



Applying to Optometry School

About the Profession

Doctors of Optometry (ODs) are the main providers of vision care. ODs are trained to evaluate any patient's visual condition and to determine the best treatment for that condition. ODs are viewed increasingly as primary care providers for patients seeking ocular or visual care. Although most work in a general practice as a primary care optometrist, some optometrists prefer to specialize in a particular field, such as contact lenses, geriatrics, pediatrics, or vision therapy. Optometrists examine, diagnose, treat, and manage diseases, injuries, and disorders of the visual system, the eye, and associated structures as well as identify related systemic conditions affecting the eye.

Doctors of Optometry must successfully complete a four-year accredited degree program at one of the schools or colleges of optometry. Most students accepted by a school or college of optometry have completed an undergraduate degree.

Prerequisite Courses

The requirements for admission to the schools and colleges of optometry vary, but students wishing to study optometry should be certain to take at least a year of biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, general physics, and microbiology, English, college mathematics, and other social science and humanities courses. One can use any major to apply to optometry school. Be sure to consult with the pre-optometry adviser at your school or an adviser at the school or college of optometry that you plan to attend. School specific requirements are located at the following web site:

<http://www.opted.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3344>

Suggested Penn State Science courses include: calculus (MATH 140), statistics (STAT 200 or 250), general biology (BIOL 110 plus 230W or 240W; or BMB 251, BMB 442, and BIOL 322), general chemistry (CHEM110, 111, 112, 113), organic chemistry (check with schools on requirement; we recommend CHEM 210, 212, 213, but CHEM 202 and 203 along with BMB 211 may be acceptable), general physics (PHYS 250, 251; or PHYS 211, 212, 213, 214), and microbiology (MICRB201/202 or MICRB 106/107). Additional recommended science courses could include anatomy, physiology and biochemistry. Many schools require general psychology (PSYCH 100).

Optometry Admission Test

All applicants to optometry school must take the Optometry Admission Test (OAT). The OAT is a computer-based test administered by Prometric test centers. Testing appointments are available year-round. Most centers have evening and weekend appointments the examination lasts approximately five hours and has four sections: 1) natural sciences: biology, general chemistry, and organic chemistry, 2) science reading comprehension, 3) physics, and 4) quantitative reasoning. Information about the OAT can be found at

<https://www.ada.org/oat/index.html>

Competitive Applicant

Your GPA, OAT scores, letters of recommendation, and your school interview will be the most important factors in a school's decision to admit you. Other relevant considerations may be your interpersonal skills and your record of extracurricular, community, health-related, optometry-related or research-oriented work. Optometry schools require at least three letters of recommendation, including one from a professor who has taught you a course for a grade, and one from an optometrist. In the last several years, the average GPA has been a 3.59 and OAT Academic Average score of 336 and Total Science score of 332.

Application Process

All 20 schools and colleges of optometry are participating in OptomCAS. Visit the OptomCAS Web site at <http://www.optomcas.org/> for more information.

OptomCAS allows optometry applicants to use a single web-based application and one set of materials to apply to multiple schools and colleges of optometry. Applicants who apply through OptomCAS submit a completed web-based application comprised of biographical data, colleges and universities attended, academic course history, letters of recommendation, work experience, extracurricular activities, honors, and a personal essay. It is the applicant's responsibility to read and follow specific instructions for OptomCAS and the schools and colleges of optometry. The Health Pre-Professional Advising Office at Penn State will provide a committee letter if required by the optometry school. Details on our interview packet and process can be found at: www.science.psu.edu/premed/.

Optometry School — Timeline for Success

First Year

- Take entry-level courses in biology, chemistry, and math.
- Focus on getting adjusted academically.
- Get involved in campus activities.
- Begin to explore optometry, shadow an optometrist, and consider joining the Penn State Pre-Optometry Club.

Sophomore Year

- Start taking organic chemistry and physics.
- Continue to focus on achieving good grades.
- Stay involved in campus activities and pursue leadership positions within an organization.
- Continue gaining experience with an optometrist.
- Meet with an adviser in the Health Pre-Professional Advising Office.

Junior/Senior Year

- Finish prerequisite courses like physics and life science requirements.
- Check with the schools that you are interested in to determine that you have met their guidelines for admission and if they require a committee letter.
- Early in the junior year begin studying for the OAT.
- If you are using Penn State's committee packet, obtain the packet at www.science.psu.edu/premed or at 213 Whitmore Lab.

Junior/Senior Year *(continued)*

- Solicit faculty letters of recommendation. You need two science and one non-science faculty letters and you can also have three additional letters, one of which should be from an optometrist.
- Register for the OAT at <https://www.ada.org/oat/index.html> and take the exam when ready.
- Apply to optometry schools thorough OptomCAS, a centralized application service. The application is located at <http://www.optomcas.org/> You will need to follow the instructions very carefully.
- Call the Health Pre-Professional Advising Office at 814-865-7620 to schedule a committee interview when your biographical sketch and at least three letters are received at our office. Interviews occur between the end of May through the end of October.
- It is your responsibility to check to see if your letters and file are complete. We will NOT call you to schedule an interview.
- When you have your interview with our office you will need to bring in your OptomCAS ID number and letter of recommendation matching form, and OAT scores (if you have them).
- Continue gaining any relevant experiences with an optometrist and involvement in extracurricular activities.
- Communicate with the optometry schools to make sure your file is complete.

Helpful Web Sites

American Academy of Optometry
www.aaopt.org
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
www.opted.org
Student Profile & Prerequisites by ASCO
<http://www.opted.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3344>
Optometry Admission Test
<https://www.ada.org/oat/index.html>
OptomCAS - Optometry Centralized Application Service
www.optomcas.org

Advisers are here to help! Contact:

Health Pre-Professional Advising Office
Eberly College of Science
The Pennsylvania State University
213 Whitmore Laboratory
University Park, PA 16802-6101
814-865-7620 or 814-863-3889
www.science.psu.edu/premed

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