

OPTOMETRY SCHOOL

PLANNING GUIDE

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**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this booklet is to describe the process of preparing for and applying to optometry school. The most important challenge for students is deciding that becoming an optometrist is the career for you and assessing the implications of that decision. It is our hope that you have consulted your pre-health advisor at several points during your undergraduate career at Hopkins, as well as practitioners in the optometry field, in order to help you clarify your motivation to become an optometrist. In making the decision to apply to optometry school, it is important to consider the range of health career options that are available to you.

The demand for trained optometry professionals has increased in past years due to the vision care needs of a growing and aging population. The number of optometrists in healthcare services is also growing, as there is a growing need for vision care, there is greater financial assistance with eye care costs through insurance benefits and Medicare coverage, and new technology has helped the profession expand both the scope and the efficiency of practice. An increase in the number of corporate optometry locations has also increased the demand for optometrists.

If you proceed with your application, the initiative is and must be yours. It is essential that you complete the tasks outlined here on time and do a thorough job of putting together the best possible presentation of yourself. We are here to support you throughout the application process and wish you every success in achieving your goals. A majority of the information in this booklet is provided by the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO).

We wish you success in your health career pursuits,

Katie Cruit, MS

Advisor to Pre-Optometry Students

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***What does an Optometrist Do?***

* Performs vision tests to check for sight problems, such as nearsightedness or farsightedness.
* Checks for eye diseases, such as glaucoma.
* Prescribes eyeglasses, contact lenses, and medications.
* Provides other treatments, such as vision therapy or low-vision rehabilitation.
* Provides pre- and postoperative care to patients undergoing eye surgery—for example, examining a patient’s eyes the day after surgery.
* Evaluates patients for the presence of diseases such as diabetes and refers them to other health care providers as needed.
* Promotes eye health by counseling patients, including explaining how to clean and wear contact lenses.

***Optometry Career Options***

While most optometrists practice general optometry, it is possible to specialize practice in pediatrics, geriatrics, sports vision, vision therapy, and many other areas. The most visible setting for optometrists is in private practice; however optometrists are found in a wide variety of settings:

* ***Private Practice:*** Approximately 50% of optometrists work in private optometry offices, either on their own or with other optometrists.
* ***Other direct health care facilities****:* Optometrists also work in hospitals and clinics. Optometrists can also work in group practices with other physicians or specialists. Practice opportunities also exist for optometrists in community health centers, HMOs and retail optical settings.
* ***Government:*** Optometrists also serve in the Armed Forces, domestically and abroad. The U.S. Public Health Service, and other government agencies, along with municipal health departments also employ optometrists.
* ***Research and Education:*** Colleges, universities and major health professional schools provide optometrists opportunities to teach and perform scientific research.

***Personal Abilities of an Optometrist***

* Genuine interest in people and medicine and a commitment to the optometric profession and its standards.
* An ability to communicate effectively, efficiently and sensitively with patients and their families, peers, staff, instructors and other members of the health care team.
* High ethical standards and integrity and the ability to meet the demands for judgment, dependability, and conscientious performance.
* Strong attention to detail.
* Emotional stability, calm mind, decision making ability and etiquettes to deal with variety of people.
* High sensory and motor skills.

***Characteristics of a Successful Applicant***

###### Those considering applying to a optometry school often ask what they need to do to get accepted or what the schools are seeking in candidates. What the schools seek in applicants are:

###### “Strong Academic Record”

* Demonstrated mastery of the basic science requirements.
* Demonstrated a broad and successful exposure to the humanities and social sciences.
* Maintained or further developed the ability to read rapidly and understand sophisticated material. This is especially important for those taking a test like the Optometry Admissions Test (OAT).
* Demonstrated ability to be a lifelong learner, and have shown “mature and independent scholarship,” etc.
* Established a relationship with at least four faculty members and with a professional in the field who can write a letter of recommendation.

“Firm and Clear Motivation”

* Demonstrated ability to care for fellow human beings and their welfare.
* Demonstrated knowledge of the role of a pharmacist from direct personal contact.

