

Do Preadmission GPA or GRE Scores Predict Student Success in Physician Assistant Education?

Abstract:

With the general movement of Physician Assistant (PA) Programs toward Masters level, programs have continued to adapt and change their curricula, clinical experiences and admissions criteria (1). Historically the type of applicant originally drawn to the PA profession was a second career, older individual with a significant amount of healthcare experience. Originally, this served the profession well, as each student brought in a fund of knowledge that could be built upon to produce a competent provider by the time of graduation. As programs have moved toward a Masters level of education, and as the profession has matured, there is an ongoing trend towards admitting younger, less clinically experienced individuals. PA programs have adapted well to this trend and continue to produce high quality entry level PAs, but recently it has become more challenging to discern individuals able to complete a PA program and pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE), due to the overall younger and less experienced population applying to PA programs (1).

Based on this, a pilot study was performed at one PA program to determine if certain admissions criteria could be predictive of a student's ability to complete a PA program in a timely manner as well as to pass the PANCE. A five year retrospective study looked at all admitted students' undergraduate overall GPA, Science GPA, GRE Verbal, GRE Analytical, GRE Quantitative scores, whether the student completed the program, decelerated, or graduated on time, and their score on the PANCE. Initial analysis reveals significant positive correlation of both overall GPA and Science GPA to completing the program on time and passing the PANCE, as well as positive correlation to the overall PANCE score. However, the GRE did not correlate or have predictive value on either graduation success or passing the PANCE. The exception to this finding is that the new Analytical GRE score appears to correlate with passing the PANCE, although the small sample size makes validity of this finding questionable. Further investigation is needed to determine whether these conclusions are true of other PA programs that employ similar admissions criteria.