



HOW TO GET INTO OPTOMETRY SCHOOL

AN OPTOMETRY ADMISSIONS GUIDE

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Introduction

You've decided to pursue a career in optometry—congratulations! This guide has been written for students who are working towards gaining acceptance into an optometry program in North America. The advice will likely be most relevant to those in their undergraduate career in the United States, but can also be used for those who are not yet working on their bachelor's degree as a guide on how to map out a plan to reach your goals. The contents can be equally as useful to those post-bachelors who are working on their application as well. It's never too late or too early to choose optometry and this guide is designed to help you know what schools are looking for in their future students.

Read on for a compilation of advice from admissions committee members and administration from various optometry schools acquired by a current first-year optometry student throughout both her undergraduate career and application process. Experiences from a few dozen optometry students attending various schools has also been used in order to increase accuracy of information.

The guide is created to help students be competitive applicants at top optometry schools, but if your application looks very different from what is outlined here, optometry school is not necessarily out of the question for you. If you are unsure about your application, it is highly recommended that you reach out to the admissions department at the schools you are interested in. Most, if not all schools, will have admissions directors who would be happy to look at your transcripts, test scores, and experiences to help gauge where you stand as an applicant. Do not hesitate to reach out; schools love to see your interest and willingness to improve.





Pre-Application

It is important to know what optometry schools are looking for well before starting your application. By keeping in mind what admissions committees want in their student body, you can work to build your experiences and meet the criteria that is being sought after each application cycle. The application process is holistic, meaning a combination of all of your experiences will be considered when accessing your application..

ACADEMICS

When thinking about your application, one of the main components schools will look at is your GPA. Across all the optometry schools under the [Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry](#), the average undergraduate GPA of the entering class of 2018 was a 3.41. This can be a bit daunting, especially because it can feel impossible to bounce back after a tough quarter or semester, but it is important to remember since the application process is holistic—admissions committees will take into consideration other factors that may have affected your performance in various aspects of your application. On the flip side, a high GPA may help offset a lower OAT score.

GPA

Admissions committees want to ensure that their incoming class will be able to handle the rigors of optometry school. First-year optometry students are expected to take more than 20 credit hours of core science courses. Although optometry schools do not have a preference on the major applicants choose to pursue at their undergraduate institution, course rigor is definitely taken into consideration. GPA is qualitatively important, but it is also important to show you are able to take more than one challenging course at a time. Admissions committees will consider what courses were taken concurrently when assessing GPA, not only what the final grades were. This can work in your favor, or against you if you have been strategically spreading out all prerequisite courses over your undergraduate career. This does not mean if you only took one prerequisite course at a time you will not be accepted into optometry school, but admissions committees will be looking for higher grades from you than from someone who took three prerequisite courses at once.

In addition, keep in mind schools will also calculate a “science” or “prerequisite” GPA. Sometimes known as sGPAs, these scores are usually a bit lower than your overall or cumulative GPA. Lower sGPAs are normal, but in order to have the best application possible, you want to strive to keep your science/prerequisite GPA as high as your overall GPA. Calculating a science GPA shows admissions committees how much the additional courses beyond the prerequisites are increasing the applicant’s GPA. The science/prerequisite GPA allows schools to gauge how well the student is performing in the courses that will be relevant to the student in optometry school.

Admissions committees will be looking at grade trends as well. An upward GPA trend can really help your application, especially if you are taking more upper-level classes. The increase shows admissions committees that although you may have had a rough transition to undergraduate courses, you have adapted better study strategies and found ways to succeed.

Keep in mind that many schools will have a minimum prerequisite course letter grade of a C or higher. This means if you were to earn a C- or lower in a course, regardless of your overall GPA, schools will ask you to retake the course to ensure you have a good foundation for optometry school. Generally, optometry schools do not have a strict minimum GPA, but make sure to look further into the requirements at the schools you are most interested in.

Don’t throw away your goals because of a course or two. Although you want to do well in all of your prerequisite courses the first time you take them, if there is a course

you really struggled with, schools will allow you to retake a course for a better grade. It may not be the ideal situation, but a better grade the second time taking a course shows you did in fact learn the content. Similarly, if you don’t perform as well as you hoped in a class, work diligently to score high in that section on the OAT to show schools you mastered the material. A poor grade in a prerequisite course along with a below average score in that section on the OAT could lead to concern that you are not prepared for optometry school.

PREREQUISITE COURSES

Every school has slightly different prerequisite course requirements. They can be found on each school’s websites along with any minimum letter grade or GPA requirements. The exact requirements will also be listed on your OptomCAS application, but it is best to look at the schools you are most interested in prior to starting your application to ensure you will be able to complete all the courses before starting optometry school. Generally the courses required are:

- A full year of general chemistry with lab
- A full year of general biology with lab
- A full year of physics with lab
- A full year of organic chemistry with lab
- A full year of English
- A semester/quarter of psychology
- A semester/quarter of statistics

In addition to the required classes, there are also a handful of recommended classes as well. They include:

- Microbiology
- Biochemistry
- Anatomy
- Physiology
- Social sciences
- Humanities

Regardless of your major, it is imperative to make sure to do well in all of the prerequisites and take as many of the recommended courses as possible. The additional recommended courses will only help build your foundation for optometry school.

In summary, it is hard to gauge what GPA you may need. Different undergraduate universities have different course rigors and schools may take this into consideration. A good rule of thumb is to look at the average incoming class GPA

for the schools you're most interested in and shoot for a GPA higher than the highest average. Individual school information is included later in this guide.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

The admissions committee is often composed of optometrists. When your application is being considered, they are not only looking to see how well you performed in your classes, but they also want to choose individuals who are well-rounded and will be able to push the profession of optometry in the right direction.

In your undergraduate career you should participate in clubs, organizations, and athletics that interest you. These activities will help you meet more people like yourself, whether that be professionally or socially. Although there is no requirement on the number of extracurriculars you should be involved with or how many hours you commit a week, two to three organizations is a good goal. More competitive schools will look for even more commitment. It is important to be an active member of the organizations you are a part of, not just be on their roster. Being involved will help you when it comes to your personal statement, supplementary writing portions of your application, and in your interview. It may also be helpful to have one of your extracurriculars have an academic or volunteering component if your school has these organizations available to you. Some examples include pre-optometry club, pre-health organizations, or tutoring organizations. If you attend a school that does not have the types of organizations you are interested in being a member of, consider starting a club. If you are not a full-time student and this is not possible for you, look into how you can get involved in your community.

Showing leadership within the organizations you are a part of, whether that is starting a club or obtaining a leadership position, will help build skills needed for optometry school and your career, while also strengthening your application tremendously. Do not be scared to take on extra commitments in an organization because of the time it will take away from your course load. Succeeding in your classes is very important, but admissions committees will take into account involvements outside of the classroom when considering your application. Great extracurricular involvement and/or leadership can help offset a lower GPA. On your OptomCAS application you will be asked the time you are spending weekly in each organization, so don't fear that all the time spent will go unnoticed.