“Outstanding Personal Qualities”

* Demonstrated personal traits such as maturity, stability, integrity, responsibility, trustworthiness, leadership, enthusiasm, etc.
* Demonstrated having accomplished something worthwhile, and developed skills and abilities to contribute to my intended profession.
* Demonstrated the ability to communicate with varied populations.
* Demonstrated the ability to effectively deal with those of other cultural backgrounds.

***Academic Preparation for Applying to Optometry School***

To enter an optometry program, one generally must complete three to four years of college credit at an accredited institution. Some optometry schools give preference to students who have earned a bachelor’s degree.

There is no particular major required for optometry school, just the prerequisite of certain science classes. You should check the specific admissions requirements for your schools of interest; however, some typical prerequisite courses include:

* Biology with lab (6-8 credits)
* Microbiology with lab (3-4 credits)
* Chemistry with lab (6-8 credits)
* Organic chemistry with lab (3-4 credits)
* Biochemistry with lab (3-4 credits)
* Human anatomy and physiology with lab (8 credits)
* Physics with lab (6-8 credits)
* Calculus (3-6 credits)
* Psychology (3 credits)
* English (3 -6 credits)
* Humanities and social science classes (3-6 credits)

Johns Hopkins University does not offer all of these courses. If you need to complete prerequisite courses that are not offered at Johns Hopkins University, you may take courses at other area colleges and universities through the Johns Hopkins University Academic Cooperative Program (<http://web.jhu.edu/prepro/health/cooperative_programs.html>). In some cases you can also complete these courses through accredited online programs or at community colleges. You will need to meet with your academic advisor and Ms. Cruit in the Pre-Professional Programs and Advising Office about these options.

***Choosing an Optometry School***

Choosing which optometry schools you apply to is a personal decision. It is important to note that there are no valid ranking of optometry schools. Instead, consider these questions as you review each school’s material to make your choices:

* What is the focus of the optometry school’s training, and does it match my interests and needs?
* What is the structure of the curriculum in terms of what is taught and when?
* What academic resources are available?
* What services are available to the students?
* Where is the school located? Most state-supported optometry schools give significant preference to state residents.

***Applying to Optometry School***

There are four major steps in the application process:

1. Taking the Optometry Admissions Test (OAT).
2. Completing the Optometry Central Application Service (OptomCAS) for the U.S. schools that participate in OptomCAS or individual school applications for non-participating institutions.
3. Submitting supplemental materials such as letters of evaluation and academic transcripts.
4. Managing the timing of the application process.

###### Optometry Admissions Test (OAT)

The OAT is a standardized test that helps identify qualified applicants to optometry colleges. The examination is administered in a computer-based format and takes approximately four hours to complete. The OAT measures four content areas:

* ***Survey of the Natural Sciences:***This section tests knowledge of Biology, General Cehmistry and Organic Chemistry.
* ***Reading Comprehension:*** This section tests the ability to read, comprehend and analyze thoroughly basic scientific information.
* ***Physics:*** This section tests knowledge of Physics
* ***Quantitative Ability:*** The quantitative ability section is based on testing for mathematical skills. You are required to have basic knowledge of math, algebra, probability and statistics and calculus. There is also section on applied mathematics with word problems.

Please note that to be eligible to take the OAT, students must have completed courses in biology, chemistry, organic chemistry, and physics. Most students complete two or more years of college before taking the OAT.

Optometry College Application Service (OptomCAS)

OptomCAS is the online application service that allows you to apply to optometry programs through one application and send it with other information to a centralized service. OptomCAS will verify your application accuracy, computer process it, and send it along with your supplemental materials to the optometry programs you designate. At this time all optometry programs in the United States participate in OptomCAS.

Fees for using OptomCAS are based on a graduated scale that varies according to the number of programs you designate to receive your application information.

Up to four letters of recommendation may be accepted by OptomCAS and they should be written by individuals such as academicians, physicians, licensed and practicing optometrists or other health care providers. Some programs may have requirements or specifics as to the type of letter of recommendation so be sure to check with the schools to which you are applying for specific information.

