



# Pre-Optometry *Advisement*

## Nature of the Work, Earnings and Occupational Outlook

The American Optometric Association (AOA) states that “Doctors of Optometry are independent primary health care providers who examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures as well as diagnose related systemic conditions.” Optometry is the nation’s third largest independent healthcare profession. Over half the people in the United States wear glasses or contact lenses.

The number of new practicing optometrists is limited by the fact that there are presently only 19 schools and colleges of optometry in the United States and one in Puerto Rico. For the 2008-2009 academic year, 2,822 applicants submitted approximately 7,766 applications for the 2,482 first professional year seats available. According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook 2008-2009 Edition, Optometrists held about 33,000 jobs in 2006. Employment of optometrists is expected to grow as fast as average for all occupations through 2016 in response to the vision care needs of a growing aging population. Most optometrists are in general practice. Optometrists usually remain in practice until they retire, so job openings arising from replacement needs are low. Employment growth will be fastest in retail optical stores and outpatient clinics. There continues to be a significant need for underrepresented minorities in this profession.

According to the 2006 AOA Economic Survey, the median net income for all optometrists in practice ranged was \$105,000, while the median annual earnings of salaried optometrists was \$91,040. The middle 50 percent earned between \$66,560 and \$118,490. The individual net income of optometrists, like that of most professions, tends to rise with the number of years in practice. All states and the District of Columbia require that optometrists be licensed, which requires a Doctor of Optometry (O.D.) degree from an accredited optometry school and a passing score on both a written and a clinical state board examination. Licenses are renewed every 1 to 3 years and in all states, continuing education credits are needed for renewal.

## Optometry Education

The Doctor of Optometry degree is a 4year program. Optometry programs include classroom and laboratory study of health and visual sciences, as well as clinical training in the diagnosis and treatment of eye disorders. Included are courses in pharmacology, optics, vision science, biochemistry, and systemic disease. Residencies are not required to develop a specialty. Since the four-year optometry curriculum prepares graduates in all areas, a residency does not introduce but rather enhances experiences in a selected area.

## Pre-Optometry Preparation

Admission requirements at all schools require the completion of a minimum of at least 90 semester units of college coursework; however, a Bachelor’s degree may be required and is strongly recommended. Ninety percent of new entrants at most schools have obtained Bachelor’s degrees. A student’s academic evaluation is based upon overall GPA, science GPA, college attended, degree progress, and course load difficulty. The overall average GPA for the 2008 entering class at all 18 schools and colleges of optometry ranged from a high of 3.70 to a low of 3.05.

### ***Common Components Required for Admission:***

- Application including personal statement
- Official transcripts from all colleges attended
- Official Optometry Admission Test (OAT) scores
- Letters of recommendation
- Optometry experience/exposure
- Personal interview

The optometry schools do not participate in a centralized application service. Hence, each applicant should contact the individual schools in which they have interest. In general the schools and colleges of optometry begin accepting applications in August and September for their classes, which begin the following August or September.

Before applying to Optometry school, each applicant should become acquainted with at least one optometrist and if possible gain some firsthand experience to see what optometrists do on a daily basis to confirm motivation for entering optometry.

***Course Requirements for Optometry School:***

Prerequisite admission requirements vary from school to school. Please refer to the **Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)** website: <http://www.opted.org>. Most students major in the sciences (biology, chemistry, etc.) because the prerequisites for optometry schools are science intensive and they find a great deal of overlap between major requirements and those required for optometry school, although a science major is not required.

Listed below are the three Optometry programs in California.

**The Southern California College of Optometry**

Application Deadline March 15

Overall Avg. GPA 3.35

Required Courses: Bachelors degree required

**The University of California, Berkeley School of Optometry** (see [www.assist.org](http://www.assist.org) for SAC courses that meet admission requirements)

Application Deadline: December 15

Overall Avg. GPA 3.53

Required Course: Bachelors degree required

**Western University of Health Sciences**

Application Deadline: April 1

**OAT:**

The Optometry Admission Test (OAT) must be taken by all applicants seeking admission to schools and colleges of optometry. The OAT is a standardized exam, which exclusively contains multiple choice test items. There are six components to this exam: Quantitative Reasoning, Reading Comprehension, General Biology, General Physics, General Chemistry, and Organic Chemistry. The OAT is a computerized test offered at Prometric Testing Centers. The most desirable schedule for applicants is to take the exam from February of their junior year to October of their senior year in college. Visit [www.opted.org](http://www.opted.org) for more information.

***3/09 Information courtesy of the CSU, Long Beach Health Professions Advising Office, [www.sascenter.org](http://www.sascenter.org)***