

# A comparison of interviewed and non-interviewed student cohorts for the PA Program of study and national physician assistant certification exam scores.

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## 1. Introduction

Traditionally, individuals who choose a medical career know that they must meet specific program requirements in order to be considered a competitive prospective student. The criterion used by the majority of professional college programs includes the following elements: grade point average, standardized tests, health care experience and in-person interviews. Most programs weight the undergraduate grade point averages and the standardized tests scores more because of their presumed ability to predict success, thus leaving the question of importance of the other elements. This research explored the importance of the in-person interview as it relates to performance on the Physician Assistant National Certification Exam (NCCPA).

## 2. Methods and Results

**Methodology:** A retrospective study was done comparing NCCPA aggregate exam scores of WSU PA students. Study subjects included graduates from 1991-1996 who served as the interviewed cohort and graduates from 1997-2002 who served as the non-interviewed cohort. Each study group was subject to descriptive (Table 1 and 2) and parametric statistics (Table 3) with the alpha level set at 0.5. An independent sample *t*-test was used to see if there was a significant difference in NCCPA aggregate exam scores between the cohort groups. **Results:** The mean for the interviewed graduates was 496.67 (SD +/- 28.54) and the mean for the non-interviewed graduates was 474.33 (SD +/- 15.28), which were not statistically different.

Table 1

### Demographics

Class	Avg. age	Female	Male	Caucasian	African Amer.	Hispanic	Asian	Native Amer.	Other
1991	29.5	6	6	17	1	1	1		2
1992	30.4	16	10	22	1		2	1	
1993	27.0	14	16	29	1				
1994	30.0	15	15	29		1			
1995	28.0	13	18	31					
1996	30.0	25	20	41	1		2	1	
1997	29.0	31	15	39	2	1	2		2
1998	27.7	31	15	39	1	1	3	1	1
1999	29.1	27	19	41		2	2	1	
2000	31.4	28	18	43		2		1	
2001	35.4	31	15	39	1	1	4		1
2002	29.2	32	16	45			3		

Table 2

Average NCCPA Board Scores

CLASS YEAR	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002
NCCPA SCORE	447	499	500	503	536	495	459	473	483	470	461	500
1991-1996 Interviewed												
1997-2002 Not Interviewed												

Table 3

Results of Independent Samples T-Test

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval	Sig.*	Equal Variances Assumed Sig.+	Equal Variances Not Assumed Sig.#
Interviewed	6	496.67	+/-28.54	11.65	12.722	-10.37 to 55.04	0.1395	0.1220	0.1313
Non-Interviewed	6	474.33	+/-15.28	6.24					

\* Not significant  
 + Not significant  
 # Not significant

Discussion: In this small study, which only evaluated interviewed and non-interviewed cohort’s aggregate NCCPA exam scores, no difference was found. A large scale study evaluating the same variables is suggested before generalizations can be made.

### 3. Conclusions

Several elements are used for criterion for admission for many professional college programs. Grade point average, standardized test scores, health care experience and in-person interviews are used the most. This study was conducted to determine the importance of the in-person interview as it relates to performance on the NCCPA certification exam. This study was small and no difference was found when evaluating interviewed and non-interviewed cohorts. A much larger study evaluating the same variables would be suggested before generalizations can be made. This information may be valuable to physician assistant programs and well as other professional college programs attempting to sort out admission criteria.

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