least-resistance to protect their GPA. A student with a 4.0 is not automatically better than a student with a 3.6.
 - Overall GPA vs. Pre-requisite GPA

What makes a competitive candidate?

- Strong GPA (>3.5 for both overall and Science/Prerequisite GPA; Average Matriculant has **3.7 and 3.6**, respectively).
- Strong scores on admissions exams (GRE, PA-CAT, OAT, etc)
- Pattern of taking challenging coursework and credit-load (14-17 hours/semester).
- Extracurricular involvement (leadership in student organizations, research, employment, etc.).
- Consistent volunteer experience, especially activities based in your community.
- Experience in or exposure to the medical field (through shadowing, volunteering, or employment).
 - Physician Assistants also need Direct Patient Care experience.



Allied-Health Programs in Texas

▪ **Physician Assistant Programs**

- Baylor College of Medicine
- Baylor University
- Austin College
- Hardin-Simmons University
- Texas Tech Health Science Center
- University of Mary-Hardin Baylor
- University of North Texas Health Science Center

▪ **Physical Therapy Programs**

- Angelo State University
- Baylor College of Medicine
- Hardin-Simmons University
- Texas State University
- Texas Tech University
- Texas Woman's University
- University of Mary-Hardin Baylor
- University of Texas – El Paso

▪ **Occupational Therapy Programs**

- Abilene Christian University
- Texas Tech University HSC
- Texas Woman's University
- University of St. Augustine

- University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley
- University of Texas Health – San Antonio
- University of Texas – Southwestern
- University of Texas Medical Branch – Galveston
- University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences
- South University
- Franklin Pierce University (Round Rock)
- Tarleton State University (*working on accreditation for 2026)

- US Army Baylor University
- University of North Texas
- University of Texas Health – San Antonio
- University of Texas – Southwestern
- University of Texas Medical Branch – Galveston
- University of the Incarnate Word

- University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley
- University of Texas Health – San Antonio
- University of Texas Medical Branch – Galveston
- University of Texas – El Paso
- Baylor University (*post-Masters OTD program)

What is a Physician Assistant?

- Physician Assistants (PAs) provide services under the supervision of physicians. PAs are trained to examine and treat patients, order and interpret laboratory tests and X-rays, make diagnoses and prescribe medications, and give treatment, such as setting broken bones and immunizing patients.
- PAs are educated as generalists in medicine. Most PAs work in the primary care specialty areas of family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, and obstetrics and gynecology. However, many PAs work in specialty fields, such as: cardiovascular surgery, orthopedics, and emergency medicine.
- **Why consider becoming a Physician Assistant?**
 - A career as a PA offers students the opportunity to participate directly in patient care without the time/financial investment of becoming a physician.
 - PAs also benefit from team-based work environment in which the responsibility of care is shared among a team of health professions; thus, offering a health work-life balance. PAs also have job versatility and can work across specialties.

PA Admission Requirements

- The minimum pre-requisites for admission into PA programs include:
 - **Anatomy & Physiology I and II:** BIOL 2301/2101 and BIOL 2302/2102
 - **Biology I and II:** BIOL 1306/1106 and BIOL 1307/1107
 - **English I and II:** ENGL 1301 and ENGL 1302
 - **General Chemistry I and II:** CHEM 1311/1111 and CHEM 1312/1112
 - **Genetics:** BIOL 3301
 - **Biochemistry:** BCHS 3304 (*only for UTMB but strongly encouraged*)
 - **Medical Terminology:** HLT 3325
 - **Microbiology:** BIOL 2321/2121
 - **Organic Chemistry I:** CHEM 2323/2123
 - **Psychology:** PSYC 2301
 - **Sociology:** SOCI 1301
 - **Statistics:** MATH 3339 or PSYC 2317 (*Statistics course must cover Analysis of Variance-ANOVA)
 - **Immunology:** BIOL 4323 *not required* but is encouraged
- Additional information regarding course requirements can be found on our [website](#).
- It is important you verify the specific course requirements of each PA program in which you hope to apply, as they may vary.

What is a Physical Therapist?

