

HEALTH PROFESSIONS OFFICE**OPTOMETRY**

Optometrists are the major providers of primary vision care in the United States. They examine the eyes and vision system, diagnose vision problems, prescribe and provide treatment. Treatments include prescription glasses, contact lenses, vision therapy, aids for low vision and, in an increasing number of states (well over half at this writing), therapeutic drugs for specific diseases. As members of the eye health care team, optometrists (O.D.'s) work with ophthalmologists (M.D.'s), who are physicians specializing in diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases and defects, including surgery. They also work with opticians, who fit, supply and adjust eyewear according to prescriptions written by optometrists or ophthalmologists. As the primary eye care provider, it is the optometrist who often is the first to detect symptoms of eye disease, including glaucoma and cataracts, as well as systemic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension and arteriosclerosis. The doctor of optometry also deals with vision problems that can be remedied through corrective refraction, either in the form of eyeglasses or contact lenses. Vision therapy for children helps them overcome learning problems due to vision deficiencies, and provides them with the perception skills necessary for effective reading and studying. Another emerging area of optometric care is low vision rehabilitation, which provides sophisticated optical devices for individuals who formerly may have been classified as legally blind. The new field of sports vision goes beyond vision screening, to evaluate and teach vision skills that sharpen individuals' athletic performance. Optometrists are involved also in determining safe vision standards in industry, and in determining who may safely drive an automobile.

There are 17 schools of optometry in the US, including Puerto Rico, and two in Canada. A total of 34,500 optometrists are in practice. Optometry school is a four-year program. The curriculum consists of general anatomy, optics, theoretical optometry, pathology, practical optometry, neurology, pharmacology, physics and mathematics. The mean GPA of the 2005 entering class was 3.37. Once you obtain your degree, fields to choose from include private practice, associate practice (with an M.D.), teaching, research, and public health, working with a hospital clinical team, environmental or industrial vision service.

Course Requirements for Admission

Most optometry schools require math, general chemistry, organic chemistry, biology, microbiology, physics and English. Recommended courses include psychology, history, sociology and statistics. The Berkeley School of Optometry also requires courses in Human Anatomy and Human Physiology. Some of these courses may be fulfilled by summer session courses at UC Berkeley immediately prior to matriculation in the School of Optometry. For more specific requirements you should contact the individual schools. While only a few schools of optometry actually require a bachelor's degree, with increasing competition, many students choose to complete their bachelor's degree.

Pre-Optometry Core Requirements

Biology

General Chemistry

General Physics

Microbiology

Organic Chemistry

Calculus

English

UCSB Course Equivalence

MCDB 1A/AL, MCDB 1B, EEMB 2, MCDB 1BL or EEMB 2L, EEMB 3/3L

Chem 1ABC + labs (or 2 series)

Physics 6ABC + labs

MCDB 131

Chem 109ABC + Chem 6AB (lab may or may not be required – please see Admission for specific program)

Math 34AB or 3ABC

Writing 2, 50 (or equivalent) **Pacific requires 14 quarter units of English, NOT Comp Lit, Rhetoric, or Speech

Note: the above does NOT include requirements for all optometry programs. Please check the Admission Requirements for Schools and Colleges of Optometry for a specific list. Additional required courses might include: Biochemistry at Berkeley, 12-15 units of Humanities/Social Sciences at various out-of-state schools.

Applying

There is no centralized application service for Optometry schools. The application process typically begins during the summer or early fall, one year before you expect to begin optometry school. Because admissions is “rolling”, applying early is beneficial. To apply, contact each school for their application materials. Applications are usually available in September and are due in December or January. In deciding where to apply, one of the most important considerations is your state of residency. Because there are so few schools of optometry, many states do not have a school but contract with specific schools to accept their residents preferentially. For example, Southern College of Optometry, Pacific University College of Optometry, and UC Berkeley have contracts via the WICHE program in western states.

Test Requirements

All schools and colleges of optometry require the Optometry Admission Test (OAT). This test is offered in February (December registration deadline) and October (September registration deadline) of each year and must be taken no later than the October of the year preceding the intended date of registration in a school of optometry. Students are advised to take the test immediately after completion of the required basic courses in chemistry, biology, and physics. You should be aware that if you take the test more than one time, the Berkeley School of Optometry uses the highest total testing for ranking purposes. The OAT tests the following: reading comprehension, quantitative reasoning, biology, chemistry (both organic and general) and physics. The test announcement describes the test, application procedures, and test dates in more detail.

Schools of Optometry

For a complete listing of all Schools of Optometry, visit the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry at www.opted.org.