Surgical Physician Assistant, Bachelor of Science in

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Physician assistants (PAs) are valuable members of a multidisciplinary healthcare team. The profession was established in 1965 to help physicians provide healthcare services to underserved and rural populations. While the profession remains committed to its historical mission, PAs are now employed in almost all medical and surgical specialties.

PAs are healthcare professionals licensed to practice medicine under the supervision of a physician. Individual state practice laws and hospital bylaws define the scope of practice and prescribing authority of physician assistants. In general, most states authorize PAs to prescribe non-controlled substances and perform any task delegated by a supervising physician.

To be eligible for licensure, PAs must graduate from an accredited physician assistant program and pass the Physician Assistant National Certification Examination (PANCE). To maintain licensure, PAs must complete continuing medical education credits every year and pass the Physician Assistant National Recertification Examination (PANRE) every six years. PAs may obtain additional training through postgraduate residency programs in subspecialty areas, but these programs are not required for licensure or practice in subspecialty areas.

A Surgeon's Assistant (SA) is an unofficial title given to a physician assistant who has obtained advanced surgical training by either attending an accredited entry-level surgical physician assistant program, by attending a postgraduate physician assistant surgical residency program, and/or by completing postgraduate on-the-job-training. Surgeon's assistants are skilled surgical practitioners who are capable of performing technically oriented tasks such as first assist, wound closure, intubation, venous access, arterial monitoring, thoracentesis, paracentesis, and harvest saphenous veins. Because surgeon's assistants are also PAs, they may also assist the surgeon by providing pre- and post-operative care, completing history and physical exams, ordering laboratory tests, and assisting in the clinic.

The mission of the UAB Surgical Physician Assistant Program is to provide qualified individuals with the knowledge, skills, and judgment...
needed to assist surgeons in the care of patients in surgical, acute-care, and out-patient settings. The surgical physician assistant, functioning under the direction of the surgeon, will be expected to perform appropriately delegated tasks autonomously with the full confidence of the surgeon. Yet, the surgical physician assistant will always have benefit of the surgeon’s guidance and counsel.

**Accreditation:** The program is accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc.

**Credentials Conferred:** Diploma—The Bachelor of Science degree and/or a baccalaureate certificate of completion are awarded by the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

**Professional Certification:** Graduates are required to apply for the certification examination sponsored by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants.

**Length of Study:** Preprofessional Phase—Four semesters (approximately two years) minimum; Professional Phase in SHRP—Six semesters (24 months).

**Term of Enrollment for Professional Phase of Program:** Fall semester.

**Professional Phase Application Deadline:** Completed applications for the professional phase of the program must be received by the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) no later than December 1 preceding the expected term of enrollment.

**Application Procedure for Professional Phase:** This program participates in the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA). Please consult [www.caspaonline.org](http://www.caspaonline.org) for more information regarding specific application procedures and fees. Requirements for the initial application are specified in the CASPA application materials. Applicants should not submit any materials related to the CASPA application to the UAB Surgical PA Program. CASPA will send the applicant's materials directly to the program. Following the program's receipt of the applicant’s CASPA materials, the UAB Surgical PA Program will send a secondary program application to qualified applicants. Qualified applicants must complete and return the program’s secondary application no later than February 1 to the professional phase of the program along with a $25 check payable to the UAB Surgical Physical Assistant Program. Students accepted to the professional phase will need to apply to UAB or submit a change of major form if already at UAB (see below).

**Application Procedure for Enrollment in Pre-Professional Phase of Program at UAB:** The following materials must be submitted. To the UAB Undergraduate Admissions Office:

- completed UAB undergraduate application form, indicating pre-surgical physician assistant as the major, and application fee, if applicable (if enrolled at UAB in another major, complete a Change of School/Major Request indicating pre-surgical physician assistant as the major; form available from the Office of Registration and Academic Records), and
- official transcripts from each college or university attended.
Requirements for Admission: The student will have completed a minimum of 64 semester hours before transferring to SHRP for six semesters (24 months) of professional courses. Enrollment is limited and acceptance will be based upon the student's academic ability and aptitude for a career as a surgical physician assistant. The candidate is expected to satisfy the following requirements:

- have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.75 (A=4.0) in Area I Written Composition, Area II Humanities and Fine Arts, and Area IV History, Social, and Behavioral Sciences core curriculum prerequisites,
- have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 2.75 in the Natural Sciences and Mathematics prerequisites in Area III and Area V of the core curriculum,
- have a minimum grade of C in each prerequisite course,
- complete a personal interview with the selection committee, and
- if accepted, complete the UAB medical history questionnaire and physical, provide proof of required immunizations, and receive satisfactory screening by the UAB Medical Center Student Health Service.

