



## Medical Laboratory Assistant Short-Term Certificate Frequently Asked Questions

Medical laboratory personnel (MLA, MLT, MLS) play a crucial role in the detection, diagnosis, and treatment of disease. Lab personnel obtain, prepare, examine, and analyze body fluids and cells. They look for bacteria, parasites, and other micro-organisms; analyze for the chemical content of fluids; match blood for transfusion; and test for drug levels in the blood that show how a patient is responding to treatment. They perform analyses in the areas of microbiology, hematology, immunology, and biochemistry. Technologists use microscopes, cell counters, computerized instruments and other high-tech laboratory equipment in their work. The data they obtain plays a vital role in identifying and treating medical conditions. It is estimated 60-70% of all decisions regarding a patient's diagnosis, treatment, hospital admission, and discharge are based on test results produced by the medical laboratory team.

### What is a Medical Lab Assistant?

A Medical Laboratory Assistant (MLA) is educated and skilled in specimen collection, transport, and processing of patient blood, urine, and other body fluids. MLAs are knowledgeable of the pre-analytical factors that may compromise the accuracy of patient results. MLAs perform rapid, waived laboratory testing and basic analyzer maintenance and decontamination procedures. MLAs are also capable of preparation, performance, interpretation, and troubleshooting techniques necessary for quality control analysis.

**Academic Requirement:** Calhoun offers a 2-semester MLA Short-term Certificate Program that prepares individuals to take a national certification exam to become certified as an MLA and/or Phlebotomist.

### Upon Completion of the MLA certificate, the student will be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of infection control and safety practices
- Follow standard operating procedures to collect specimens
- Prepare blood and body fluid specimens for analysis
- Prepare/reconstitute reagents, standards, and controls
- Perform appropriate tests at the clinical assistant level
- Perform and record vital sign measurements
- Follow established quality control protocols
- Communicate (verbally and non-verbally) effectively and appropriately in the workplace using common medical terminology
- Use information systems necessary to accomplish job functions
- Identify and report potential pre-analytical errors that may occur during specimen collection, labeling, transporting, and processing

To learn more about the medical laboratory profession: <https://ascls.org/how-do-i-become-a-laboratory-professional/>

## What is a Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT)?

Medical lab technicians perform a wide range of tests on patient samples, with the results used to diagnose and treat patients. They work in laboratory settings, often in hospitals or doctors' offices. The job outlook for MLTs is positive; 100% of CCC graduates find employment.

**Academic Requirement:** An MLT holds an Associate of Applied Science degree.

## What is a Medical Laboratory Scientist (MLS)?

While similar, there are several key differences between a medical lab scientist (MLS) and a medical lab technician (MLT). Both perform tests on biological samples, but the MLS has more education and skills and can conduct higher-complexity laboratory tests. The MLS may also have a supervisory role in the laboratory.

**Academic Requirement:** A medical laboratory scientist must have at least a bachelor's degree.

## What coursework is required to be a Medical Laboratory Assistant (MLA)?

### MLA Short-Term Certificate Course Sequencing

Course	Course Title	Credit Hours
<b>Semester - 1</b>		
<b>MLT 131</b>	Laboratory Techniques I (1 <sup>st</sup> mini-mester)	4
<b>EMS 100</b>	Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)	1
<b>MLT 132</b>	Laboratory Techniques II (2 <sup>nd</sup> mini-mester)	5
<b>EMS 106</b>	Medical Terminology (optional)	2*
<b>Semester - 2</b>		
<b>MLT 286</b>	MLA Clinical Practicum	3
<b>SPH 106 or SPH 107</b>	Fundamentals of Oral Communication or Fundamentals of Public Speaking	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>16 - 18</b>

The MLA certificate program is 2 semesters in length. Study begins with classes on the Huntsville campus. Students develop the required skills of an MLA through didactic learning and hands-on simulated laboratory experiences during **MLT 131** and **MLT 132 Laboratory Techniques I/II**. Students are assessed on their knowledge of processes and abilities related to specimen collection, handling, transport, and processing; rapid test methodology and performance; regulatory applications; and equipment maintenance, calibration, and quality control.

Once the student demonstrates competence in the content and laboratory skills through completion of MLT 131 and MLT 132 courses, the student progresses into the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of the program. **MLT 286 MLA Clinical Practicum** is an experiential learning experience within an assigned healthcare facility. The clinical rotation provides invaluable real-world experience,

ensuring entry-level competence in the field. Upon successful completion, students are eligible for the MLA and/or Phlebotomy national certification exams.