- Doctors of Physical Therapy (DPTs) treat patients with injuries, disabilities, and disease, and can work with a variety of populations with a wide range of functional problems. Physical therapy uses physical methods to assist patients with functional problems from injuries or illnesses. The primary focus of a PT is on gross motor functions.
- Physical therapists spend time learning the functional limitations of their patients in order to make individualized treatment plans and to monitor improvement. The goal of physical therapy is to help restore function, improve movement, manage pain, and prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs. Some physical therapists specialize in a particular type of care.
- **Why consider becoming a Physical Therapist?**
 - A career as a PT offers students the opportunity to participate in “hands-on” care. Indeed, most PTs are actively involved in the treatment of their patients and foster long-term relationships.
 - Patient outcomes for PTs are also quite high and PTs can work in a variety of settings and with diverse patient populations.

PT Admission Requirements

- The minimum pre-requisites for admission into PT programs include:
 - **Anatomy & Physiology I and II:** BIOL 2301/2101 and BIOL 2302/2102
 - **Biology I and II:** BIOL 1306/1106 and BIOL 1307/1107
 - **Developmental Psychology:**
 - HDFS 2314 can be accepted by some institutions in lieu of Developmental Psychology
 - Abnormal PSYC 2320 *does not count* for UTMB but *does count* for other institutions
 - **English I and II:** ENGL 1301 and ENGL 1302
 - **General Chemistry I and II:** CHEM 1311/1111 and CHEM 1312/1112
 - **Medical Terminology:** HLT 3325
 - **Physics I and II:** PHYS 1301/1101 and PHYS 1302/1102
 - **Psychology:** PSYC 2301
 - **Statistics:** (Must include ANOVA for UTMB) MATH 3339 or PSYC 2317
- Additional information regarding course requirements can be found on our [website](#).
- It is important you verify the specific course requirements of each PT program in which you hope to apply, as they may vary.

What is an Occupational Therapist?

- Occupational therapy is the use of assessment and intervention to develop, recover, or maintain meaningful activities (occupations) for people with disabilities, injuries or impairments. Compared with PT, the primary focus of an OT is on *fine* motor functions.
- Occupational therapists (OTs) can work in a variety of settings with a wide variety of populations. OTs can work in hospitals, rehab facilities, skilled nursing facilities, outpatient clinics, schools, home, and community settings. The different practice areas of OT include children and youth, mental health, disability and rehabilitation, healthy living, aging, and work-related.
- **Why consider becoming an Occupational Therapist?**
 - Like PT, a career as an OT offers students the opportunity to be more directly involved in the treatment of their patients. OTs also develop longer-lasting patient relationships.
 - OT is a great option for students who like to problem-solve and wish to holistically evaluate a patient's condition, considering physical, emotional, and environmental factors.

OT Admission Requirements

- The minimum pre-requisites for admission into OT programs include:
 - **Anatomy & Physiology I and II:** BIOL 2301/2101 and BIOL 2302/2102
 - **Abnormal Psychology:** PSYC 2320
 - **Biology I and II:** BIOL 1306/1106 and BIOL 1307/1107
 - **English I and II:** ENGL 1301 and ENGL 1302
 - **Lifespan/Human Development:** PSYC 2307 or PSYC 2308 or HDFS 2314 (confirm requirement with intended OTD programs)
 - **Kinesiology:** KIN 1352, or KIN 3309 if Biomechanics is required
 - **Medical Terminology:** HLT 3325
 - **Physics I:** PHYS 1301/1101
 - **Social Sciences:** PSYC 2301 and/or SOCI 1301
 - **Statistics:** MATH 1342 or MATH 3339 or PSYC 2317
- Additional information regarding course requirements can be found on our [website](#).
- It is important you verify the specific course requirements of each OT program in which you hope to apply, as they may vary.

Is AP or IB credit accepted?

- It is *highly encouraged to retake AP or IB courses*, as some institutions will not accept AP/IB course credit for prerequisites. These policies vary widely, so when in doubt, contact the institution you are looking to apply to in the future.
- You are not automatically required to retake a course if you have earned AP or IB credit for a pre-requisite.
- While it will say on the program's website, it never hurts to confirm the admissions policies for the specific programs in which you hope to apply.

How do I apply?

- Admission into allied-health programs requires submission of a centralized primary application:
 - PA: CASPA
 - PT: PTCAS
 - OT: OTCAS
- You will need the following to complete your application:
 - Completion of prerequisite courses. Some programs will allow courses to be in progress, some will not.
 - Completing of the required admissions exam (GRE/PA-CAT/CASPer)
 - Volunteer, shadowing, and leadership experience
 - 3-5 Letters of Recommendation
 - Personal essay(s)

When would I apply?

