**PA-CAT**

**Physician Assistant
College Admissions Test**

# Getting Started Guide
# for PA Educators

**Exam Master®**

# Physician Assistant College Admissions Test (PA-CAT)

## Getting Started Document for PA Educators

### Overview

The Physician Assistant College Admissions Test is a 240-item basic science examination covering the most common prerequisite subjects required for admissions consideration at PA programs in the United States. The multiple-choice PA-CAT will be delivered at Prometric testing centers throughout the United States starting in May of 2020. The PA-CAT is presently a norm-based assessment, and there is no cut score.

### Field Testing and Exam Development

Different versions of the PA-CAT were extensively field-tested at 34 different PA programs encompassing over 1800 examinees. Field-testing was part of a research project led by Scott Massey, PhD, PA-C of Central Michigan University and Johnna Yealy, PhD, PA-CA, of the University of Tampa. IRB approval was provided by the University of Tampa. Research involved retrospective comparisons of PA-CAT outcomes with examinee admissions variables: prior GPA, science GPA, etc. Prospective comparisons of PA-CAT outcomes were compared longitudinally with student performance, including didactic GPA. Additional data collection and research is underway as longitudinal tracking of examinee performance in PA school continues.

| **Key Milestones** | **Key Future Dates** |
| --- | --- |
| May 2018 – Launch of v1.0 of the PA-CAT | January 2020 – Official PA-CAT registration opens |
| July 2018 – v1.1 Update to the PA-CAT | |
| August 2018 – v1.2 Update to the PA-CAT | February 2020 – Late-stage PA-CAT stress testing completed |
| December 2018 – v.1.3 Update to the PA-CAT | May 2020 – Commercial Release of v3.1 – v3.4 of the PA-CAT at Prometric testing centers |
| January 2019 – v.2.0 Update to the PA-CAT | |
| November 2019 – v2.1 Update to the PA-CAT | |
| November 2019 – Contract execution with Prometric | |
| November 2019 – Rollout of official PA-CAT website: **pa-cat.com** | |

**Participating Programs**

For 2020, participating PA programs will choose to "Require" or "Recommend" use of the PA-CAT in their admissions process. Based on initial expressions of interest and commitments made to date, Exam Master expects that approximately 7500 candidates will sit for the PA-CAT in 2020.

**Setting Up for the PA-CAT**

- Determine whether implementation of the PA-CAT requires approval from your college or university administration.
- Determine if the graduate school mandates the GRE.
- Provide evidence to the appropriate constituencies regarding the implementation of the PA-CAT.
- Secure approval through program governance system.
- Meet with admissions personnel to provide critical information.
- Disseminate update policy via website and other channels.

**Implementation of the PA-CAT**

- Consider when you admissions cycle begins – the 2020-2021 cycle and beyond.
- Provide notice to prospective candidates before beginning admissions cycle.
- Place the PA-CAT information on program admissions website – *Sample website verbiage on page 4*
- Communicate with prospective students about questions they may have.
- Provide information to students about Prometric test centers.

**Website Language Samples – You can use this language on your website.**

| Sample #1 – *From Central Michigan University* | Sample #2 | Sample #3 |
|---|---|---|
| Beginning with the 2020 application cycle, all applicants to CMU's PA program are required to take the PA-CAT (Physician Assistant College Admission Test). The PA-CAT is a specialized test designed to measure applicant knowledge in key prerequisite science subjects typically required for PA school. For information about the PA-CAT, visit their website. | The PA-CAT is designed to be a broad-based exam and will provide evidence-based data on what applicants have learned in prerequisite subject areas before applying to PA school.<br><br>Topics were chosen based on literature reviews, surveys, and consultations with PA educators who were asked to identify which prerequisite topics are most important for mastery of the demanding PA curriculum. Anatomy and Physiology are given the most emphasis in recognition of what PA students must learn early in the curriculum. Along with Anatomy and Physiology the PA-CAT will test Microbiology, General Biology, Genetics, General Chemistry (including Organic Chemistry), Biochemistry, Behavioral Sciences, and Statistics. The 240-item exam covers a variety of learning targets (objectives), with a focus on the higher-order cognitive levels to assess application and understanding. Topics and subjects covered are subject to change.<br><br>Registration for the PA-CAT will be available commercially in January 2020. Scheduling will begin on or about March 1, 2020. The PA-CAT exam window opens May 1, 2020 and runs continuously after that. Further details will be made available on how and where applicants can access the PA-CAT, fees, and other requirements. | Beginning with the 2020 application cycle, all applicants *to (INSTITUTION NAME)* PA program are *required/recommended* to take the PA-CAT (Physician Assistant College Admissions Test). The PA-CAT is a specialized test designed to measure applicant knowledge in key prerequisite science subjects typically required for PA school.<br><br>Applicants must designate *(INSTITUTION NAME)* as the institution to receive their official PA-CAT transcript score report. It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that *(INSTITUTION NAME)* has received the PA-CAT official transcript score report before the application deadline. An applicant whose score is received after the deadline will not be considered for admission during the current cycle but may use their score report for the next cycle. Applicants are permitted to take the PA-CAT more than once to improve their scores, but they must ensure that the score report is received by *(INSTITUTION NAME)* before the application deadline.<br><br>For more information about the PA-CAT, score reporting, practice test, and other study resources, visit www.pa-cat.com. |