**EMS 100 Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation** provides CPR certification, a required component of the clinical documentation needed for enrollment in **MLT 286 MLA Clinical Practicum**. CPR Certification outside of Calhoun Community College is permissible, but must meet clinical documentation requirements. EMS 100 must be completed in the 1<sup>st</sup> semester of the MLA STC program.

**SPH 106 (or SPH 107) Fundamentals of Oral Communication** supports the development of essential communication skills that are increasingly emphasized by local industry partners. Employers have expressed a need for graduates to enter the workforce with stronger verbal communication abilities, especially in interactions with patients, coworkers, and interdisciplinary healthcare teams. SPH 106/107 can be taken in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of the MLA STC program.

**EMS 106 Medical Terminology** is an **optional** course within the MLA curriculum. Completion of EMS 106 provides foundational knowledge applicable to health science programs. Bonus points are applied to the MLT application for successful completion of EMS 106. EMS 106 can be taken in the 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of the MLA STC program.

### **What is required to enroll in MLA?**

Students with a high school diploma or GED and who have been admitted to CCC are eligible for the program. MLA courses are open enrollment, meaning there is no separate application process for the program. However, class size is limited, and the seats are filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Interested students must email program director Reannon Wilkerson to request registration. [reannon.wilkerson@calhoun.edu](mailto:reannon.wilkerson@calhoun.edu)

Registration of EMS 100, SPH 106/107, and EMS 106 is the responsibility of the student. Please refer to the section above for course sequencing requirements.

### **What physical capabilities are required of an MLA?**

Enrolled students are required to successfully complete both academic and clinical requirements. The program has adopted a list of **Eligibility Criteria** to delineate the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills deemed the minimal necessary for admission, progression, completion, and for the provision of safe and effective client care. The Eligibility Criteria can be found on the MLA website. If a student cannot meet the Eligibility Criteria it is their responsibility to request appropriate reasonable accommodations through the Student Disability Services Office.

### **What expenses are involved in the MLA Program?**

In addition to tuition, health students have expenses related to the listed requirements below, plus textbooks and laboratory supplies. Approximate costs are discussed in information sessions and program orientation.

### **HEALTH SCIENCES STUDENTS REQUIREMENTS:**

- Retain reliable transportation to and from the campus and assigned clinical education facilities

- Comply with a dress code that includes an assigned uniform
- Undergo a health examination, TB screening, and validate immunity to infectious diseases
- Submit proof of current certification in basic life support (CPR) at the healthcare provider level
- Purchase low-cost malpractice insurance through the CCC Health Sciences division
- Submit to a background check by a designated vendor
- Undergo drug and alcohol testing by a designated vendor

### **Do I have to have a background check, a physical exam, drug testing, or have taken CPR to register for MLA?**

No, none of the above are required to register. Faculty will instruct enrolled students when to proceed with these requirements. Policies for the background check and drug testing are provided upon enrollment. A background check with findings or positive drug screen may render a student ineligible to participate in clinical rotation which may result in dismissal.

### **Are there scholarships or funding available for MLA?**

The Alabama Community College System is currently offering reimbursement scholarship funds to students who complete the program.

The certificate program also qualifies for Calhoun Community College Scholarships. More information: <https://calhoun.edu/student-services/financial-aid/calhoun-scholarships/>

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides funding for careers in demand. Both the MLA and MLT programs are eligible. Contact your local career center.

Madison/Limestone Counties 256-851-0537

Morgan/Lawrence Counties 256-355-0142

### **Will I be certified as an MLA once I complete the classes?**

No, but you will be prepared and eligible to take a national exam for certification as an MLA and/or a Phlebotomist. Two agencies offer the exam and the credential, which is accepted by local employers and throughout the United States.

American Medical Technologists (AMT)

[www.americanmedtech.org](http://www.americanmedtech.org)

American Society of Clinical Pathology (ASCP)

[www.ascp.org](http://www.ascp.org)

### **What is the salary of a MLA?**

Based on a survey of local employers, average local pay is generally \$15.00-20.00/hour. Individuals with MLA certification are typically compensated at the higher end of the estimated pay scale.

### **Will the MLA classes help in earning a higher degree?**

At CCC, completion of the MLA certificate will improve your chances of being accepted into the Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) associate degree program.

Though taking MLA is not required to apply to the MLT program, completing MLA provides students with familiarity of the laboratory professions.

### **Where can I find out more about MLA?**

Attend a MLT/MLA Information Session! Dates and times are posted on the MLA and MLT webpages. You may also contact a CCC Advisor or MLA program faculty with questions.