- UH students typically apply in the Spring/Summer between Junior and Senior Year.
 - PA: CASPA usually opens in late April
 - PT: PTCAS usually opens in mid-June (deadlines are typically October – December)
 - OT: OTCAS usually opens in mid-July (deadlines are typically October – December)
- Importantly, your individual time-line may vary!
 - Your major, amount of AP/IB or transfer credit, academic performance, individual goals, etc. can all affect when you are able to apply.
- Do not focus on when you can apply, but when you will be competitive!
 - Getting into an allied-health program is not a race. No one is admitted by accident.
- Taking an **extra year or two before applying can be very beneficial**, especially if you need more shadowing, community service, or clinical experience.

What is the GRE?

- GRE is the test that most allied-health programs require for admission.
- GRE consists of three sections:
 1. *Quantitative Reasoning*
 2. *Verbal Reasoning*
 3. *Essay (two prompts)*
- GRE scores range from 260-340 (scores are valid 2-5 years depending on program)
 - The quantitative and verbal sections are scored on a 130-170 scale.
 - Essay section is scored from 0-6, with both prompts averaged to produce a total score.
 - A score of 305 is ~50th percentile
 - A competitive applicant should score 300-310, and above the 50th percentile in each section.
- The GRE takes ~3 hours and 45 minutes to complete and costs \$205.

GRE Frequently Asked Questions

- **Is there any required coursework that I must complete to prepare for the GRE?**
 - No, the GRE is a “general” exam and covers topics that most students have had in high school.
- **When and where can I take the exam?**
 - The GRE is offered on-campus at UH as well as testing sites throughout Houston. It also now offered to take at home.
 - Most students take the GRE during the Spring term ahead of their specific application cycle.
- **What is the policy regarding re-takes?**
 - You can take the GRE once every 21 days, up to 5-times within any 12-month period.
 - Retakes are not recommended but permitted. Most applicants take the GRE 1-2 times.
- **How long will my scores be valid?**
 - Your GRE scores are kept on file for a maximum of 5-years following your test-date.
- **How should I prepare?**
 - Our office does not endorse any specific test prep resource, but encourage you to explore the different options: Educational Testing Service, GRE Prep, NextStep, Kaplan, Princeton Review, etc.
 - You can study on your own and do well—key is to make study plan and take practice tests.

What is the PA-CAT?

- PA-CAT is a new exam that [some Physician Assistant programs](#) have begun requiring.
- PA-CAT consists of nine sections (240 multiple choice questions total):
 - Anatomy, Physiology, Biology, Biochemistry, General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Microbiology, Behavioral Sciences (Psychology), Genetics, Statistics.
- PA-CAT scores range from 200-800 (scores valid for 2-years)
 - Three section scores: Anatomy & Physiology, Biology, and Chemistry
 - One composite score
 - 540 is in the 80th percentile
- The PA-CAT takes ~4 hours and 30 minutes to complete and costs \$228.
- **Hardin-Simmons does not *require* the PA-CAT but it is now *encouraged*. While not used in the decision-making process, the program is collecting data on how to best implement score results in the future.

What is Shadowing?

- Shadowing involves observing healthcare professionals in action.
 - Most allied-health programs will require experience as well as a letter of evaluation.
- Many schools require a set minimum—usually 20-100 hours.
 - Variety is encouraged if possible (PT programs usually require two settings of in- and out-patient).
 - Average shadowing hours of matriculant applicants is 250-400.
- Start with your local providers.
 - Campus organizations are also a great way for connecting and networking with potential clinical opportunities.
- Do not engage in any activity that could be considered the practice of medicine.
 - This is especially important for medical mission trips abroad.

What is Direct Patient Care Experience?

- Many PA programs recommend or require direct patient care experience.
 - Direct patient care is different from shadowing, in that you are directly involved in the “hands-on” care and treatment of patients.
- Most TX programs do not require minimum hours of direct patient care, *but it does make you substantially more competitive for PA programs.*
 - That said, out-of-state programs often require experience ranging from 1000-3000 hours.
 - Average Direct Patient Care hours of matriculant applicants is 2500.
 - Competitive applicants will have consistent patient-care experience and engagement.
- While there are many options, the top recommended options include working as a CNA, MA, EMT-B, or EMT- Paramedic.

