

PRE-OPTOMETRY RESOURCES

When considering optometry programs, it is important to remember that you will be seeking a medical degree, however, most programs are, at least partially, independent of medical schools. Therefore, the practice of applying differs from that of medical school. You must thoroughly read the requirements that each school has for admission including **required hours or experiences, pre-application testing requirements, application process, etc.** Here are some things for optometry applicants to consider:

- When reviewing school options, it is important to remember that programs are extremely competitive. Only a select few schools offer degree programs for a Doctor of Optometry (OD). According to recent statistics, there are less than 30 schools in the country accredited in optometry.
- Most schools have a minimum requirement of a **3.5 GPA**, although the average GPA for successful applicants is usually around a 3.7. Science GPA is extremely important.
- Before applying for programs, you must sit for, and pass, the **Optometry Admission Test (OAT)**. The test covers a variety of subjects and is used to assess your science knowledge, reading comprehension, and quantitative reasoning skills. Your scores must be submitted with your application.
- Take **challenging medical related courses** in addition to the required prerequisites. Rigorous elective course content will be taken into account when looking at your GPA.
- Seek out **research opportunities with faculty** as early as freshman year. Laboratory research strengthens your resume tremendously when applying to optometry schools.
- Schools require applications to be submitted through the **Optometry Centralized Application Service, or OptomCAS**. You can make your account and seek more information [here](#). Check the admission procedures for each school to ensure you apply in the correct location.
- General and school-specific requirements for undergraduate work vary. Information on pre-requisites listed by school can be found [here](#).
- Requirements for shadowing hours or observation hours **varies from program to program**. You will need to visit the sites for each program you are applying to verify information.
- For requirements, most schools require you to achieve a minimum grade of a C.

PREREQUISITE COURSES

*Most common **prerequisite courses**:*

Principles of Biology I & II – BIOL 1107/L & 1108/L

Microbiology – BIOL 4180

Principles of Chemistry I & II – CHEM 1211/L & 1212/L

Organic Chemistry I – CHEM 3361/L

Biochemistry – CHEM 3510

English Composition I & II – ENGL 1101 & 1102

Calculus I – MATH 1261

Probability and Statistics – MATH 2600

Introductory Physics I – PHYS 1111/L

Introductory Physics II – PHYS 1112/L

Intro to General Psychology – PSYC 1101

*Other **highly suggested courses** are:*

Genetics – BIOL 2100

Cellular and Molecular Physiology – BIOL 3200

Human Anatomy and Physiology – BIOL 2160 & 2170

Check with each of the programs you are applying for to ensure that you are taking the correct courses. Requirements may vary from program to program.

***Talk with your academic advisor before choosing courses!*

TESTING

Before you can apply to programs, you must pass the **Optometry Admission Test (OAT)**. The test is administered year-round by Prometric test centers and is designed to assess not just your science skills, but also your reading comprehension and quantitative reasoning skills. It is recommended you take the test early in the Spring of your junior year. Your score must accompany your application and it will be submitted directly through the testing service. You may take the test as often as you feel necessary and your scores remain valid for three years. Information about studying, cost, and applying for the test can be found at <https://www.ada.org/en/oat>.

PERSONAL STATEMENT WRITING & SECONDARY APPLICATIONS

Personal Statements used to apply to schools should be general and not program specific. When applying through the common application service, OptomCas, they will forward your information to the schools you select including your general personal statement. Pay attention to the character count allotted for the essay and remember that this could take spaces into account! Follow the instructions listed carefully to ensure that you follow all of the parameters set. OptomCas allows for a 4,500- character limit and asks that you “Please describe what inspires your decision for becoming an optometrist, including your preparation for training in this profession, your aptitude and motivation, the basis for your interest in optometry, and your future career goals.” You should start writing your personal statement early so that you can get adequate feedback prior to submitting your application. **Secondary applications** are sent out by most optometry programs. They vary in information requested and could include work history, detailed shadowing/observation experiences, or have question and answer prompts, and most often require a fee.

OBTAINING LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Developing meaningful relationships with faculty is vital when seeking letters of recommendation. Begin thinking about faculty who you have or will have taken several classes with, have similar research interests with, or that you feel a connection to, so that you can begin building those relationships from day 1. The same goes for shadowing experiences and other potential letter sources. Remember that a person’s title is not near as important as how well they know you as a student and as a person. When requesting letters of recommendation, quality highly outweighs quantity. ***It is vital to check the website of each program you are applying to so that you ensure that you are submitting exactly what they have requested.***

When asking for letters, remember to be gracious and *ask* for the letter. “Would you be willing to,” is usually a good way to start the conversation rather than demanding that they write you a letter. Faculty expect you to ask, and they will most likely agree as long as they feel comfortable speaking on your behalf. Be sure to give the faculty member, optometrist, or whomever you plan to ask plenty of notice, generally a month is suggested. Providing a resume, CV, personal statement, or some other document will show that you are serious about obtaining a letter and give the letter writer some reference as to what you want them to talk about. ALWAYS REMEMBER TO THANK YOUR REFERENCES!

