

PRE-PROFESSIONAL HEALTH SCIENCES

Program Description

John Douglass (<https://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/biology/faculty-staff/douglass-john/>), PhD and Ben McFarland (<https://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/chemistry/faculty-staff/mcfarland-ben/>), PhD, PPHS Directors

Pre-Professional Health Sciences Website (<http://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/biology/pphs/pphs/>)

The Pre-Professional Health Sciences (PPHS) program at SPU offers specialized advising and coursework to prepare students for graduate-level professional training in a wide variety of health care fields. Our graduates become physicians, veterinarians, physical and occupational therapists, physician assistants, public health specialists, dentists, pharmacists, genetic counselors, podiatrists, and optometrists. Over the last five years, SPU students have achieved an acceptance rate of 90% for admission to medical schools, compared to a national average of about 40%.

SPU believes that students applying to professional schools should demonstrate academic competence, a willingness to serve others, and a familiarity with the demands of their chosen profession. Accordingly, the PPHS program helps guide students to succeed in appropriate academic coursework, to commit to volunteer service, and to observe professionals at work. Above all, students are encouraged to use their college experience as a time to develop a strong sense of vocation and the ability to clearly articulate their professional and personal goals.

Faculty Advisors

Tracie Delgado (<https://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/biology/faculty-staff/delgado-tracie/>), PhD, Faculty Advisor

Ryan Ferrer (<https://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/biology/faculty-staff/ferrer-ryan/>), PhD, Faculty Advisor

Wade Grabow (<https://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/chemistry/faculty-staff/grabow-wade/>), PhD, Faculty Advisor

Jenny Tenlen (<https://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/biology/faculty-staff/tenlen-jenny/>), PhD, Faculty Advisor

Cara Wall-Scheffler (<https://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/biology/faculty-staff/wall-scheffler-cara/>), PhD, Faculty Advisor

Derek Wood (<https://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/biology/faculty-staff/wood-derek/>), PhD, Faculty Advisor

Course Requirements

The formal component of the PPHS program consists of a set of unique 1- and 2-credit courses that provide instruction as well as inspiration and peer support. These courses offer opportunities for self-reflection to complement the mentoring by knowledgeable faculty and clinical professionals.

Students take PPHS 1200 Introduction to the Health Professions during their first year to learn more about the wide variety of health care professions and to explore current issues that impact health care

systems, and to begin planning for volunteer work and clinical observations as part of their professional development.

Throughout their college years, students meet with their faculty advisor to monitor their progress in all academic subjects. Students are expected to choose courses that are both challenging and of personal interest. Low grades during the first year are not career-ending, but it is important for a student to achieve an upward-trending grade-point average (GPA) over the course of their college studies. It is possible to repeat a course or take a similar upper-level course to demonstrate mastery of a subject. Note that 3.0 is the minimum GPA for most graduate programs; medical schools require a GPA of at least 3.5.

Most PPHS students major in Physiology, Biochemistry, or Applied Human Biology, which include the coursework typically required for admission into different types of graduate training programs. However, pre-professional students may major in any discipline they choose, provided that they enroll in additional courses to fulfill specific pre-requisites for admission to a professional school.

All students are expected to explore the humanities and social sciences in addition to biology, chemistry, physics, and math. Competent and compassionate care providers must develop skills to communicate effectively with patients and understand their physical, spiritual, and emotional needs.

Application Workshop

- Students who have completed PPHS 1200 Introduction to the Health Professions, and plan to apply to medical or dental schools enroll in PPHS 3400 Application Workshop in the autumn of their final year.
- Students pursuing other types of training are also encouraged to enroll in PPHS 3400 Application Workshop.

By this point, students should have achieved an acceptable GPA and have accumulated a significant number of hours volunteering and job-shadowing. The workshop is an opportunity for students to compose a personal statement, to request letters of recommendation from professors and nonacademic mentors, and to prepare other application materials.

- Students typically apply to professional schools in the spring of their final year at SPU or one or two years after graduation.

Graduates can continue to take advantage of the PPHS program even after they leave SPU. For many applicants, a “bridge” year or two between application and matriculation at a professional school is a valuable time for further personal growth. Some professional schools favor older applicants with meaningful work experience, which puts early applicants – those applying at the end of their third college year and not taking a bridge year – at a distinct disadvantage. The PPHS system encourages each student to craft a competitive application and choose an appropriate timeline for applying to professional schools.

Committee Interview

A key part of the PPHS process for applicants to medical and dental schools is the “mock interview,” where the applicant is questioned by a panel of SPU faculty and staff and receives formative feedback to consider in advance of an actual interview at a professional school. Following the mock interview, the committee chair writes a letter on behalf of the interview committee to summarize the applicant’s accomplishments and readiness for training in medicine or dentistry. A comprehensive committee letter supplements the assessments

provided in individual letters of recommendation and is considered to be an excellent mechanism for conveying each applicant's potential for success as a health care professional.

Only applicants who have participated in a formal committee process, such as the one followed by the SPU PPHS program, are eligible to include a committee letter as part of their application to a professional school. However, all PPHS students — not just pre-medical and pre-dental students — can benefit from the support and guidance of the entire PPHS curriculum as they choose a profession and prepare their applications.

Advice for Students

The path toward a graduate training program differs for each student and for each profession. Please visit the PPHS website (<http://spu.edu/academics/college-of-arts-sciences/biology/pphs/pphs/>) for more details about the pre-professional program and information about the most common career pathways.

- Choose an appropriate major and add the necessary supplemental courses. Investigate the admissions requirements for particular schools of interest to check whether any pre-requisite courses are not already required courses in the major. Most professional schools accept students from a variety of majors, as long as prerequisite courses have been completed. With careful planning, most supplemental courses can be completed while a student is an SPU undergraduate. In a few cases, additional courses may be needed following graduation. Round out a STEM education with electives in the liberal arts, business, psychology, and so on. Be sure to include classes that emphasize cross-cultural competencies.
- Make arrangements for job shadowing, which is unpaid observation of clinical professionals at work. Students should have at least 20 hours of shadowing by the end of the second year and at least 50 hours by the end of the fourth year.
- Volunteer for community service outside of campus. Students should have at least 20 hours of volunteering by the end of the second year and at least 50 hours by the end of the fourth year. A long-term regular commitment to one organization is far better than sporadic participation in multiple places.
- Participate in extracurricular activities. Clubs related to a particular career area are a good choice. Long-term participation with leadership responsibilities is advisable.
- Cultivate meaningful relationships with mentors, advisors, professors, supervisors, and relevant professionals so that these people can be approached to write letters of recommendation to professional schools. Keep a log, journal, or e-portfolio of all formal and informal professional development experiences, including readings and reflections, to consult when applying to graduate programs.
- Prepare for and take the entrance exam appropriate for the graduate program. Consider whether completing a self-study program or enrolling in a private exam-preparation course would be helpful. Students should plan to take the entrance exam once and do well. Taking a test without preparation and then re-taking it later demonstrates poor planning. Some entrance exams are scheduled only on certain dates, and scores may not be available for several weeks.
- Optional: Seek summer jobs or internships or part-time work in a clinical setting. Consider participating in scholarly activities such as an honors project or laboratory research. Demonstrate leadership and reliability through work as a laboratory teaching assistant, tutor, residence assistant, peer mentor, etc.