

# Pathologists' Assistant, M.H.S.

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## Degree Offered

- Master of Health Science (MHS)

## The Profession

A pathologists' assistant is a healthcare professional who is qualified through academic and practical training to provide services in anatomic pathology under the direction of a qualified pathologist. Pathologists' assistants serve as physician-extenders in the same manner as physician assistants. The addition of pathologists' assistants to the pathology team can reduce cost, increase revenue, and improve workflow in the anatomic pathology lab. In practice, pathologists' assistants (PAs) are responsible for the processing of the surgical pathology specimen from receipt to dissection and description to submission of tissue to histology. In autopsy practice, the PA is involved in reviewing the medical record of the decedent, evisceration, dissection, and selection of tissue for submission to histology as well as formulation of a preliminary anatomic diagnosis and autopsy report under the direction of a pathologist. Many PAs are involved in laboratory management, teaching at the university level, training of residents and medical students, forensic investigation, or research.

## Nature of Program

The graduate program for pathologists' assistants began in January 2008 and is administered by the School of Medicine. Students are admitted into the Master of Health Science program after earning a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited college or university. Students with a cumulative grade point average of 3.25 or higher in the BS degree program in Medical Laboratory Science at West Virginia University may be provisionally admitted directly into the pathologists' assistant program at the end of their junior year.

This program is a twenty-four month master's-level program that prepares graduates as allied health professionals for careers as pathologists' assistants. During the second year, the student receives both didactic instruction and practical experience. Students receive practical experience at several of the program's affiliated medical facilities, which are listed on the departmental website (<https://medicine.hsc.wvu.edu/pa/curriculum/clinical-rotations/>).

## Certification

Graduates are eligible for certification by the Board of Certification of the American Society for Clinical Pathology (ASCP). Graduation is not contingent upon passing the certification exam.

## Pathologists' Assistant Program Essential Functions

In accordance with Section 504 of the 1973 Vocational Rehabilitation Act, the West Virginia University Pathologists' Assistant program has adopted minimum technical standards for assessment of all applicants.

Because the master's degree in health science/pathologists' assistant signifies that the holder has obtained minimum competencies in all areas of the anatomic pathology laboratories, it follows that graduates must have the knowledge and skills to function in a wide variety of laboratory situations and to perform a wide variety of procedures. A detailed list of these essential functions can be found on the departmental website (<https://medicine.hsc.wvu.edu/pa/admission-process/essential-functions/>).

When an applicant does not meet a non-academic standard as defined in the list of essential functions, and when this would, in the professional judgment of the committee, not satisfy the pathologists' assistant objectives for the student in performing laboratory procedures, education, and research, such opinion will be documented by the Admissions Committee.

The questions are not designed to disqualify an applicant but rather to give the Admissions Committee more complete information about an applicant's ability to meet the following nonacademic standards:

1. Is the candidate able to observe demonstrations and perform procedures in the basic sciences and clinical courses?
2. Is the candidate able to analyze, synthesize, solve problems, and make judgments about results obtained on patient specimens?
3. Does the candidate have sufficient use of the senses of vision, hearing, and somatic sensation necessary to perform the indicated laboratory procedures?
4. Can the candidate reasonably be expected to communicate the results of laboratory tests to other members of the healthcare team with accuracy, clarity, and efficiency?
5. Can the candidate reasonably be expected to learn and perform laboratory tests and operate instruments?
6. Can the candidate reasonably be expected to display good judgment in the analysis of procedure results?
7. Can the candidate reasonably be expected to accept criticism and respond by appropriate modification of behavior?
8. Can the candidate reasonably be expected to possess the perseverance, diligence, and consistency to complete the pathologists' assistant program and to become a practicing pathologists' assistant?