SHADOWING

Shadowing is one of the most important parts of your application. Most schools do not have a minimum requirement of shadowing hours, but it is recommended you check the individual optometry school websites. The admissions committee is looking for hardworking students, but they also want to know that you know optometry is the right career for you. Regardless of how well you can perform in your classes, if you don't want to be an optometrist, chances are you will not make it through the program. Not only do you want to shadow optometrists to show the admissions committee that you did your research, but shadowing is extremely beneficial to you! It allows you to feel confident that you have made the right choice. The more you shadow the more you can learn what your future will look like.

There are many different modalities (private practice, corporate, academia, hospital setting, etc.) along with many specialties (ocular disease, low vision, vision therapy, contact lenses, etc.) of optometry. Schools want to see that you have diversified your experiences to see a least a few different types of modalities and/or specialties. The quantity of hours is not important but more so the quality of what you learned. A student may shadow for 10 hours and experience what one student experienced in four. The amount you choose to shadow is up to you; the objective is to feel confident in your decision to pursue optometry and to learn about all the different ways you can practice in the profession. The more you learn through these experiences, the more you will have to write about in your application and to discuss in your interview. Consider setting a goal to see a new modality or specialty of optometry during every break between semesters or quarters. The hours will add up before you know it!

WORK EXPERIENCE

Work experience is a great addition to your application. The ability to balance different commitments will strengthen your application. If you are able to work in an optometric setting, that is an extremely valuable experience to have on your application. It is a great way to learn more about the field and what goes into patient care inside and outside of the exam room. That knowledge will show through in your personal statement and interview. Schools are aware that these opportunities can be difficult to find, especially in certain areas, so it will not hinder you if you are not able to work in an optometric setting. If you do not have these opportunities consider shadowing more to ensure you have enough exposure to the field to stay competitive.

RESEARCH

Research can be a very valuable experience to add to an application, although not required. Most optometry schools are more focused on the clinical aspect of optometry with varying degrees of involvement with research. If you have an interest in research, whether that be optometric related research or otherwise, it will only strengthen your application. Participating in research is also a good way to get to know a professor on a personal level, which may be a helpful relationship to have when it comes to asking for letters of recommendation (discussed in a later section of this guide). Do not feel as if you have to take part in research solely for the sake of writing it on your application. If you have an interest in an opportunity near you, it would be a great addition to an application—especially if it is related to optometry—but again will not hinder your application as long as you have other involvements.

VOLUNTEERING

Optometry is a profession all about giving back. Although volunteering is not specified as a requirement, all schools will ask about your volunteering experiences along with a quantitative number of how many hours you volunteered on average per week. For this reason, it is important to make sure to have some regular volunteering in your schedule. A great way to do this is to become a member of a volunteer organization. These organizations will often put together volunteering events, eliminating the work of looking for opportunities on your own. If you attend such events regularly, it is easy to make friends who may connect you to even more volunteer opportunities in your area.

Another great way to volunteer is to be a tutor for a class you did well in. Many schools have tutoring opportunities. If your school does not, consider starting a tutoring organization by speaking to an academic advisor about the need you see in your community.



Writing the Optometry Admissions Test

A big part of your optometry school application is taking the Optometry Admissions Test (OAT). This can be the most nerve-wracking aspect of the application process for many, but staying informed about all aspects of the test is a great way to stay calm and excel. The more you know about the test, the less likely you will be caught off guard by anything the day of the exam. This guide—in addition to online forums, other students, and advisors—is a good place to start.

Signing up for the test can be quite confusing, so make sure to set aside at least a couple hours to sign up. The process usually takes a couple days before you can choose your testing date. At the end of the registration process you will be asked to [choose your testing center](#), date, and time according to what is available. It is recommended students register for their testing date two to three months in advance, as testing spots can fill up especially during peak test-taking times. Having a known test date also helps keep many students motivated over the course of the few months of studying.

When signing up, you will be asked if you want to send your scores to any particular schools. The first time a student takes the exam they are able to send their test scores to as many schools as they would like free of charge. It is in your best interest to send your scores to all schools—but

please check to ensure this is still the case when you are signing up for the exam! There is no way to hide a poor first exam score from a school, because—for example—if a student takes the OAT once and scores poorly, when they take it a second time and send their scores out, each school will get a copy of both their first and second exam scores. Do not treat your first exam as a practice. Schools do not like to see this. If you are not prepared for your test day, change your exam date. Taking the OAT twice is not going to break your application by any means, but the admissions committee will ask why you did not perform as well as you had hoped the first time. Additionally, earning a lower score on the second attempt would definitely require a very good explanation.

RESOURCES

There are multiple options for OAT study material, along with classes test takers can take. It can be hard to sift through all the options and choose what is best for you. Use this guide, threads on Student Doctor Network Forums, and your peers to help you choose the best resources for your study plan. Below are some of the popular resources students use, but know this is not an exhaustive list.

Instructor-Led Courses

Kaplan OAT Prep Course: Kaplan offers a course that some students opt to take. The course is said to be helpful for those who struggle making a study plan and sticking to it. Kaplan provides resources and helps students stick to the study plan they have set in place for the class. This class will need to be paired with self-studying after it is completed. Aside from Kaplan, there may be courses offered locally, along with private tutors which likely have the same utility.

Self-Study

Many students chose to only self-study. The benefit of this is that the plan is completely catered towards each individual and can be changed at any time to add or decrease focus on any particular subject.

Kaplan OAT book: Students often choose to use this as their primary resource and add supplemental materials for different sections. The Kaplan book covers every section of the test, and most students say it is a very good starting point. By going through the whole book, students will have a decent exposure to all the contents of the exam and are able to distinguish which subjects they need the most work on. This book also comes with two online exams. Online exams are quite helpful as they help replicate the conditions during testing day. The interface of the online Kaplan exams is quite similar to those of the actual OAT, which students find comforting. Each year Kaplan comes out with a new edition of the book. Luckily since the test has not been changed recently, buying an older version is equally as useful (and usually less expensive!) However, students would most benefit from buying a new book, as used ones usually do not allow for access to the online exams since the access code can only be used once. For students who do not have much time to study, this

may be the best stand alone resource, although it is not generally recommended to only use one book.

CliffNotes's AP Biology Book: This book is very useful for the biology portion of the OAT. Concepts are covered to an adequate depth and organized very well. Used copies can usually be found online or a used book store.

Crash Course Youtube Videos: Crash Course Youtube videos are a great way to study a specific topic, especially anatomy and physiology. The depth in the anatomy and physiology videos seems to be very similar to the depth of knowledge needed for the OAT. The other videos may also be very beneficial to those who are auditory or visual learners. As an added bonus, these are all free videos—feel free to try them out for any subject at no cost! Beware they are not made for the OAT or any similar test, so it would be worthwhile to compare the content with other resources you have to ensure the material needed for the OAT is what is being covered.

Chad's Videos: These videos are known to be extremely beneficial, especially for those who learn best by listening, rather than reading. They are most well-known for the helpful organic chemistry material but there are videos on other subjects as well. Some of the content is available at no charge while others require a subscription purchased at www.chadsvideos.com. Subscriptions are extremely affordable starting at \$5 per month (although prices seem to be changing).