## PA-CAT Scores

PA-CAT scores will be reported on a scaled basis. Students and participating programs will receive a composite score and three sub-domain scores. Students will receive an official PA-CAT score report. Programs will receive an Official PA-CAT transcript.

**Official Transcript**

**Official Score Report**

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**Special Accommodations**

Working collaboratively with Prometric, Exam Master is developing an evaluation and approval process. Approved requests will be at no added cost to examinees.

**PA-CAT Special Accommodations**

**Fee Waivers/Reductions**

With community involvement, Exam Master will be setting up a fee waiver/reduction program in the Fall of 2020 to assist economically disadvantaged exam candidates.

**Additional Resources**

For the most complete source of information on the PA-CAT program, visit **pa-cat.com**.

**Quick Facts about the PA-CAT:**

**Facts About the PA-CAT Infographic**

For background information on the PA-CAT program, including early research findings, refer to:

**PA-CAT Brochure**

## Contact Information:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Matt Bader** | **Jim Pearson** | **Judy Cox** |
| **President and CEO** | **VP of Academic Solutions** | **VP of Project Management** |
| **Exam Master** | **Exam Master** | **Exam Master** |
| **800-572-3627** | **800-572-3627** | **800-572-3627** |
| [mbader@exammaster.com](mailto:mbader@exammaster.com) | [jpearson@exammaster.com](mailto:jpearson@exammaster.com) | [jcox@exammaster.com](mailto:jcox@exammaster.com) |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Scott Massey, PhD, PA-C** | **Johnna Yealy, PhD, PA-C** |
| **Director, Central Michigan University** | **Director, University of Tampa** |
| **Physician Assistant Program** | **Physician Assistant Medicine Program** |
| **(989) 774-1273** | **(813) 253-3333** |
| [masse2sl@cmich.edu](mailto:masse2sl@cmich.edu) | [jyealy@ut.edu](mailto:jyealy@ut.edu) |

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The Physician Assistant College Admissions Test (**PA-CAT**) is designed to objectively assess student comprehension of core basic science subjects to help PA admissions committees more accurately determine the academic preparedness of their applicants.

The PA-CAT science subjects have been selected based on how frequently PA schools require them as prerequisites for admission. The difficulty level of the questions and of the overall exam was refined through extensive field-testing involving over 1800 examinees.

The PA-CAT features 240 carefully constructed multiple-choice questions assessing 9 subject areas. The number of questions devoted to each subject area is derived from research, surveys, and PA educator judgments about the relative importance of each topic to the more complex concepts students will learn during the didactic phase of the PA curriculum.

| PA-CAT Content Weighting | |
|---|---|
| Physiology | 16% |
| Anatomy | 16% |
| Chemistry | 16% |
| General Biology | 11% |
| Microbiology | 11% |
| Genetics | 11% |
| Biochemistry | 5% |
| Behavioral Sciences | 9% |
| Statistics | 5% |
| **Total** | **100%** |

*Table 1: Exam weighting by subject*

PA-CAT test items were developed to measure key learning objectives for each subject based on common college-level learning outcomes for that subject. All test items were reviewed by subject-matter experts and PA educational professionals.

Content is organized by a hierarchical outline structure.

| Anatomy Topic Weighting | |
|---|---|
| The Back | 13% |
| The Abdomen | 5% |
| The Head | 8% |
| The Lower Limb | 25% |
| The Neck | 8% |
| The Pelvis and Perineum | 8% |
| The Thorax | 8% |
| The Upper Limb | 25% |
| **Total** | **100%** |

*Table 2: Sample breakdown of subject by topic*

To better assess and differentiate academic preparedness, efforts have been made to develop test items assessing higher cognitive levels. Each PA-CAT question is mapped to Bloom's taxonomy, with the Application level most prevalent. The exam covers various learning targets with a focus on the higher order cognitive levels to assess application and understanding.

| PA-CAT Cognitive Levels | |
|---|---|
| Knowledge | 12% |
| Comprehension | 25% |
| Application | 54% |
| Analysis | 9% |
| **Total** | **100%** |

*Table 3: Exam breakdown by cognitive level*

**To participate and for more information, contact:**
Jim Pearson, Vice President of Academic Solutions
jpearson@exammaster.com