Essential Requirements: Fundamental tasks, behaviors, and abilities necessary to successfully complete the academic and clinical/residency requirements of the program and to satisfy licensure/certification requirements, if any, have been outlined and are available upon request from the academic program office. Students requesting disability accommodations must do so by filing a disability accommodation request in writing with the academic program office.

UAB/Program Core Curriculum - UAB Equivalents
(Course requirements are listed in semester credit hours)

The following courses must be completed prior to the beginning of the professional phase of the program. Contact the program advisor for details regarding the core curriculum.

Area I. Written Composition (6 hours)
English Composition - EH 101, 102 (6)

Area II. Humanities and Fine Arts (12 hours)
Literature\(^1\) (3)
Fine Arts elective (3)
Electives\(^1\) (6)

Area III. Natural Sciences and Mathematics (11 hours)
Precalculus Algebra - MA 105 (3)
General Chemistry (complete sequence) - CH 115/116 lab, 117/118 lab (8)

Area IV. History, Social, and Behavioral Sciences (12 hours)
History\(^1\) (3)
Electives (psychology recommended)\(^1\) (9)

Area V. Preprofessional, Major, and Elective Courses
Introductory Biology - BY 123, 124 (8)
Microbiology - BY 261 or 271 (3-4)
Human Anatomy and Human Physiology - BY 115, 116 (8)
Electives from approved list in Areas II-IV or as approved by the program director (3-4)
A 6-semester hour sequence either in literature or in history is required. If a second literature is chosen, it will apply as 3 of the elective hours in Area II Humanities and Fine Arts; if a second history is chosen, it will apply as 3 of the elective hours in Area IV History, Social, and Behavioral Sciences.

Typical Program
Professional Phase
(Course requirements are listed in semester credit hours)

Junior Year
Fall
SA 305 Medical Physiology I (3)
SA 307 Physiological Chemistry (1)
SA 308 Pharmacology I (3)
SA 310 Surgical Care Techniques I (2)
SA 314 Electrocardiography (2)
SA 320 Physical Diagnosis I (4)
SA 322 Laboratory Diagnosis (4)
SA 323 Clinical Medicine I (2)
SA 330 Human Gross Anatomy (5)
Spring
SA 306 Medical Physiology II (3)
SA 309 Pharmacology II (3)
SA 311 Surgical Care Techniques II (2)
SA 315 Respiratory Therapy (1)
SA 321 Physical Diagnosis II (5)
SA 324 Clinical Medicine II (7)
SA 326 Surgical Disease I (3)
SA 331 Neuroantomy (3)
Summer
SA 312 Operating Room Techniques (3)
SA 313 Orthopedics (1)
SA 317 Risk Management (1)
SA 325 Clinical Medicine III (6)
SA 327 Surgical Disease II (2)
SA 340 Applied Behavioral Sciences (2)
SA 350 Fundamentals of Clinical Research (2)

Senior Year
The senior year is comprised of twelve clinical services, nine required (five general medicine and four surgical), two surgical electives, and one general elective; four clinical services are taken each semester of the senior year. Each of the services taken are awarded four semester hours credit (SA 431 - 442). There is also a weekly senior seminar that provides three semester hours credit for each of the fall and spring semesters and two semester hours credit for the summer semester (SA 421 - 423).

Required General Medicine and Surgical Rotations:
General Surgery
Emergency Medicine
Cardiovascular Surgery
Orthopedics
Family Practice Medicine
General Internal Medicine
Pediatrics
Obstetrics and Gynecology
Elective Rotations:
Thoracic Surgery
Neurosurgery
Renal Transplantation
Surgical Oncology
Trauma Surgery
Urology
Plastic Surgery
Outpatient Surgery

For further information, contact:
Program Director
Surgical Physician Assistant Program
School of Health Related Professions
University of Alabama at Birmingham
Birmingham, Alabama 35294-1270
Telephone: (205) 934-4407
E-mail: bsspa@uab.edu
Web address: www.uab.edu/surgicalpa

For course descriptions, see the UAB School of Health Related Professions Catalog - Course Descriptions.

Go to list of SHRP Programs of Study.