OAT Destroyer: The Destroyer book series has been known to be extremely effective and help students attain a high score. Test takers are able to purchase a set of books for all subjects, or select individual books depending on their needs. These books do not go over subject matter the way the Kaplan book or the Cliff's AP Biology book does, but rather gives hundreds and



hundreds of practice questions to help students prepare. The questions represent the most challenging problems seen on the OAT; they are not representative of what the questions will be like overall. These books are designed to help students score a 400 on the OAT and have shown great results if used correctly.

Practice Exams

Part of the battle of taking the exam is having the stamina to stay focused for the duration of the exam. The best way to prepare for this is to take as many full practice exams as you can.

Kaplan Practice Exam: Kaplan has free practice exams that are offered every few months. Test takers must sign up online in advance and log on at the specified time. This test is very similar to the ones that come with the Kaplan book. They are thought to be similar to the true OAT but usually students find if they have been practicing by taking full length Kaplan tests they score a bit higher on testing day.

OAT Achiever: This is a package test takers can buy and download directly to a laptop or desktop computer. There are packages of 3, 5, or 7 exams. This is a good tool for students who are struggling with staying focused for the full test and would like to take many practice exams. There is also a free trial for students to try before buying a package. OAT Achiever is thought to be more difficult than the OAT and some say even more than Kaplan practice exams. However, as the tests are likely changed over the years, please refer to SDN Forums as well to see how students are comparing the exams.

ADA Practice Exams: This is an essential practice exam that is one of the best resources. It is made by the makers of the OAT, thus this exam is very similar to the difficulty of the true OAT. Unfortunately it is not in a similar format to how the OAT is presented on test day, but is still a great way to gauge the difficulty of exam questions. This exam can be found online at the ADA website and is free of charge. In addition to the practice OAT, the practice DAT is also helpful to students, as the OAT and DAT are almost identical. The DAT does not contain the physics but rather has a spatial reasoning section that students should skip if they choose to use any DAT practice material.

CONTENT OF THE TEST

The OAT is made up of the following four sections. All sections have a time limit and consist of only multiple choice questions.

Survey of Natural Sciences:

This section is comprised of 100 questions, and test takers are given 90 minutes to complete it. The first

40 questions are biology questions, the subsequent 30 are general chemistry, and the final 30 are organic chemistry questions. From this section students will be given separate Biology, General Chemistry, and Organic Chemistry scores. These three scores will also be averaged with the physics section score to create a Total Science score as well. This score is important as schools look at this quite heavily.

Reading Comprehension:

Reading comprehension has three (3) passages and 13-14 questions after each passage, totaling 40 questions. The time limit for these questions is 50 minutes.

Physics:

There are 40 questions in the physics section which lasts a duration of 50 minutes.

Quantitative Reasoning:

This section is 45 minutes long and has 40 multiple choice questions.

TIMELINE & STUDY SCHEDULE

Making a schedule is very difficult, as it is hard to know the best way to tackle so much information.

You should give yourself six to eight weeks to study for this exam. It is a good idea to take it early in the summer the year before you would like to start optometry school. For example if you would like to begin optometry school in the Fall of 2022, the application cycle would begin in June/July 2021, and around that same time is a great time to take the OAT. If your goal is to apply as early as possible, taking the OAT in June would be ideal. As this does not give many students the full six to eight weeks, July is still a great time to register as well, or you can opt to begin reviewing during winter break, making study guides for yourself to look over in the summer.

If you are taking the test later in the application cycle, you can send in your application with your upcoming testing date rather than your test results. You will not be extended an interview until you have taken the OAT, but this allows for your application to be processed while waiting for the scores. Keep in mind that if you need to retake the test, test takers must wait 90 days from their original testing date.

Many work while studying for the OAT. However, if you are able to take time off, it is very helpful to have the OAT be a sole priority for a time be able to study eight to 10 hours a day. If it is not possible for you to take off for such long periods of time, I would recommend at least spending the last two weeks studying full time.

There are three components of studying for the OAT:

1. Reviewing the material
2. Finding weak spots and spending time relearning those concepts
3. Practice, practice practice

I planned to spend about four and a half to five weeks reviewing the material, primarily using the Kaplan book. I also used Cliff's book for biology, and anatomy and physiology Crash Course videos. I gave myself a week each for biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, and physics. The last week in this plan was half for quantitative reasoning, and the other half as additional time knowing that one of the four core subjects will likely need more time than I had allotted. I found the Reading Comprehension section difficult to prepare for. I studied for it by doing as many practice sections as I could. Throughout the five weeks, I completed a practice reading section any time I was bored of the subject I was currently studying, as a way to give myself a change of pace for an hour or so. During this time I also tried to incorporate step two and relearn concepts in my weaker subjects.

I started with the subjects I was most confident in; I wanted to try to be ahead of schedule knowing that the subjects I struggled with would likely take a bit longer than planned. I also wanted the more difficult subjects to be fresh in my mind. There is no right or wrong order in tackling the subjects, as many students choose to do the opposite, wanting to get the difficult subjects out of the way early on.

After reviewing the content, it is useful to take a practice exam to see what you have retained and what weak areas you need to work on. From here you can gauge if your target score is attainable depending on how much time you have until your testing date. This is a good time to push back your test if need be. It is important to be realistic with yourself, but also know you can improve your score much more than you would expect with a couple weeks of practice.

The following 10-14 days were spent working on weak subjects. This was done mostly with materials other than the Kaplan book. I would recommend using other resources to learn content that you still feel you are struggling with. Chad's videos are quite helpful to see the material in a different way. The OAT Destroyer books are a great way to start drilling material as you are studying these tougher subjects. Making or using flashcards is great for memorizing mechanisms for organic chemistry.

The last seven to 10 days should be saved for additional practice and practice tests. Taking a practice exam every two to three days allows for you to study material you

struggled with before taking another test. This is also a great time to use the OAT Destroyer books to practice. If you find yourself confused on a concept, make sure to go back to reviewing/learning the material.

SCORING

Each section is scored by taking the amount of questions test takers got correct and converting that to a score between 200 and 400, increasing in increments of 10. Each subject—biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, physics, quantitative reasoning, and reading—will have an individual score. Additionally there will be a Total Science score and an academic average. Total Science takes into account biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, and physics performance, while the academic average looks at the test as a whole.

An academic average of a 300 equates to about the 50th percentile, but this seems to vary slightly on each test. On the score sheet print out there will be a percentile listed next to each sub-score and the overall score. A score of a 350 would make a test taker a competitive applicant at all schools, assuming the individual has at least the average GPA and has been shadowing and participating in extracurricular activities. Many students who have taken full-length practice exams through Kaplan or OAT Achiever have reported their score on testing day as a bit higher than their score during practice, but you should not count on that as testing day can add different stressors.

Practice test scores can be very inaccurate if they are not taken in one sitting, as taking long breaks can help elevate your score. The test is not simply a measure of how much information you know but rather how well you are able to stay calm, think critically, and continue applying yourself over the course of the test. Being familiar with what is to come and the content helps ease additional tension and will allow you to perform your best on exam day.

Scores are given as soon as the test is complete on exam day. It will come up on the computer screen and test takers will be given a paper copy when they check out of the testing center.



The Application

The optometry school application process is centralized through the [OptomCAS website](#). Once the applicant creates an account, they will be able to choose which of the 23 schools and colleges of optometry in the [Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry \(ASCO\)](#) they would like to apply to. Later in this guide there is a list of schools in the ASCO in order to aid your research. If you add a school to your application, you do not necessarily have to follow through and submit an application. You can also add more schools to your application at any time.