Information on OptomCAS requirements and the process of completing a OptomCAS application can be found at: <http://www.optomcas.org>.

Supplemental Application Materials

While OptomCAS has application requirements, optometry schools and colleges may also require a supplemental application and other requirements for admission, including personal statements and a personal interview. Be sure to check with the individual schools to determine what supplemental materials are required.

Managing the Timing of the Application Process

DON’T PROCRASTINATE! Participating OptomCAS programs encourage applicants to submit applications early to insure timely processing and to avoid delays. In some cases it may improve your chances for admission to those optometry programs that use a rolling admissions process. Application deadlines vary and every school has its own program start date. Please be sure to research the application deadlines and program start dates ahead of time.

Healthcare Related Experience

Optometry programs encourage or require you to have volunteer or paid experience in an optometry or other health-related setting such as a hospital, nursing home, etc. Ongoing work or volunteer experience in an optometry setting, particularly with patient contact, may be an important factor in the admissions process.

Letters of Recommendation/Evaluation

Types of recommendation letters vary by optometry school so it will be important to check the schools you are interested in for their recommendation requirements. OptomCAS requires that no more than four letters be submitted in either paper format or electronically (preferred method) directly to OptomCAS. Most optometry programs encourage students to submit letters of recommendation from the following:

* An optometrist who can state through documented experience that you know what the profession of optometry entails.
* A professor with whom you have done personal work (such as assisted on a specific project or served as a TA or reader), or with whom you took a course.
* An employer or extracurricular activity advisor who can comment about your maturity, diligence, and conscientiousness.

Do not send LORs from coworkers, someone you have supervised, relatives, or personal and family friends. These are inappropriate and can be detrimental to the review of your application.

Keep in mind that an important part of your application consists of letters of recommendation written by people who know you personally. It is your job to solicit the strongest possible letters of recommendation/evaluation.

Select your recommenders to reflect a variety of your strengths. A strongly supportive letter from someone in your major field of study can be very important. If you are taking a tutorial, or have done independent research, ask your supervisor to write a letter for you. Be thoughtful about what each person can contribute.

Whenever possible, ask for your letter in person. Request a brief interview and use the opportunity to discuss your application. We advise you to prepare a statement of why you wish to attend optometry school to help the writer.

Be respectful of demands on your recommender. Allow approximately a month for your letter to be written. Follow-up with a written thank-you note, and later advise them of your admissions decision. Your recommenders are interested in you.

***Financing Optometry School***

As with many health profession programs, the cost of optometry school is expensive and getting more expensive. In general, optometry schools do not consider ability to pay when selecting applicants. They expect each student will manage with the help of personal and family contributions, grants and scholarships, low and high interest loans, and work-study opportunities.

As you complete the application process, your main source of information will be the financial aid offices of the optometry schools themselves. They will help you put together a financial aid package based on your estimated costs and ability to pay. The financial aid is usually an important consideration in finalizing your choice of an optometry school.

***Optometry Resources***

A number of sites offer information about careers as an optometrist, preparing for admission and financial aid for optometry students.

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)

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

List of Optometry Schools in U.S. and Abroad:

<http://www.opted.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3351>

Optometry College Application Service (OptomCAS)

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

Optometry Admissions Test (OAT)

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

American Optometric Association (AOA)

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

American Optometric Student Association (AOSA)

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

U.S. Department of Health and Human Resources - Health Resources and Services Administration

[www.hrsa.gov](http://www.hrsa.gov)

Johns Hopkins Career Center

[www.jhu.edu/~careers](http://www.jhu.edu/~careers)

Johns Hopkins University Office of Undergraduate Advising – National Scholarships Advising

[www.jhu.edu/~advising/scholarships/index.html](http://www.jhu.edu/~advising/scholarships/index.html)

Free Application for Federal Student Aid

[www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

Stafford Loan

[www.staffordloan.com](http://www.staffordloan.com)

Johns Hopkins University Academic Cooperative Programs

<http://web.jhu.edu/prepro/health/cooperative_programs.html>