INTERVIEWING PREPARATION

When preparing for professional school interviews, a lot of the same rules apply as with most job interviews. Remember to dress according to interview etiquette and conduct yourself in a professional manner. On Handshake, you can view the Career Center’s “Dress for Success” handouts by clicking on the *Resources* tab. In addition, you want to be sure that you practice ahead of time. “Why do you want to be an optometrist?” or “Why our program?” are common types of questions that you want to be sure and prepare for. There are different types of interviews such as traditional interviews, video interviews, multiple mini interviews (MMI), among others. MMIs are becoming increasingly popular and stray from the traditional interview set-up. To become more familiar with interview types and preparation, make an appointment with a pre-professional advisor.

Also, you will want to prepare your own questions to ask. Much like job interviews, you are interviewing the school and program just like they are interviewing you. Finding a good fit is important for you to thrive in a program. Once the interview is over, it is always a good idea to write thank you notes. These can be via email or hand written. Making it to the interview stage is a huge feat, so you want to make sure that you make the best impression!

MAJORING IN SOMETHING OTHER THAN SCIENCE?

You do not need to have a degree in a science discipline to go to optometry school! This is a misconception that many have about the majority of health professions. Professional programs are seeking out students that will bring a different perspective to their program, and a major other than a STEM field could help you stand out. However, you must consider the required prerequisites that will need to be worked into the curriculum of your chosen major. Also, consider seeking out additional challenging science or medical related courses as electives to make yourself a well-rounded candidate. But be sure to consult with your academic advisor before choosing courses!

TIMELINE

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| Year 1 | Meet with a pre-professional advisor to start building your timeline and to explore options and opportunities available to you. | Use the Learning Center for Supplemental Instruction to maintain a strong GPA from day 1 <i>especially in science courses!</i> | Register for professional organization memberships to stay up to date on events and information. | Explore professional healthcare careers using Focus2 and Occupational Outlook Handbook, as well as attending the Graduate & Professional School Fair. |
| Summer 1 | <p><i>*Work with the Career Center to start building your resume or CV to prepare your applications for summer experiences*</i></p> <p>Volunteer with local optometrists, hospitals, or health centers and keep a journal about your experiences. Other summer experiences could include: research with a faculty member, summer enrichment programs, participate on campus with community science education programs for youth.</p> | | | |
| Year 2 | Assess academic standing and plans for completing prerequisite courses with Academic Advisor. | Identify and connect with faculty for mentorship, research opportunities, and professional advice. | Seek out campus leadership opportunities. | Continue gaining experience in your field as mentioned above. Attend the Graduate & Professional School Fair to continue growing your network and knowledge of programs available. |
| Summer 2 | <p><i>*Work with a pre-professional advisor to begin looking at schools/programs of interest and choose several*</i></p> <p>Start familiarizing yourself with the Optometry Admission Test (OAT) and the optometry school application process (OptomCas). Continue to gain meaningful shadowing and volunteer hours. Create a budget that will include the OAT, test preparation, and application fees for each program of interest including secondary application fees.</p> | | | |
| Year 3 | Begin preparing for the OAT by registering for a course, beginning the study process and start by choosing a test date during the spring semester. | Consider what faculty, advisors, and mentors could potentially write your letters of recommendation and consult with them so that you can include their names on applications. | Take the OAT. Also, keep regular contact with your pre-professional advisor to fine tune your application strategy, schools of interest, personal statement, and create your OptomCas account. | Discuss alternatives with your pre-professional advisor in case of needed gap year or change in career plans. Attend the Graduate & Professional School Fair to explore your options. |
| Summer 3 | <p>By summer 3, you should have your final OAT score and be ready to start applying. Complete and submit your OptomCas application and any secondary application requirements. Continue involvement, research, and/or meaningful volunteering and shadowing that can be added to your experiences when applying.</p> | | | |
| Year 4 | Prepare with the Career Center for different types of interviews with schools. | Complete secondary applications/essays as requested. | Evaluate acceptance offers and talk with your pre-professional advisor for guidance. | Consider if a gap year would be in your best interest to acquire the needed shadowing or volunteer hours, practical experiences, or prerequisites. |