The application cycle begins the summer of the year before your chosen matriculation date and runs through the following spring. For example, if an applicant wanted to begin optometry school in the fall of 2021, the application would become available on OptomCAS in late June/early July of 2020, and end in the spring of 2021. With one exception, all optometry schools have a rolling application cycle. This means that they will assess applications, offer interviews, and fill seats on a first come first served basis throughout the cycle. It is in the applicant's best interest to complete all portions of their application and submit as early in the process as possible. Each school only has a limited amount of seats available for their entering class, and unfortunately in the winter and spring months, schools may only have a handful of seats left. Each application cycle is different, but there are years where schools find themselves filling all the seats before the cycle is completed, meaning there are only spots on the waiting list remaining. Since it is hard to predict what each application cycle will look like, it is recommended to apply as soon as possible to increase chances of acceptance. Interviews typically starting August; it would be ideal to complete all portions of the application at the beginning of August. Applicants are still very successful throughout the fall months, and even into the winter,

but since submitting an application in August maximizes chances to receive scholarship money, that timeline will be used as an example throughout this section.

There are many components to the application—knowing what is expected of you and planning ahead can help applicants stay on track. Keep in mind that once the application is submitted it takes a few weeks for your application to be verified, and the admissions department will usually not look at an application until the verification process has been complete. This means it is normal to not hear any news from a school for four to six weeks, although applicants who apply in the summer often report to hear back from schools a bit sooner than those who submit their application later in the cycle.

PARTS OF THE APPLICATION

There are four sections of the application each with some subsections. They have been outlined below to help you begin thinking ahead.

Personal Information

This section is very straightforward and can be quickly filled out. It consists of mostly biographic information.

Academic History

Colleges Attended

This section requires applicants to report all colleges they have attended after high school and when they attended that school. All schools must be reported, even if no prerequisite courses were taken there.

Transcript Entry

This section of the application requires the applicant to manually report every course they have taken after high school, along with any prerequisites that were taken in high school for AP credit. Reporting can be difficult as each course and grade needs to be categorized, and the category options on OptomCAS often vary from how they were organized at the institution where the course was taken. If you have questions, refer to the transcript entry instructions on OptomCAS or reach out via phone call.

Official transcripts from every college or university you have taken a course at must be sent to OptomCAS. Once the official transcripts have been received, they will be used to verify the manual entries that have been made. If there are any discrepancies the applications can be put on hold. The verification process usually takes two to three weeks, so completing this portion of the application promptly as the application process begins can be quite beneficial.

Standardized Tests

This is where applicants will report their OAT scores. The date the test has been taken and the scores received in each section will be requested. The official scores will also need to be sent to each school you apply to for verification purposes. You can begin your application before you have taken the OAT. If all other portions of your application are complete, you can even submit your application without having taken the OAT as long as the upcoming OAT date is written in this section. Admissions committees will not invite you to interview until at least one OAT score has been received, but they may begin looking at your application in the meantime. If you are an applicant in this situation, it is not a bad idea to reach out to the admissions committees to explain your situation and when they should expect to receive your scores.

Supporting Information

Evaluations/Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation can be tough to acquire, especially if the applicant attended a large undergraduate university or has been out of school for some time. It is imperative to start thinking about letters of recommendation early. The steps to get a successful letter of recommendation include building strong relationships with professionals around you, planning how many letters of recommendation you need from each category, asking/inviting evaluators, and following up.

Schools most commonly ask for two to three evaluations, one from a science professor, one from an optometrist, and a third from someone of the applicant's choice. Keep in mind that these requirements can vary from school to school, and an applicant can submit a maximum of four letters. Applicants must ensure that these four letters will fulfill the application requirements of all the schools they are applying to. Plan out how many evaluators will be needed from each category in order to meet the requirements of all the schools.

Once you have planned out how many evaluators you need from each category, start thinking about whether you have a strong relationship with anyone who would be able and willing to write an evaluation that would add color to your application. A professor from a very difficult class where you earned an A, but did not know personally, would not be a good evaluator since they would not be able to say anything more than "Jane Doe was a hardworking student as she earned an A in my course." This is something the admissions committee can see and infer from the transcript portion of the application. Make an effort to attend office hours for courses and build personal relationships with the optometrists you shadow or work under. The optometrist should be able to attest to your interest and passion for optometry.

Those writing your letters need to be professional acquaintances. Family members will not be accepted. Additionally, do not submit a letter from your personal optometrist unless you have made a professional relationship with them through shadowing or work experiences.

Through OptomCAS you will be able to send each evaluator an invite via email. The invite allows them to quickly make an account where they can upload their evaluation to OptomCAS. Before sending an electronic invite it is important to have a conversation with the evaluator, asking them if they would be comfortable writing a positive letter of recommendation. There are horror stories of evaluators submitting a negative evaluation, and this is a good way to mitigate that risk. Work with the evaluator on a good timeline for them. It often takes longer than one would expect to get a letter of recommendation. The desired timeline varies from person to person, but it is courtesy to give evaluators at least three to four weeks to prepare an evaluation. Asking professors at the end of the spring semester before the application cycle begins is a good idea. This will give them over four weeks before the application to get a head start on writing. Remember this is a time when many professional school application cycles begin, and professors especially may have many letters to write. Some evaluators will request a resume or even your personal statement as a guide to help them write your letter. Speaking to evaluators early allows you a couple weeks to update your resume or write a rough draft of a personal statement to help the evaluator.

If you are still a year or two away from starting your application, start getting to know potential evaluators as soon as possible. If you have gotten to know a professor a couple of years in advance, reach out to them, share your future goals, and ask them if they would be comfortable writing a letter of recommendation for you. Many professors will write letters years in advance and keep them saved until you send them an invitation to upload it to OptomCAS. This is a great way to make sure you are fresh in their mind when writing your recommendation, and also allows you to work ahead.

When sending the invite to the evaluator you will be required to set a deadline for them. It is not a bad idea to add a bit of cushion in case the evaluator is running behind schedule. For example, if you plan to complete your application by August 1st, you can tell your evaluators in May that you will send them an invite in late June or early July, and that ideally you would like the evaluation by July 20th. A couple days before the deadline if you see on OptomCAS that the evaluator has not submitted their letter, you can reach out to them and offer them additional time. This may help prevent a generic and hastily written evaluation. Make sure to check in after you have sent

the invitation and offer help if needed. It is imperative to remember that the evaluators are doing you a favor and to always be courteous and as helpful as possible.

It is not uncommon for evaluators, especially professors, to forget about the letter and become hard to get a hold of in the summer months. It is helpful to have back-up options you can turn to if this occurs.

Experiences

This section is an opportunity to showcase how well rounded you are by reporting involvements in the community, leadership, shadowing, and/or work. A description of the activity, approximate time spent on each experience, and contact information of someone who worked above you will be requested. It is not uncommon for schools to call to verify reportings on the application, so make sure to be as accurate as possible in your reportings. Applicants who have been working at the same practice for years can use their tax forms to help them get an accurate number of hours they have worked there.

