



CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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.

The median annual earnings of U.S. optometrists were \$111,790 in May 2018. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$57,480, and the highest 10 percent earned \$188,160 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. The Center for Career & Professional Development can provide students with contact information for alumni in the field of optometry.

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 23 U.S. schools of optometry offering 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, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, and Tennessee. The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) offers contact information and website links for each U.S. optometry school via <https://optometriceducation.org/students-future-students/member-schools-and-colleges/>.

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 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 have earned a bachelor's degree. The average GPA (nationwide) for the class entering in 2018 was 3.41. In Texas, for the class entering in 2018, the average GPA was 3.38 at Incarnate Word and 3.56 at UH.

Potential applicants should check schools' websites and catalogs to determine current prerequisites.

TYPICAL PRE-REQUISITES

- 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 4-hour, multiple-choice exam is required for admission to all U.S. optometry schools and consists of four sections: Survey of the Natural Sciences, Reading Comprehension, Physics, and Quantitative Reasoning. The Survey of the Natural Sciences section consists of items from basic biology and general and organic chemistry, emphasizing problem-solving rather than simple recall. The Reading Comprehension section is designed to reproduce reading experiences similar to studying an optometry science textbook. The Physics section is constructed to evaluate problem-solving ability and includes topics covered in introductory physics courses. The Quantitative Reasoning section presumes knowledge of basic mathematics, algebra, probability and statistics, geometry, trigonometry, data analysis and interpretation, and word problems (applied math). 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 and wait 12 months 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.

Nationally, for the 2018 entering class, average total science scores per optometry school ranged from 280 to 357 and average academic scores ranged from 290 to 354. In Texas, the average total science score was 301 at Incarnate Word and 340 at UH. The average academic score was 310 at Incarnate Word and 340 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, their maturity, and their 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 instructors, supervisors, extracurricular advisors, and optometry professionals 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 that have helped them develop as a person. The Center for Career & Professional Development 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. CCPD also offers practice interviews tailored to optometry school upon request.

The Application Process

All 23 U.S. 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. A completed OptomCAS application is 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 June, schools and colleges of optometry generally begin accepting applications in August or September for their classes that begin the following fall. No matter their schools' application deadlines (which can vary from November to May), students are encouraged to apply as early as possible. 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.

Additional Resources

- The Texas Optometric Association: <http://texas.aoa.org/>
- The American Optometric Association: www.aoa.org
- The American Optometric Student Association: www.theaosa.org
- Student Doctor.net Optometry Forums: <https://forums.studentdoctor.net/categories/optometry-forums-od.128/>
- Optometry: A Career Guide <https://optometriceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Career-Guide-January-2018.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