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## ADMINISTRATION

### PROGRAM DIRECTOR

- Michelle M. Costas - MHS, PA(ASCP) (Quinnipiac University)  
Assistant Professor

### CLINICAL COORDINATOR

- Justin Falcon - MHS, PA(ASCP) (West Virginia University)  
Assistant Professor

### MEDICAL DIRECTOR

- David Howell - MD, PhD  
Assistant Professor

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## FACULTY

### ASSISTANT PROFESSORS

- Carie Boykin - MHS, PA(ASCP) (West Virginia University)
- Michelle M. Costas - MHS, PA(ASCP) (Quinnipiac University)  
Program Director
- Justin Falcon - MHS, PA(ASCP) (West Virginia University)  
Clinical Coordinator
- Miranda Janucik - MHS, PA(ASCP) (West Virginia University)
- Samantha Pan - MHS, PA(ASCP) (West Virginia University)

### ADJUNCT ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

- Alyssa Hoffman - MHS, PA(ASCP) (West Virginia University)

## Admissions for 2025-2026

**For the most up-to-date information, please refer to the admissions requirements on the program's website at:** <https://medicine.hsc.wvu.edu/pa/admission-process/admission-requirements/>

All students seeking admission to the Master of Health Science, Pathologists' Assistant Program, must meet the following requirements:

- Hold an earned baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited US or Canadian academic institution of higher education
- Successfully complete the specific prerequisite coursework in mathematics and sciences with a "C" or better
- Have a cumulative GPA of 3.0 (on a 4.0 scale)
- Submit two letters of recommendation electronically, as part of the application
- Complete a shadowing experience with a certified PA in surgical pathology or have equivalent work experience
- Complete an interview with the admissions committee
- Submit an electronic admissions packet including the application form, personal statement, essential functions form, shadowing statement, and official transcripts from all colleges and universities attended
- Applicants accepting an offer of admission will submit a non-refundable deposit of \$250 which will be due within two weeks of receipt of the invoice. The deposit will be applied towards the first semester tuition.

## REQUIREMENTS

Requirement	Description
College Prep	Baccalaureate Degree
Prerequisite Courses	8 hours of Biology with laboratory
Prerequisite Courses	3-4 hours of Human Anatomy (can be taken in combination with Physiology)
Prerequisite Courses	8 hours of College Chemistry with lab
Prerequisite Courses	3-4 hours of Organic Chemistry (CHEM 231 at WVU) or 3-4 hours of Biochemistry
Prerequisite Courses	3-4 hours of Microbiology, Immunology, Parasitology, or Virology

Prerequisite Courses	3 hours of college Algebra or higher
Prerequisite Courses	3 hours of English Composition or higher
Grade Point Average required	3.0 cumulative
Grade Point Average preferred	3.0 in the prerequisite courses
Recommendations	Two letters of recommendation
Interview	A personal interview with the Pathologists' Assistant Program Admissions Committee

## Shadowing or Work Experience

Applicants must complete a shadowing experience with a practicing pathologists' assistant in surgical pathology, or have applicable work experience. A statement regarding this experience is required in the application packet. Please contact the program specialist for assistance if necessary.

## Admissions Classifications

Students must have a baccalaureate degree prior to beginning the professional sequence. The program has established the following admissions classifications:

- **General Admissions:** All applicants who have successfully completed their undergraduate degree (BS or BA) and who meet all criteria for admissions as outlined under "Admission Requirements" can apply December 1 to March 15.
- **Direct Admit:** For current WVU students in the Histotechnology (HTL) and Medical Laboratory Science (MLS) Programs *only*. A limited number of students completing the bachelor of science program in the HTL and MLS programs who have a cumulative GPA of 3.25 by the end of their junior year may apply to the Pathologists' Assistant Program. These students will be admitted into the program after successfully completing their HTL or MLS undergraduate degree.
- **Current Undergraduate Students:** Students enrolled in their final year of undergraduate studies during the application period of December 1 to March 15 are eligible to apply to the program if the degree is conferred in May following the end of the application period. Students should submit their transcripts showing courses that are "in progress." Any offer of admission to the program is contingent upon successful completion of the baccalaureate degree with a 3.0 minimum GPA.

**Program Progression** - Students are required to maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 throughout their entire matriculation in the program.