Work experience is not required to apply to optometry school, but it is important to show that you have exposure to the field by shadowing. If when completing this section you realize you do not have much shadowing experience or do not have a variety of exposure, reach out to a local practice. It's not too late to add and/or diversify your shadowing experiences.

Achievements

This section is paired with experiences. It is recommended applicants report all professional or academic achievements. A date for when it was issued and a short description will be required.

Program Materials

The Program Materials section contains all the school-specific requirements. This primarily consists of your personal statement and any additional supplemental materials the school would like. It is not uncommon for schools to have supplemental essay questions in addition to the main personal statement.

The personal statement is where you will get a chance to explain your passion for the field of optometry. Be sure to pay close attention to the word/character limit of any essay question. Many applicants waste time because they did not give the limit much thought and are then forced to spend time revising the essays to be shorter. The personal statement has historically been limited to 4500 characters, which is about one and a quarter pages long. Keep this in mind while writing your first draft. Supplemental essays have varying limits, but are usually

shorter than the personal statement. OptomCAS will not allow you to submit an essay that exceeds the limit.

It is extremely helpful to have a few people look over your essay and to make revisions based on their feedback. Applying the input of others to your writing ensures that the message you are trying to convey is getting across effectively. Having many revisions is normal, and many times your first draft will be very different from your final draft. Do not be too hard on yourself. That said, it is important to know when to stop revising and submit your application.

SUBMITTING YOUR APPLICATION

This is a very important factor in the application process. Although OptomCAS is a centralized service, you do not need to submit your application for all the schools at

the same time. If some schools have additional essays beyond the personal statement, you can go ahead and submit the applications that only require the personal statement while you work on others. You will be asked to pay the application fee when you submit. Usually you will get a confirmation email from the school saying they have received your application. Some schools require a secondary application. Secondary applications are sometimes sent to you within a few days of your original submission through OptomCAS, while other schools will wait until they have reviewed your application and then send you a secondary application if they find you are a competitive applicant at that time in their application cycle. Some secondary applications will only include quick demographic questions, while others will have an essay question. Secondary applications commonly have a secondary fee associated with submission. It is in your best interest to look into which schools have a secondary application and remember that your application is not complete until you receive and submit it.



School	Avg GPA All Applicants/ Admitted Applicants	AA Avg OAT All Applicants /Admitted Applicants	TS Avg OAT All Applicants /Admitted Applicants	Bachelor's Degree Required?
University of Alabama at Birmingham, School of Optometry	3.36/3.66	309/321	301/315	Preferred
Midwestern Univ, Arizona College of Optometry	3.25/3.43	309/321	300/313	Yes
Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University	3.29/3.32	326/340	317/337	No
University of California-Berkeley, School of Optometry	3.18/3.43	336/357	334/360	Yes
Western University of Health Sciences, College of Optometry	3.18/3.25	307/313	298/306	No, but preferred
Nova Southeastern University, College of Optometry	3.27/3.34	306/327	296/323	No
Chicago College of Optometry, Midwestern University	3.22/3.32	295/307	285/297	Yes
Illinois College of Optometry	3.31/3.44	313/326	306/323	No, strongly recommended
Indiana University, School of Optometry	3.47/3.60	317/323	308/317	No
University of Pikeville, Kentucky College of Optometry	3.19/3.35	298/305	287/292	No
MCPHS University, School of Optometry	3.20/3.28	302/309	290/302	Preferred. Must complete 90+ undergrad credits
New England College of Optometry	3.28/3.4	315/335	309/329	No
Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University	3.40/3.70	316/338	309/336	Preferred
Univ. of Missouri at St. Louis, College of Optometry	3.34/3.47	306/322	296/314	No
State Univ of New York, State College of Optometry	3.33/3.57	320/347	315/350	No
Northeastern State University, Oklahoma College of Optometry	3.35/3.66	308/320	298/312	Preferred
The Ohio State University, College of Optometry	3.39/3.68	319/343	312/342	No
Pacific University, College of Optometry	3.34/3.54	322/332	316/328	No
Salus University Pennsylvania College of Optometry	3.25/3.39	309/319	305/314	No
Inter American University, School of Optometry	3.04/3.13	290/294	280/282	No
Southern College of Optometry	3.40/3.61	313/335	305/332	Strongly Preferred
Univ of the Incarnate Word, Rosenberg School of Optometry	3.25/3.39	302/316	293/310	No
University of Houston, College of Optometry	3.36/3.59	317/340	310/342	Yes

DECIDING WHERE TO APPLY

Optometry, in comparison to many other graduate healthcare programs, is quite small. As a result, there are not as many schools to choose from compared to other health professions. A good way to figure out which school is best for you is to schedule a visit with the admissions department. Most schools have open houses where schools will host lectures teaching prospective students about the school and lead tours in small groups. This is a great way to meet students you may be going to school with in a year or two and to learn about the school's culture. If the school does not have any open house event information on their website or if you are traveling and have very specific availability, most schools have admissions advisors who would be willing to meet, answer any questions, and give you a tour.

Before evaluating schools, make a list of the factors that are most important to you. Some examples are location, tuition, cost of living, reputation, culture, etc. Although it may be difficult, it is very helpful to be able to rank your first few choices, since the application process is rolling. A good strategy is to only apply to two to three schools you can see yourself going to, making sure at least one to two of them are realistic options. From there you can apply to more if needed. This strategy may not work as well if you are applying later in the cycle. Regardless of when you are applying, keep in mind that the optometry school application is a bit more straightforward than applying to other health professional schools, such as medical or dental school. Applicants often fall into the trap of applying to close to 10 schools, some more, because they see their peers applying to graduate school doing such. If applying early with strong credentials, pre-optometry students do not need to apply and interview at more than five schools.

Optometry schools have many components that are quite standard amongst all of them. When evaluating schools, you want to take a look at what makes them different. Here are some questions you can ask when visiting the school, when speaking to someone in the admissions department, or during interview day to help you compare them to other schools. It is imperative to have good questions ready for the admissions committee on interview day.

How early are students exposed to the clinic, and what will students be able to do in clinic?

There are many classes students have to take the first couple years, resulting in many long days and nights in the library. Schools have found that getting students into clinic, even just for a couple hours a week, helps students remember their love for the profession. It is also helpful for students to gain exposure to how the clinic at their school operates so when it's their turn to see patients they

find the clinic a bit more comfortable. Many schools have noticed this effect and began incorporating shadowing as early as the first year, but it is good to ask how often you will get to go to clinic early on in your optometry school career and compare between schools. Also, learning if you will be shadowing or having a more hands on role in the clinic could be useful information.

What are the faculty to student ratios during clinic practice time and in the clinic?

Schools often post similar ratios online with overall faculty to student ratio. This is helpful to know, but even more so, it is helpful to know what the ratio is during practice time, labs, and in the clinic. These are the times where you will most benefit from individualized attention. Some schools have labs taught by teaching assistants, who are students that have previously completed and done well in the course. This can be beneficial, as sometimes students who just learned a clinical skill may be better teachers than someone who is practicing for 20 years. On the other hand, that experience and expertise from faculty is valuable as well. Both have positives and negatives, but it can be helpful to know what to expect ahead of time.