What is Volunteering?

- Volunteering (Community Service) involves doing good work and giving back to your community.
- Importantly, volunteer experiences do not have to be medical or clinical in nature
- No minimum hours, but strong applicants show consistent engagement.
 - Try to find activities where you are regularly involved, rather than one-offs.
 - Average community service hours for matriculant applicants is 250-400 hours
 - Baylor College of Medicine notes that a common mistake is students waiting until the last minute to complete their community service.
- Keep a record of your experiences/activities (dates, locations, responsibilities).
 - This will make completing your eventual application much easier

What is Research?

- Participating in a research lab does look good on your application, but not required for admission.
 - You may participate in a lab for course-credit, for pay, or as a volunteer.
 - Most students begin looking for research opportunities in their sophomore year.
- Only do research if you are truly interested in it.
 - Plan to be involved in a lab or project for at least a year (1000 hours total is a competitive number).
 - You must be able to discuss the research (goals, results, your role) in-depth.
 - Does not have to be medical or translational.
- Talk to your advisor, your professors, and review departmental websites.
 - All it takes is a few emails to prospective professors to become a research assistant.

What is Leadership?

- Get involved in student organizations and the community.
 - Admissions committees prefer applicants who take charge in the activities in which they are most passionate.
- Attending organization meetings is helpful but leading one is better!
 - Who cares if you are a member of 10 clubs? Active involvement is what matters!
 - You do not need to be President, but some executive or advisory role is helpful.
- Check out our [website for a list of student organizations](#) to get started.

Letters of Evaluation

- Most Allied-Health programs will require 3 letters of evaluation. If program does not specific requirements, we recommend:
 - 1 healthcare provider (licensed and practicing PA/PT/OT, respectively)
 - 1 science professor (upper level BIOL, or Organic Chem, or Biochem)
 - 1 additional letter from another healthcare provider or academic professional (recommend a *second* science professor or *second* PA/PT/OT)
 - Several PT schools require letters from TWO (2) different PTs
- Letters should come from people who know you!
 - Will need to describe you as an individual, not just as a student—behavior, character, maturity-level, etc. are all important.

Overall aspects to building a competitive application

■ **Academics**

- Strong performance in pre-requisite courses (C or better required—A or B preferred)
- Limit withdrawals (W's) and number of courses taken outside of UH.
- Challenge yourself! Take science classes concurrently. (About two science prerequisites per semester, and total semester hours between 14-17).
- Not all about 4.0.
 - Admissions committees review your academic history/transcript.

■ **Extracurricular activities**

- Shadowing (Exposure to “clinician-patient” interaction)
- Volunteering (Commitment to helping others and community involvement)
- Leadership (Extracurricular engagement)
- Research (does not need to be medical or clinical)
- [For PA] Direct Patient Care as an EMT-B, CNA, or MA, or EMT-Paramedic

Other Allied-Health Careers

- If you are interested in a career in healthcare, but unsure of where to start check out explorehealthcareers.org.

- Our office also has an overview of some other popular careers, including:
 - Anesthesiology Assistant
 - Chiropractic Medicine
 - Genetic Counseling
 - Healthcare Administration
 - PT/OT Assistant
 - Mental Health and Counseling
 - Podiatric Medicine
 - Public Health
 - Speech-Language Pathology

Please note- not all of these programs are offered at UH, and are additional to undergraduate degree.

Major Takeaways!

- Major/minor in whatever you are most interested.
 - Certain majors (Biology, Exercise Science, etc.) may be a practical fit—but not necessarily the best choice!
 - Your choice of major will not impact your admission decision.
 - Seek out activities and organizations that you are passionate about—even if non-medical.
- Your primary focus in your first year should be on strong grades (A's/B's)
 - Do not stress about the GRE, when to apply, or other application components
 - The best thing you can do to prepare as a Freshman is get good grades!
 - Look to start more involvement as a Sophomore
- Utilize the resources available from Health Professions Advising!
 - Join our [Health Professions Advising Listserv](#) for email updates
 - Review our website: www.uh.edu/pre-health
 - Contact us with questions: prehealth@uh.edu

Thank you!

Office email: prehealth@uh.edu

Website: www.uh.edu/hpa



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