



The Effect of Time Between Undergraduate Degree Completion and Enrollment into a PA Graduate School on Didactic Success

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Introduction

The physician assistant/associate (PA) profession is relatively new compared to other healthcare professions. Yet, PA school application is very competitive and requires applicants to demonstrate strong academic abilities and non-cognitive skills. This study examines if a time gap of 3 years in formal education impacts students' academic performance during didactic PA education.

Hypothesis

PA students enrolled into PA school within 3 years of completing their undergraduate degree will perform better academically during the didactic year.

Methods

The study employed a quantitative, non-experimental method. Current PA students across the US voluntarily completed a Qualtrics survey. We collected demographic characteristics, prior healthcare experience, and academic performance data during their didactic year. The data analysis was conducted using SPSS. It consists of descriptive and chi-square statistics. A P-value less than 0.05 is considered statistically significance.

Results

Figure 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=346)

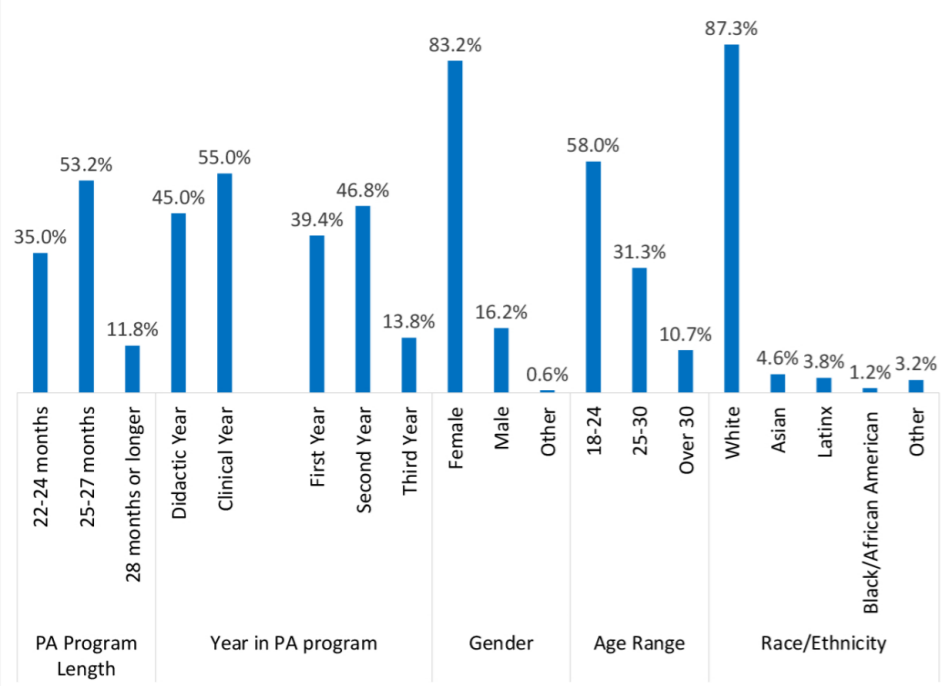
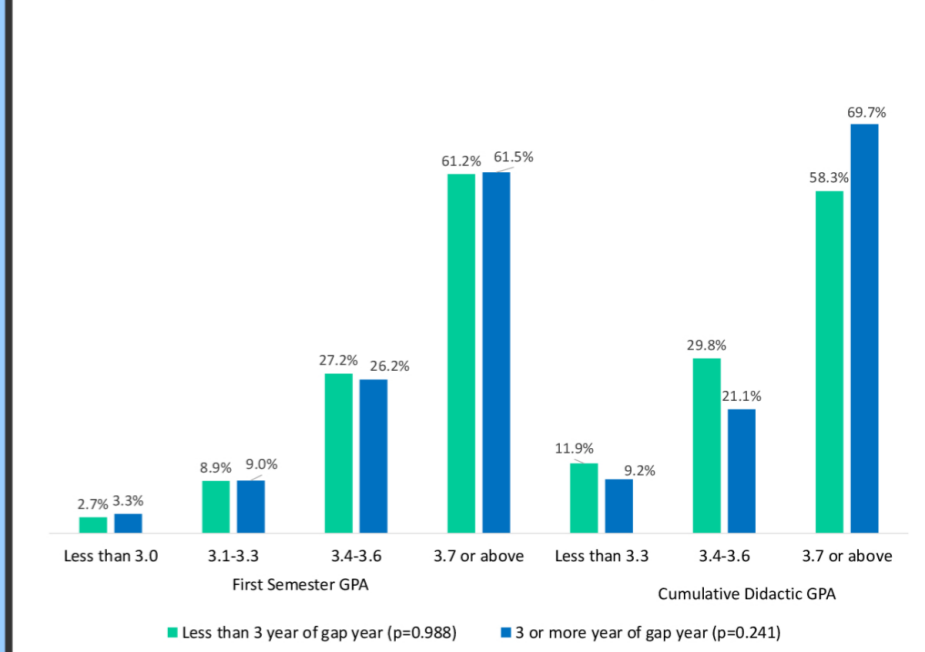