What specialties are seen in the clinic? What specialties do students get the least exposure to? Is this supplemented with externships?

Optometry school graduates are often terrified when they first get out and practice in the real world. Even if they were the best student, this is the first time they will be practicing without a team of optometrists right down the hall to ask if they are unsure about something. There is often the fear a patient will walk into your office with a condition you have never seen before. The best way to prevent this is to look for a school that will give you the most exposure to as many different specialties as possible. This can be accomplished by getting a variety of patients into the clinic or by making sure to place students in externship sites during fourth year that have high exposure to particular specialties not seen in the primary clinic. Many schools are located in or near urban settings, which makes it easier to find patients with a variety of needs. If you have shadowed a specific specialty that you found interesting, for example contact lenses, you can compare schools by asking how much students get to work with specialty contact lens patients.

What resources are in place to help students prepare for the National Boards?

The National Boards are a three-part test that every student needs to pass before they are certified to practice in the United States. The Association of Schools and College of Optometry posts the pass rates for each school on their website at the end of each calendar year. These scores may be helpful to take a look at because it can be

a gauge of how well a school prepares their students, but keep in mind they do not always tell the full story and are not a single most important factor in rating how great of an education the school provides. In combination with researching the board pass rates, compare how schools help prepare students for the exam. Do they plan student schedules to be a bit lighter the semester/quarter leading up boards? Are there any specialized practice room lanes reserved for students to practice for Part 3 of the boards? Does the school guide studying for students in any way?

What technology is a part of our clinical education?

It's no secret technology is greatly changing optometry as we know it. Moving forward in the profession, optometrists need to embrace the new technology and evolve with the times. For that reason it is important that schools have the new technology available and that it is being taught in the curriculum, as that may be what their future office is equipped with. On the flip side, you may graduate and work for a practice that does not have any new technology at all, as many practicing optometrists have a preference to complete certain parts of the exam manually. Diversity of different brands of equipment and a mixture of manual and automated is very beneficial to your learning experience. Ask about these things from school to school and compare what they have to say.

Are there any joint degree programs?

Many schools have joint degree programs where students are able to get an additional degree or certification along with their OD while they are in optometry school. This is either through the school itself, the larger university they are a part of, or another college/university the school is partnered with. This is becoming increasingly popular and may be something to inquire about if you are interested in combining a potential OD with another degree. Some examples of programs offered at various schools are a Masters of Science in Visual Science, a Doctor of Philosophy in Vision Science, Masters of Education in Visual Function in Learning, a Masters of Business Administration, and/or a Masters in Public Health. Applicants usually do not need to decide if they want to take on more until their first year of school or later. These additional programs sometimes have an additional cost, but some may not. This is another thing that can be inquired about.

TUITION AND QUICK FACTS

Although the cost of tuition should not be your main factor in choosing a school, unfortunately it is often on the forefront of many students' minds. Try not to worry too much about cost before applying, as many schools do have scholarships, and many states will allow students to establish residency thus making them eligible for in-state

tuition after one year. Each school will have a faculty member who will be able to individually help you with your personal situation to help make sure you will be financially able to attend school. Feel free to call the financial affairs department at any point in the process to learn more about what you personally may qualify for and if there are any additional steps you need to take.

Below is a list of different optometry schools and a few facts or characteristics of each school, although this is not an exhaustive list by any means. Tuition costs are from ASCO's 2019 listing.

SCHOOL PROFILES	
University of Alabama at Birmingham, School of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: Resident \$28,034; Non-Resident \$55,007 Small class size Located on a large university campus
Midwestern Univ, Arizona College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$48,529 Great location and weather On an interprofessional university campus
Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$47,432 Interprofessional education Great weather all year round
University of California-Berkeley, School of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: In-State \$38,573 Out-of-State \$50,260 Optional research opportunities/programs Application cycle is not rolling; only one interview day later in the application cycle—refer to their website for information on their timeline
Western University of Health Sciences, College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$40,890 Great weather all year round Newer school with new facilities
Nova Southeastern University, College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: In-State \$35,194 Out-of-State \$39,558 Eye Care Institute with five locations Multidisciplinary learning Lots of technology integrated into the classroom and lab

Chicago College of Optometry, Midwestern University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$48,627 On an interprofessional university campus MMI style interviews Newest school with brand new facilities Not yet accredited; will be accredited when the first class graduates, expected Spring 2021
Illinois College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$42,870 On quarter system Great clinical exposure Have conveniently-located residence center
Indiana University, School of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: Resident: \$29,890 Non-Resident \$42,426 Do not have traditional interview Located on a large university campus
University of Pikeville, Kentucky College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$42,200 New school, new facilities including nice food court
MCPHS University, School of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$43,950 Students begin seeing patients independently in their second year
New England College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$42,592 Beautiful city, lots to do in walking distance, no need for car Offers an accelerated program
Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$30,704 Class size of only 36 students; virtually personalized education Located on a large university campus
University of Missouri at St. Louis, College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: Resident \$26,200 Non-Resident \$42,587 Family feel Small class; 45 students
State University of New York, State College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: Resident \$30,490 Non-Resident \$51,820 Located in the heart of Manhattan creating for a diverse patient base

Northeastern State University, Oklahoma College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: Resident \$20,394 Non-Resident \$39,094 Small class size; 28 students
The Ohio State University, College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: Resident \$27,800 Non-Resident \$48,856 Recently renovated clinic Located on a large undergraduate campus
Pacific University, College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$42,024 One rotation in Portland area and three offsite locations during fourth year
Salus University Pennsylvania College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$40,920 +\$940 Has a three-year OD scholars program Interprofessional learning
Inter-American University, School of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$28,768 Diverse student population from Puerto Rico, United States, and the world Bilingual environment
Southern College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: Regional \$19,497 Non-Regional: \$8,697 Has many scholarship options Promotes a family culture Conversational closed file interview
University of the Incarnate Word, Rosenberg School of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private Tuition: \$41,235 Faith-based
University of Houston, College of Optometry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Tuition: Resident \$24,897 Non-Resident: \$44,982 Strong research programs

Interviews

BOOKING YOUR INTERVIEW

Once you have submitted your application it will take some time for everything to be verified and processed by each school. If within a couple weeks you have not heard from the school confirming that they have received your application, you are encouraged to reach out to the admissions department to ensure nothing has gone wrong in the process or see if any further steps are needed from you.

After your application has been processed, the school will review it in order to determine if you are a competitive enough applicant to be offered an interview. If so, you will get an email asking if you would like to set up an interview time. Different schools have different ways of setting up interviews. Some may offer you a handful of dates via email, others have an online portal to schedule an interview, but many ask that you call a specific admissions department member to schedule an interview over the phone. Interviews can fill up quickly, and since the application is rolling it is in each applicant's best interest to set up the interview as soon as possible.

Instead of being invited for an interview, schools can also put your application on hold and request more information. Sometimes schools will request applicants retake their OAT. This dialogue is unique to each applicant. Schools may also not be ready to extend an invite upon initial review of your application and may not reach out until months after your application has been processed or not reach out at all. Other schools will communicate that your application has been closed. If your application is closed at a school you plan to reapply to in the next cycle, reach out and ask what you can do better in the next year to strengthen your application.

