

# Planning for Optometry School



## THE OPTOMETRY PROFESSION

Optometrists are the major providers of vision care in America. They are educated, clinically trained and state licensed to examine, diagnose and treat conditions of the vision system and recognize symptoms of eye diseases and general health problems that require referral to other health specialists. All optometrists provide general eye and vision care through general practice or through more specialized practice in contact lenses, geriatrics, low vision services (for visually impaired patients), occupational vision (to protect and preserve workers' vision and minimize eye strain), pediatrics, sports vision and vision therapy. Others may choose to enter optometry education and/or perform scientific research.

The majority of optometrists work in private or group practice. Others are employed in hospitals, research institutes or public health agencies or teach in colleges and universities. The demand for optometrists is expected to remain strong, particularly as the population ages. Most full-time optometrists work about 40 hours a week. Many work weekends and evenings to suit the needs of patients. Emergency calls, once uncommon, have increased with the passage of therapeutic-drug laws expanding optometrists' ability to prescribe medications.

Median annual earnings of salaried optometrists were \$103,900 in May 2015. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$51,780 and the top 10 percent earned \$187,200 or more. Salaried optometrists tend to earn more initially than do optometrists who set up their own practices. In the long run, however, those in private practice usually earn more.

Many optometry schools encourage prospective applicants to seek out activities and experiences that will help them confirm optometry as their career choice. Career Services can provide alumni contact information for current or former optometrists.

## Related Occupations

Optometrists should not be confused with ophthalmologists or dispensing opticians. Ophthalmologists are physicians who perform eye surgery, as well as diagnose and treat eye diseases and injuries. Like optometrists, they also examine eyes and prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses. Dispensing opticians fit and adjust eyeglasses and, in some states, may fit contact lenses according to prescriptions written by ophthalmologists or optometrists.

## OPTOMETRY SCHOOL

There are 22 US schools of optometry which offer a four-year program leading to the professional degree of Doctor of Optometry (OD). These include the **University of Houston** and the **University of the Incarnate Word (San Antonio)** in Texas and schools in Alabama, Arizona, California, Florida,

Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Oklahoma, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico and Tennessee. The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) offers contact information on each US optometry school via [www.opted.org](http://www.opted.org), which has links to each optometry school.

Admission requirements for schools of optometry vary. Admissions officers assess each candidate's **academic preparation**, including undergraduate coursework, GPA and scores on the Optometry Admission Test (OAT), as well as their **professional potential** (via biographic information, knowledge of the profession and personal characteristics). These can be communicated in the candidate's application, letters of reference and an admissions interview. Optometry schools seek to admit students from a diversity of backgrounds.

Most accepted applicants have completed at least three years of undergraduate study and a large majority has earned a bachelor's degree. The average GPA range for the class entering in 2015 (nationwide) was 3.43. In Texas, for the class entering in 2015, the average GPA was 3.37 at Incarnate Word and 3.56 at UH.

Potential applicants should check the latest catalog or web site for each school to determine prerequisites.

**Pre-requisite courses** typically include:

Calculus/mathematics  
General chemistry (with lab)  
General biology (with lab)  
Microbiology/bacteriology  
Physics (with lab)  
Organic chemistry (with lab)  
English composition or literature  
Statistics  
Psychology

Some schools also require or recommend:

Biochemistry  
Human anatomy/physiology (with lab)  
Microbiology lab

## The Optometry Admission Test (OAT)

This exam, required for admission to all US optometry schools, consists of four sections: Survey of the Natural Sciences, Reading Comprehension, Physics and Quantitative Reasoning. The Quantitative Reasoning Test presumes knowledge of basic mathematics, algebra, numerical calculations (fractions and decimals, percentages, approximations and scientific notation), probability and statistics, geometry, trigonometry and word problems (applied math); Reading Comprehension is

designed to reproduce reading experiences similar to studying an optometry science textbook; the Survey of Natural Sciences consists of items from basic first year biology and general and organic chemistry emphasizing problem-solving rather than simple recall; the Physics section is also constructed to evaluate problem-solving ability. At least one year of college education, which should include courses in biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry and physics, is required prior to taking the OAT. Most students, however, elect to complete two or more years of college prior to taking the exam.

The OAT exam is computerized and examinees are allowed to take the OAT an unlimited number of times but must wait at least 90 days between testing dates. Applicants who have taken the OAT three or more times must apply for permission to retake. Only scores from the four most recent attempts and the total number of attempts will be reported. Register online at <http://www.ada.org/en/oat>, where you can also find a sample test and tutorial. The OAT is administered by Prometric in its nationwide testing centers. A complete list of testing centers, including the one in Austin, is available at [www.prometric.com](http://www.prometric.com).

Average total science scores per school ranged from 292 – 356, and average academic scores were 301 – 351 for the 2015 entering class. In Texas, the average total science score was 300 at Incarnate Word and 331 at UH. The average academic score was 310 at Incarnate Word and 332 at UH.

### Non-Academic Requirements

Admissions committees are interested in each applicant's personal characteristics, such as their demonstrated ability to communicate successfully with others, their motivation to be an optometrist, maturity and interest in serving others. These qualities are assessed through the information the applicant provides in the application essay, letters of reference and the personal interview.

**Letters of reference** (two or three) from some combination of the applicant's instructors, supervisors, extracurricular advisors or optometry professional are required to provide more information on each candidate.

**A personal statement** or some other form of a written narrative is usually part of each school's application. The essay provides candidates the opportunity to describe the process and experience by which they decided to become an optometrist as well as other academic and life experiences which have helped them develop as a person. Career Services can critique application essays on request.

**Interviews** are required of applicants whom the admissions committee views as most competitive for admission. The interview facilitates assessment of the applicant and affords the chance to tour the campus, meet with faculty and currently enrolled students and learn about financial aid and housing. Interviews are required for admission.

### THE APPLICATION PROCESS

All 22 schools and colleges of optometry are participating in OptomCAS – Optometry's Centralized Application

Service. 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. Individual schools may require supplemental application materials.

While the OptomCAS application cycle begins in July, schools and colleges of optometry generally begin accepting applications in August or September for their classes that begin the following Fall. Application deadlines vary from November to May; however, students are encouraged to apply well in advance of deadlines. Many schools begin offering acceptances as early as October or November. For more information about OptomCAS and to access the application, please visit the OptomCAS website at [www.optomcas.org](http://www.optomcas.org).

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Texas Optometric Association  
<http://texas.aoa.org/>

The American Optometric Association  
<http://www.aoa.org>

The American Optometric Student Association  
<http://www.theosa.org/>

Student Doctor.net Optometry Forums  
[www.studentdoctor.net](http://www.studentdoctor.net) (click on Optometry in side menu)

Optometry: A Career Guide  
[http://www.opted.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/EyesHavelt\\_CareerGuide.pdf](http://www.opted.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/EyesHavelt_CareerGuide.pdf)

Occupational Outlook Handbook: Optometrists  
<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/optometrists.htm>

*Adapted from Career Services Center, University of California, San Diego and The US Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics*