Pre-AA Quick Facts

You should prepare for a career as an Anesthesiologist Assistant (AA) by building credentials in scholarship, leadership, humanitarian & community service, and by shadowing in the various settings of the profession. There is no “best” major for pre-AA students. Instead, you are encouraged to pursue a major you are genuinely interested in as that will help you excel. Remember to consult a pre-health advisor about your individual plan.

What is the difference between an AA and a Certified Registered Nurse Assistant (CRNA)?

AAs must work directly under an anesthesiologist while CRNAs can work under the operating surgeon, dentist, other non-anesthesiologist physicians, and can sometimes work independently. To pursue a career as an AA, you must complete an undergraduate degree with the appropriate science pre-requisites and then apply to an AA graduate program. To become a CRNA, you must first pursue a BSN, gain clinical experience as an RN, and then enter a CRNA program.

Entrance Exam

Advised Pre-MCAT

- Biology BIOL 1107/L & 1108/L
- General Chemistry CHEM 1211/L & 1212/L
- Organic Chemistry CHEM 2211/L
- Physics PHYS 1111 & 1112 or 1211 & 1212
- Biochemistry BCMB 3100 or BCMB 4010 & 4020
- Statistics STAT 2000 or BIOS 2010

Recommended Pre-MCAT

- Physiology VPHY 3100, PMCY 3000, CBIO 3710 or CBIO 2200 & 2210
- Genetics GENE 3200
- Psychology PSYC 1101
- Sociology SOCI 1101

Most AA programs will accept either GRE or MCAT scores. As of 2020, University of Colorado is the only program that requires the MCAT. Unless you are applying to Colorado, the GRE is a better option as it is less expensive ($205) than the MCAT ($320) and often easier to prepare for. However, it is entirely your choice which exam which you take so select the one on which you know you can perform best.

The GRE includes 3 sections: Verbal, Quantitative, and Analytical Writing. There are no recommended pre-GRE courses. The MCAT has 4 sections: Biological and Biochemical Foundations; Chemical and Physical Foundations; Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior; and Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills. Because the MCAT is a content specific exam there are many advised pre-MCAT courses as well as numerous recommended courses.

Required Courses and GPA Expectations

DISCLAIMER: This is not a definitive list of the classes you will need for every school. Always check with the individual schools to see their specific requirements regarding coursework and AP/IB credit. Requirements vary from school to school and can change from year to year, so you must check each program individually.

If you wish to enter an AA program, you will need to have both a strong science/pre-req and overall GPA. Admissions committees also look for trends on transcripts—so all is not lost if you stumble in your first semester or two, but then show substantial improvement each subsequent year. However, they will also notice negative trends such as if you consistently withdraw from or perform poorly in hard science courses or if you take many courses away from UGA. While an instance or two is not a deal-breaker, a pattern of behavior should be avoided. Admission is very competitive, and you must demonstrate the ability to handle difficult scientific content. Additionally, some AA programs require at least a B- in all pre-requisite courses while others only require a C. If you do not meet a program minimum, then you will need to retake the course. AA programs do not do grade replacement when calculating GPA, so make sure you are doing well in your classes!

Typical AA Pre-Requisites

- Biology BIOL 1107/L & 1108/L
- General Chemistry CHEM 1211/L & 1212/L
- Organic Chemistry CHEM 2211/L & 2212/L
- Physics PHYS 1111 & 1112 or 1211 & 1212
- Biochemistry BCMB 3100 or BCMB 4010 & 4020
- Calculus MATH 2250
- Statistics STAT 2000
- Anatomy & Physiology CBIO 2200/L and 2210/L
- **CBIO 3010 and one of the 3000+ level Physiology courses might be an option depending on the programs to which you are applying.**
Volunteering

Volunteering is an important part of the application that you should not neglect. AA programs want to see depth of commitment and substantial involvement and leadership in the community. They are looking for students who not only demonstrate that they can perform well in rigorous courses, but also those who are compassionate, enjoy working with people and are dedicated to serving the community. Volunteering can be done in a clinical setting such as a hospital or hospice, but it can also be done with organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, the Humane Society, or anything else that you are passionate about.

There are many benefits to getting involved in undergraduate research, but it is not required for admission into AA programs. If you are interested in research, you should plan to start early and dedicate at least a year to a specific project or lab. If you are not interested in research, you would be better served dedicating your time to other activities which you are passionate about such as volunteering or shadowing.

Letters of Evaluation

Most AA programs require at least three letters of evaluation, but specific requirements do vary between schools. These letters are meant to provide insight into your academic ability, character, and potential for success as it relates to your pursuit of the Anesthesiologist Assistant profession. Letters cannot come from family members or friends of the family. They need to be provided by those who know you in a professional capacity – e.g., professors, supervisors, volunteer coordinators, etc.

Remember that these letters need to come from people who know you well, so begin building relationships early, especially with faculty. You should plan on obtaining at least one reference from a hard science faculty member such as someone who has taught you in a pre-requisite course. A letter from a healthcare provider is not required but can be useful provided that they have gotten to know you well and can speak to your ability to succeed in their field.

Shadowing

You are expected to have 8-10 hours minimum of documented anesthesia exposure by observation in the operating room but are highly encouraged to complete additional hours of shadowing. Shadowing can typically be with an anesthesiologist, AA, or CRNA; you are not required to shadow an AA specifically since programs understand that your access to these professionals may be limited. However, if you can shadow with an AA, it would be very beneficial. Shadowing experience demonstrates that you understand the profession, and it is recommended that you try to experience as much provider/patient interaction as possible so that you can make an informed decisions about which career track is right for you.

To prove that you have completed the required shadowing hours, you will need to complete a Shadowing Experience Verification Form which can be found on the many of the individual program websites in their “Requirements” sections. Please note that shadowing means hands-off observation only and that some programs do stipulate that the shadowing cannot be completed as part of a class or internship.

Pre-Professional Advising Office