Keep in mind the timeline of the application process when scheduling interviews. After an interview, schools typically notify applicants within a couple weeks and then give applicants a short amount of time to either accept or decline the offer. This time period is typically less than a month, although some schools will give you a bit longer earlier in the application cycle. If you are applying to a handful of schools, it would be best if you were able to schedule interviews close together so you know where you stand with all or most of the schools when you make

your decisions. Some schools will be understanding if you need a couple more days to make your decision; reach out to them, but make sure your extension request is reasonable and respectful.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

There are a handful of different types of interviews and it is important to know which you will encounter so you can prepare accordingly. Typically, you will be given some details about the type of interview you should expect before the day of the interview. If not use this guide to help prepare for all that you may encounter.

An interview can be:

- **Open file:** In an open file interview the interviewer has access to your whole file including transcripts.
- **Closed file:** In this type of interview, the interviewer has not seen your file. The interviewer has no background on you, so it may be helpful to mention the basics such as where you are from, what you studied in undergraduate school, etc. during your interview.
- **Semi-closed file:** This means the interviewer has seen some parts of your file, usually includes your personal statement and letters of recommendation, but not your transcripts or test scores.

Interviewers will sometimes start the interview by telling you if they have seen your file or not. If you were not given this information at any point it is best to act if it is a closed file interview.

In addition to the above, interviews also fall into the following categories:

- **Traditional:** In this setting there will be one interviewer and one applicant.
- **Panel Interview:** In a panel interview there will be more than one interviewer in the room. Usually the interviewers will take turns asking questions.
- **Group Interview:** In this setting there will be multiple applicants and one or more interviewers. This is a less common form of interviewing, but it has been seen at some schools. It is often in a less formal interviewing environment, but can be formal as well.
- **Multiple-Mini-Interview (MMI):** In a multiple-mini-interview there are usually five to eight different stations that applicants go to. Applicants will only be in the room for a short amount of time (five-10 minutes). At each station, applicants are typically asked to read a scenario and then discuss it with the interviewer. There are many resources online to help applicants prepare for such interviews, and it is recommended applicants spend a bit more time preparing for these interviews. Scenarios are often ethical.

COMPONENTS OF INTERVIEW DAY

Interview day typically starts in the morning and runs until the early afternoon. Some schools have afternoon interviews as well, where the day starts in the late morning and runs until early evening. The interview itself is typically about 30-40 minutes long. There will be other students interviewing on the same day as you, so there may be some down time while you are waiting for the other applicants to finish up their interviews. The flow of the day is different at each school, but typically the day consists of similar portions. There will be a financial aid presentation where the financial aid advisor will go over tuition, living expenses, loans, scholarships, and the logistics of the whole process. There are often other short presentations from administration members or even students, such as presentations on student life or career development. There will be a student led tour of the school and the clinic at some point throughout the day, along with a lunch break. Lunch is usually provided and a student typically sits with applicants creating a great opportunity for applicants to learn what life at the school is like directly from current students.

WHAT TO WEAR

On interview day you will be expected to wear professional clothing. Applicants should be on the conservative side when it comes to colors, patterns, shoes, and jewelry. For men, a suit and tie is appropriate with dress shoes. For women a suit is also appropriate. If choosing to wear a skirt or dress, make sure it is business professional and knee length. A jacket is customary. Heels or flats are appropriate but if you are not comfortable walking in heels all day, opt for flats as there is often a lot of walking on the campus tours.

QUESTIONS ASKED DURING INTERVIEW

Tell me a little about yourself.

Whether an interview is open or closed file, this is typically the first question that will be asked of you. With this question you have an opportunity to give some background on yourself. You can start with quickly stating a sentence or two about the first part of your life, such as where you were born and raised and a few words about what your upbringing was like. If this is when you were first exposed to optometry this is a great time to weave that into your response. Then you can speak about your undergraduate career, what you majored in, why you



chose the major you did, and a handful of experiences you have had. This is mostly a verbal summary of your application, but you want to make sure to highlight your journey in choosing optometry along with your other involvements to show you are a well rounded applicant who is able to juggle multiple activities.

Are you applying to other schools, and if so, which ones?

This seems to be a common question either in the interview or with an academic advisor at some point throughout the interview day. Although not confirmed, schools seem to already have this information from OptomCAS but would like to hear about the application process from the prospective student. It is best to be honest about other school applications. Some schools go as far as to ask where they stack up in comparison to other schools you have applied to. You want to make sure the school knows you are interested in them. Preparing a professional response to this question before interview day is advised. Students usually respond a bit vaguely with something like “I am considering this school strongly. The more I am here the more I can I see myself being a student on this campus”.

What are your grade trends/What class did you most struggle with?

Schools are typically looking to see applicants with upward grade trends. This means, if you struggled with chemistry, they want to see that as you progressed through the chemistry sequence your grades were getting better or at least staying consistent as the courses became more difficult. You can balance out lower grades in a specific subject with a great score on that portion of the OAT. When answering this question use an upward grade trend or great OAT as a positive spin on your lower grades in the subject. Additionally, make sure to describe what you learned from those experiences. It is okay to have a course you struggled with, but schools want to see that you learned from those challenges and are now prepared for the immense rigor of the optometry curriculum.

Why optometry?/Why not medicine?

This will more than likely be asked during your interview. Although it seems to be an easy question, especially if you are very passionate about the field, it can often be hard to formulate that passion into words. One thing interviewers do not want to hear is the simple and generic answer of “I love eyes.” Additionally, be mindful to try to avoid the topic of salary, as you do not want to appear to be pursuing the field just for the money. You want to show your passion is strong and will carry you through the tough

four years that are to come. Examples of some strong answers include: you like the doctor/patient interaction that optometry allows, you love that you are able to see the positive impact of your work quickly, especially if the patients problem was purely refractive, or discuss how you are excited by all the opportunities an OD will allow in terms of career options. If you have any specialties you are considering pursuing, speak about that interest and where your passion for the specialty comes from. Make sure to be honest in your responses, as interviewers can often discern a rehearsed response from a truthful one.

How were your shadowing and/or work experiences?

During your interview you will likely be asked about your optometric experiences. Interviewers will typically ask about a specific experience. Share what you did, along with what you learned during this experience. You also want to touch on how the experience helped you solidify that optometry was the right career path for you. Feel free to also express aspects of your experience that you did not like. For example, if you shadowed or worked at both a private practice and a corporate setting, it is acceptable to say that from the two experiences you learned that a private practice setting aligns with life goals more than a corporate setting, or vice versa, and explain why. You want to show how your experiences showed you more about your future.

Where do you see yourself in 10 years?

This question is typically asked to gauge how much thought you have given to being an optometrist, and how you have integrated the career into your life plan. Incorporate some career goals with life goals in your response.

Do you have any questions for me?

It is very important to have questions ready for the interviewers. This shows your interest in the school and that you have been proactive in gathering information about your future. Before your interview, go to the school’s website, read the information they have, and write some notes down along with some questions. You can take these notes along with your questions into the interview room. When it is time for you to ask questions, feel free to say something along the lines of “I have written down a few things I was curious about” while opening up your notes.

When preparing questions it is good to have around 10 open ended questions prepared, as many of your questions may be answered during the interview or earlier in the interview day. If a question was answered

earlier in the day, it is best not to ask the question again; interviewers typically know which presentations you had that day and what would likely have already been answered. Additionally, do not ask questions that can be answered from information on the school’s website, showing that you haven’t put any effort into research on your own. Strong questions show you are thinking about your education in the long term. Some good topics that can be formulated into strong questions are:

- The school’s research opportunities – What are the research opportunities? How difficult it is to get involved? What is the process to get involved?
- Preparing students for boards – You should look up board pass rates before going to the interview so that you have a general idea of what it is. Interviewers will know what it is and assume you do as well. Some good questions are: Are there any additional resources outside of class given to students to help them prepare for boards?

Examples of some other questions you may be asked:

- What is something unique you can bring to this school/your class?
- Why do you want to come to this school?
- How would you explain the difference between optometry and ophthalmology to an 11-year-old?
- How do you anticipate the transition from undergraduate to optometry school to go?
- How well are your time management skills?
- How did you study for the OAT?
- Who do you admire and why?
- What are some issues in the field of optometry today?
- Read this prompt about an ethical dilemma and explain how you would respond.

HOW TO PREPARE

Students find comfort in reading Student Doctor Network forums to learn more about what the interview day might entail in the weeks prior to the interview. In the days leading up to the interview, you should research the school and take notes on some key points you notice. A good place to start is by reading the school’s website. Make note of board pass rates, research opportunities, activities on campus, tuition costs, and anything else that catches your attention. From there write up some questions you want to ask during the interview, financial aid presentation, and current students.

Laws on how optometrists can practice are different from state to state. It’s a good idea to read about how optometry is practiced in the state where the school is located, especially if it is different from the state you are from. This can provide a good question to ask during your interview. Do not ask what the laws are, as this is

something you should know. Rather ask about the impact they have on education or students.

A great strategy to prepare for the questions you will be asked in the interview is to make flashcards. On one side write out all the questions you see in this guide along with others you may find on Student Doctor Network or elsewhere. Then write bullet points for how you will answer the question on the other. Spend time looking at the question and practicing how you would respond. Then turn the card over and see if you hit all the main points you intended to. You do not want to memorize a script. Most interviews will be conversational, but it is important to weave in positive points about yourself, and for many people that requires a bit of practice.

The night before your interview, make sure to get a good night of sleep. Most interviews are very early and you want to allow yourself ample amount of time to get ready and get to your interview. Early is on time, and on time is late. Typically applicants come at least 15 minutes early. Planning what you are going to wear and ironing it in advance is a great idea. Plan out what will eat for breakfast as it’s going to be a long day. You should also set out a folder, paper, and a pen that you plan to take with you. If you have a padfolio that would be even better. Make sure to include the list of questions you wrote out when researching the school.

INTERVIEW DAY

It is safe to assume that your behavior is being watched throughout the entirety of the day. Make sure to be on your best behavior, be friendly, polite, and courteous to everyone you encounter. The day is long and exhausting but it is important to keep up your energy and enthusiasm. Remember they are not just interviewing you, you are also interviewing the school to see if it is the right fit for you. Ask questions and make sure to write down the responses so you can compare the schools where you are interviewing. Make sure your questions are polite and do not make faculty or students uncomfortable. It is acceptable to mention you applied to other schools when speaking to current students, but know they are not able to speak negatively of other schools. You should also follow this guide and keep conversations positive and professional.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

At the end of your interview the interviewer(s) will let you know when you should expect to hear back from them. Adrenaline and nerves are often running high in the interview room; try to write this information down so you know when you can expect to hear from each school. Admissions committees typically have a decision for you

about two weeks. This varies depending on how often the admission's committee meets. The timeline of when you will hear back about both admission and potential scholarships will be outlined to you by the end of the day. If it is not, make sure to ask.

Applications can be accepted, rejected, waitlisted, or put on hold. If your application is put on hold, it means the admissions committee is not sure about your application at that time. This decision is often given because the school would like to see final grades or an improved OAT score. If the school is requesting more from you, they will relay this to you in the letter with their decision. Ask the school what the weak spots in your application were and if there is anything you can do to increase your competitiveness to potentially be accepted. Factor their request in with your timeline of interviews with other schools. In many situations, the school simply needs to wait until they have interviewed more applicants before they can make a decision. Applications can be left on hold for months. It is in your best interest to take steps to improve any weak areas in your application, updating the school on the steps you intend to take and when you have completed them. At the same time, continue exploring options at other schools if you are set on being admitted during that application cycle. In the case that you don't have any other applications pending, it may be time to begin planning to spend the next year strengthening your application in order to apply more competitively the following cycle. If it is still relatively early in the cycle, applying to other schools may not be a bad idea.

Some students are put on the waitlist. This happens when students are qualified to be admitted but applied at a point in the application cycle when there are limited seats remaining. Some schools will also use a waitlist as a way of putting applications on hold. In this situation as well, it is appropriate to ask for feedback on how to strengthen your application to gain acceptance for either the current cycle or the following. You again want to express your interest in the program and dedication to strengthen your application. You should also continue to explore options at other schools and/or prepare to apply again the following cycle.

If your application has been rejected, again, ask for feedback! Many students are scared to ask for constructive criticism, but this shows the admissions committee your interest in the field and your drive to improve. Make sure to be respectful and appreciative of their time. Don't be discouraged, as taking a year off to retake the OAT or take more classes will only better prepare you for the courses in optometry school.

If your application has been accepted an admissions committee member will call you. Make sure to answer these calls, as they will likely not leave your decision in a voicemail. During the call the school representative will explain upcoming steps to you. There will also be an email and physical letter sent to your permanent address.

You will have a relatively short period of time to respond with your decision once you are accepted. The earlier in the cycle you apply, the longer time you typically will have to respond, although applicants usually will not have more than a month. Strategically planning interviews so you hear back from all of them in a couple weeks can help in the decision-making process. This helps applicants avoid a situation where they have to accept and put down a deposit at their second-choice school while waiting to hear from their top choice. Keep in mind this situation could be a reality for you, as it is difficult to schedule all the interviews so ideally. Most deposits are not refundable. Some schools, depending on the time of the cycle, may give applicants an extension. As always, be sure to be reasonable, respectful, and appreciative when requesting more time to make your decision. Have a concrete amount of time you need to make the decision.

Always make sure to reach out to any schools you will not be attending and let them know you have chosen to go to another school. This can be done via email. Schools will often send a survey via email to ask for feedback about their application process. Make sure to fill out these surveys and be respectful while giving feedback. Optometry is a very small profession and you never know when your paths will cross again with many of the people you meet.

RESOURCES

The sources I used/referenced for the entire guide were ASCO, school profiles on SDN, optomcas, and the following school websites:

<https://optometry.nova.edu/index.html>

<https://www.neco.edu/>

<https://www.ferris.edu/mco/>

<https://optometry.nsuok.edu/>

<https://www.pacificu.edu/academics/colleges/college-optometry>

<https://optometry.uiw.edu/>

<https://www.optonet.inter.edu/>

The rest of the information I had was from my own personal experiences, information given to me by word of mouth by advisors or other students who had visited the school.





Health Professional Student Association

We believe every student should have the same opportunity
to attend a health professional school.



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