

HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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APPLICATION INFORMATION FOR PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT PROGRAMS

First, some basics. Read *all* the information below carefully. Also read the HPPLC *Physician Assistant* handout, available from our web site or the HPPLC office (Maxwell 010). It contains additional important information and suggestions pertaining to researching the PA profession and PA programs, and about the application process itself.

- If you plan to apply to PA programs, become familiar with the information below and apply it as you are gathering letters of recommendation (or "letters of reference") and preparing your PA program applications.
- The average applicant applies to about 8 PA programs, and HPPLC advisors do strongly recommend that you apply to a variety of PA programs.
- About 2/3 of all PA programs require applicants to apply through CASPA (Central Application Service for Physician Assistants); the other 1/3 require that you apply directly to the PA program and/or university itself.
- As you complete the CASPA online application, you will be prompted as to various CASPA procedures. The CASPA web site (<https://portal.caspaonline.org/>) includes detailed information about each step in the CASPA application process. Especially noteworthy is the very useful FAQ section. Consult the CASPA site often and consistently to make sure you understand their policies and procedures. Call them if you have questions!
- **The HPPLC Letter of Recommendation Service may be useful to some PA applicants, but not for all.** We recommend you do *not* use the HPPLC recommendation service if you are applying only to CASPA programs—CASPA has its own procedures you need to follow (more information below, and on the CASPA web site). If you are applying to more than one *non*-CASPA program, or exclusively to non-CASPA programs, then the service may be helpful. If you are applying to *both* CASPA and non-CASPA programs, bear in mind that CASPA has its own forms that your letter writers must complete, and that non-CASPA programs may have their own unique forms too. Once someone has agreed to write you a letter, gather all the different forms together and present them to the writer all at once so they can complete them simultaneously and consistently. If you have related questions, consult with the HPPLC PA advisor and/or the HPPLC Recommendation Service.
- If you are applying to non-CASPA programs and are using the HPPLC Recommendation Service, it is crucial that, in addition to the information below and above, you also follow the procedures and deadlines explained in the HPPLC handout, *Guide to the Recommendation Service*, available from our home page and in our office.
- **Note that CASPA will not accept HPPLC forms. You should also confirm with non-CASPA programs whether or not they will accept HPPLC evaluation forms, or whether they have their own forms you must use. See important information below.**

Below you'll find important cautions and other critical information pertaining to CASPA, letters of reference, and the application process in general. Read these points carefully (and remember to read HPPLC's *Physician Assistant* handout too)!

- 1) Be aware that many PA programs require or recommend at least one letter of reference from a PA with whom you have spent substantial time shadowing and discussing the profession.
- 2) Because not all PA programs require that you first apply through CASPA, you must check with individual programs regarding procedures, preferences, and application cycle dates.
- 3) CASPA will only accept CASPA waiver and faculty evaluation forms. You should also confirm with non-CASPA programs whether or not they will accept HPPLC evaluation forms, or whether they have their own forms you must use. **Repeat: CASPA will only accept CASPA forms!**
- 4) If you are applying to PA programs that **do** use CASPA, you must either print out "reference forms" from the CASPA online application or follow CASPA procedures for having letter writers submit letters of reference electronically.
- 5) Should you select "I waive my right to access this reference" when it comes to that part of the application, or not? Many letter writers and programs prefer that students don't read letters of reference, and waiving the right to do so

is pretty standard practice. Still, whether you waive this right or not is up to you. If you wish, you can further discuss the pros and cons with a HPPLC advisor. For programs that **do** use CASPA, if you choose to complete the waiver, you would complete the CASPA electronic waiver for letters submitted *electronically*; and if you are submitting *paper* letters of reference for such programs then you would check the waiver box in the electronic application (but would *also* need to print out a paper waiver form from the CASPA web site, *being sure to sign it before mailing it in*). If you use the HPPLC recommendation service, HPPLC also has its own waiver forms.

6) IMPORTANT DEADLINE INFORMATION:

- For your application to be complete, you must submit the CASPA application and all related items by the close of CASPA's yearly application cycle, which usually opens in mid-April, and closes around April 15 of the next year: A) transcripts from *each institution you've attended* B) all letters of reference C) the CASPA electronic application, and D) all CASPA application fees. To avoid delays, **allow CASPA at least five weeks to process your application.** (A new CASPA application cycle opens each April. CASPA does not keep applications and supporting materials on file from one year to the next.) **Note that this point refers to the CASPA application deadline, not PA program deadlines. SEE NEXT BULLET.**
- **PA program application cycles and deadlines are often different from the CASPA application cycle:**
 - ▶ Many PA programs set their application deadline prior to CASPA's application deadline.
 - ▶ Also, many PA programs have "rolling admissions," meaning, they begin to fill spots in their program right when the program's application cycle *opens* (in other words, they don't wait until the program's actual application "deadline" before filling spots). If you ask, programs will tell you if they have rolling admissions.
 - ▶ Finally, CASPA suggests you allow five weeks for them to process your application and submit it to schools.
 - ▶ **Bottom line:** For CASPA programs with rolling admissions, do your best to submit your complete CASPA application and supporting materials to CASPA five weeks prior to the *opening* of the PA program's application cycle; for programs that do not have rolling admissions, try to have all application materials submitted to CASPA at least five weeks prior to the program's application deadline.
 - ▶ Programs that require CASPA will often also require you to submit a secondary application directly to the university or PA program once your CASPA application is complete.

7) If you are applying to programs that require CASPA, and one of your letter writers has used non-CASPA forms, you will need to politely ask them if they could fill out the CASPA evaluation form. Or if a letter-writer originally wrote the letter for a different kind of program (e.g., medical school), you can ask them if they could revise the letter for PA programs. In either situation, you can provide the letter writer with a copy of the old evaluation form they filled out and ask if they could transfer the information to the CASPA form. (If you have a HPPLC recommendation file, you could request that HPPLC send copies of the evaluation form and letter to each letter writer.)

8) Common mistakes to avoid on the CASPA application:

- Mistakes listing coursework / transcript information on CASPA application: Inputting course information in the application is tedious, but nonetheless must be done with perfect accuracy and attention to detail.
- When listing courses you transferred into IUB, you must refer to a transcript from the *original school*, not to the IUB transcript. All courses must be listed with original course numbers, grades, credit hours, etc.
- Allow plenty of time for your CASPA application to be processed. If possible, submit all CASPA application components to CASPA 5 weeks prior to the given school's application deadline (or several weeks prior to the opening of the school's application cycle if they have rolling admissions). These CASPA application components include reference forms and letters, transcripts from each school attended, the CASPA application (submitted electronically), and all CASPA fees. Missing components or incomplete / inaccurate information will delay your application processing.
- If your name is different on one or more of your transcripts compared to how you list it on the CASPA application, inform CASPA.
- Check for any secondary materials or applications that must be submitted directly to the school and/or PA program itself (check web sites and contact each school directly if you have questions).

Visit the **HPPLC web site to sign up for the email list of the health profession in which you're interested.** You will occasionally receive information, including notices about upcoming meetings and campus visits by admission representatives, information about our Health Programs Fair, professional development opportunities, and other items of interest.

IMPORTANT:

This document was prepared for Indiana University Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, and the schools and programs in which they have an interest. Refer to each program's web pages, bulletins, and other publications for the most current information.