Table 2. Chi-square Analysis of PA Students that reported a Gap Year

	Gap Year		P-value
	Less than 3 years (n=224)	3 years or more (n=122)	
Gender			
Female	187 (83.9%)	101 (83.5%)	0.926
Male	36 (16.1%)	20 (16.5%)	
Age Range			
18-24	197 (88.3%)	3 (2.5%)	< 0.001
25-30	23 (10.3%)	85 (69.7%)	
Over 30	3 (1.3%)	34 (27.8%)	
Race			
White	202 (90.2%)	100 (82.0%)	0.168
Other race/ethnicity	22 (9.8%)	22 (18.0%)	
Marital Status			
Married/Domestic partnership	40 (17.9%)	41 (33.6%)	0.001
Single/divorced	183 (82.1%)	81 (66.4%)	
Children			
No	215 (96.0%)	102 (83.6%)	<0.001
Yes	9 (4.0%)	20 (16.4%)	
Undergraduate Major			
Non-STEM major	10 (4.5%)	27 (22.5%)	<0.001
STEM major	210 (95.5%)	93 (77.5%)	
Undergraduate GPA			
Less 3.0	0	9 (7.4%)	<0.001
3.1-3.3	4 (1.8%)	17 (13.9%)	
3.4-3.6	51 (22.8%)	50 (41.0%)	
3.7 or above	169 (75.4%)	46 (37.7%)	
Highest Degree			
Bachelor's Degree	190 (84.8%)	84 (68.9%)	<0.001
Master's Degree or above	34 (15.2%)	38 (31.1%)	
Repeated a Semester			
No	219 (97.8%)	121 (99.2%)	0.336
Yes	5 (2.2%)	1 (0.8%)	
Academic Probation			
No	218 (97.3%)	119 (97.5%)	0.902
Yes	6 (2.7%)	3 (2.5%)	

- PA students who reported less than 3 gap years were younger (age 18-24) than those who reported 3 or more gap years (88.3% vs. 2.5%; p<0.001).
- PA students who reported 3 or more gap years vs. those who reported less than a 3-year gap, list an undergraduate GPA less than 3.6 (62.3% vs. 24.6; p<0.001).
- Gap year did not affect academic probation or repeating a semester between the two groups.

Figure 2. Academic Performance of PA Students who Reported a Gap Year.



- First semester GPA (p=0.988) and cumulative GPA (p=0.241) were not statistically significant between PA students who took than 3 gap years and those who took 3 or more gap years.

Discussions/Conclusions

- Contrary to our hypothesis, there was no association with better academic performance during the didactic education between PA students who enrolled in PA school within 3 years vs. those who did not.
- Further research should explore PA students' experiences through qualitative methods to capture factors contributing to academic success in PA programs.

References

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