

Researching Programs

- **Start date of program:** A summer start date may not work for students who will complete their degree in the summer.
- **Number of schools:** Take into account the cost/time commitments for travelling to interview at too many schools.
- **Accreditation status:** Be aware that new programs will have “provisional accreditation” status. Full accreditation is usually not granted until a program has graduated at least one class.
- **Program structure and curriculum:**
 - Curriculum structure: *systems approach* (i.e., separate classes in physiology, anatomy, etc.) vs. *problem-based learning* (case-based study, i.e., the study of a patient with a respiratory illness will include study of all body systems related to that particular problem, such as anatomy, physiology, etc.).
 - Structure of clinical experience – *Integrated* (clinical experience is done throughout the academic curriculum) vs. *summative* clinical experience (clinical experience isn’t started until completion of didactic coursework).
 - Types of clinical experiences – Types required experiences? Options for electives? Location of clinical sites?
- **Dual degree options:** Many professional programs offer dual degree options which provide an opportunity to pursue an additional degree in business administration, public health, law, research (PhD), etc. Dual degree programs usually require additional time to complete, but not always.
- **Residency programs:** Residency is required for medical school, but most other health professional programs have optional residency/specialty options. If you are interested in a residency, research programs that offer residency training options. What is the placement rate for graduates of a given program? What types of residencies do graduates complete? For example, MU’s physical therapy program offers a neurological residency program, MU’s PA program has two residency programs in emergency medicine, etc.
- **Faculty composition and cohesiveness:** Consider faculty turnover, areas of expertise, etc. Based on faculty composition, programs may have strengths/emphasis in specific areas of practice/research.
- **In-state vs. out-of-state:** Schools that receive state funding may give admission preference to in-state applicants. How state of residence is determined varies by program, but your home state is typically defined by where you lived when you attended high school or where you have lived for one or more years without taking classes.
- **Facilities:** Look at instruction space (lecture and lab), equipment (dated or current), the presence of an on-site clinic, etc. Newer isn’t always better, look past the shine and new paint.
- **Licensure pass rates and employment rates:** Programs that receive federal funding (including student loans) must provide this information on their school’s web site. Schools may have programs that target specific employment opportunities, i.e., graduating health professionals who will work in rural setting, etc. that may match your interest.
- **Length of program:** Be cautious when comparing length of program, look at month of start/end and semesters for which tuition will be paid. For example, MU’s physician assistant study program is “3-years,” but only 33 months (May-Aug) that consists of only 4 semesters of tuition (summers are not billed). Many “2-year” programs are actually 27 months (Aug-Dec) and consist of 5-6 semesters of tuition (summers billed separately).
- **Admission requirements:** Be realistic about the prerequisites and patient care hours you will be able to achieve.
- **Extracurricular activities (service-learning, international service opportunities, etc.):** Look for other opportunities/factors that are important to you, such as the ability to participate in research, service opportunities, strong student organization, faith-based (or not), etc.
- **Costs and availability of financial aid:** Make sure you compare all costs, not just tuition. Additional costs would include laptop or other instruments/devices, software, additional lab fees, living expenses, transportation costs, etc.
- **International students:** Not all programs accept applicants from non-U.S. citizens or permanent residents. Those that do will have limited spaces. Only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are eligible for financial aid.
- **Go with your “gut”:** When you interview, take notice of the atmosphere. Do you feel like you could be at home at a specific school? Do the students seem happy? Are you comfortable, does it “feel” right? Selecting a school to attend often comes down to a “gut” feeling when you interview at the school.