## Application Procedure

Each year, the Pathologists' Assistant Program accepts 16 students. Applications are accepted between December 1 and March 15 for the class beginning the following January. The application fee is sixty dollars. A completed admissions packet contains the following:

- Completed application form (electronic)
- Personal and shadowing statements (see program website for requirements)
- Unofficial transcripts can be sent initially; however, the university must receive the official transcripts for all schools attended before an applicant can be accepted.
- CV or resume
- Two recommendation letters
- Signed essential functions form

Each applicant must arrange for transcripts to be sent directly from all institutions attended to the Office of Graduate Admissions. When the application is complete, the file is sent to the Pathologists' Assistant Admissions Committee. Recommendation letters can be from faculty in a pre-requisite course, a lab professional with whom the applicant has worked, current employer, or professional peer. Interviews are granted to qualified applicants after the committee has reviewed the completed admissions packet.

Major Code: 8357

## Degree Requirements

Code	Title	Hours
MICB 702	Microbiology	5
PA 507	Human Anatomy 1	3
PALM 465	Medical Laboratory Management	2
PA 527	Human Anatomy 2	3
PALM 605	Advanced Microanatomy	2
PALM 610	Pathology Assistant Education Methods	1
PALM 620	Clinical Pathology Seminar	2

PALM 625	Anatomical Pathology Techniques	4
PALM 627	Pathology Assistant Practicum 1	9
PALM 628	Pathology Assistant Practicum 2	9
PALM 629	Pathologists' Assistant Practicum 3	7
PALM 630	Pathology Review 1	2
PALM 631	Pathology Review 2	2
PSIO 743	Fundamentals of Physiology	5
PALM 648	Surgical and Autopsy Pathology Procedures	3
PALM 750	Systemic Pathology for Pathologists' Assistant Students	6
PALM 650	Introduction to Disease Mechanisms	4
PALM 652	Histology for Pathologists' Assistants	3
PALM 600	Pathologists' Assistant Microanatomy	2
Total Hours		74

## SUGGESTED PLAN OF STUDY

### First Year

Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours	Summer	Hours
MICB 702		5 PA 507		3 PALM 620	2
PSIO 743		5 PALM 600		2 PALM 750	6
PALM 465		2 PALM 625		4 PA 527	3
PALM 605		2 PALM 610		1	
PALM 648		3 PALM 650		4	
		PALM 652		3	
		17		17	11

### Second Year

Fall	Hours	Spring	Hours	Summer	Hours
PALM 629		7 PALM 627		9 PALM 628	9
PALM 631		2 PALM 630		2	
		9		11	9

Total credit hours: 74

## GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Students are required to maintain an overall GPA of at least 3.0 as a graduate student while enrolled in the pathologists' assistant program. A minimum 3.0 GPA is required to graduate from the program.

## Major Learning Outcomes

### PATHOLOGISTS' ASSISTANT

The Pathologists' Assistant Program prepares students to be highly skilled allied health professionals providing services in both surgical and autopsy pathology. Individuals are prepared both academically and professionally to be contributing members of the healthcare team.

Graduates will:

- Demonstrate proficiency in surgical pathology
  - Distinguish between normal and abnormal tissue both grossly and microscopically
  - Choose the appropriate tissue to submit based on clinical history
  - Gross complex surgical cases using the most recent cancer staging protocols
  - Choose the appropriate stains - routine, special, or IHC, - to assist the pathologist in making a diagnosis
- Demonstrate proficiency in autopsy pathology
  - Perform an autopsy using different techniques
  - Gather pertinent clinical history and all necessary documentation for a case
  - Compose a gross description for the autopsy report
  - Select tissue for processing
- Demonstrate concepts in medical laboratory management

- Apply management principles to regulation and professional oversight
- Compare healthcare delivery systems
- Discuss ethical principles and decision making
- Identify basic management concepts, functions, and styles
- Determine a differential diagnosis for tumors based on gross appearance and clinical history
- Engage in activities and behavior that promote the profession and positively represent the program
- Instruct residents, medical students, and other health professionals in surgical and autopsy techniques

## **Accreditation**

The WVU Pathologists' Assistant Program is accredited by the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS), 5600 N. River Road, Suite 720, Rosemont, IL 60018, and (773) 714-8880.