Optometry (O.D.)

What does an Optometrist do?

- Doctors of Optometry examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system and eye.
- O.D.’s may be the first to recognize systemic diseases in their patients such as diabetes or high blood pressure.
- Although we often think of optometrists only in their capacity of routine eye exams and fitting glasses and contact lenses, in reality they treat many other eye problems. This includes eye injuries and diseases such as glaucoma and visual skill problems such as the inability to move, fixate and focus the eye.
- Many technological advances in eye care mean optometrists are on the cutting edge of technology. Nearly 90%, for example, help manage patients who have had refractive (laser) eye surgery.
- Although most optometrists practice primary care optometry, some do specialize in particular populations or treatments including pediatrics, infants, low vision rehabilitation, sports vision, learning disabilities, and head trauma.
- Optometrists should not be confused with ophthalmologists who are physicians (MD’s or DO’s) who perform eye surgery as well as diagnose and treat eye diseases and injuries.

How do I become an Optometrist?

- You must attend one of the 17 accredited programs.
- Generally at least 2 or more years of undergraduate work are required, though the preference is for students with at least a bachelor’s degree.
- Optometry school is a four year program in which the first 2 years are largely science based and the third and fourth year are spent mostly in clinical settings. After successful completion of the 4 years, students graduate with an O.D. (Doctor of Optometry).
- A licensure exam is required.

What prerequisite courses do I need?

- Prerequisite courses vary between programs so as you narrow your choices of schools, you should make yourself aware of their particular requirements.
- Programs may require or recommend biochemistry, and behavioral science (psychology, sociology, cultural anthropology).
- All required courses must have a minimum grade of a C.
- Additional information on each college’s requirements can be found at the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry website at http://www.opted.org/files/ASCO_Prerequisites_June_2011.pdf

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Prerequisite Courses for Indiana University School of Optometry

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<tr>
<th>Optometry IU Requirement</th>
<th>Purdue Equivalent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-2 semesters of general Biology</td>
<td>BIOL 11000 &amp; 11100 OR BIOL 13100 &amp; 23100/23200</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 semester advanced biology</td>
<td>Any 200 level or above, recommend anatomy &amp; physiology: BIOL 30100 &amp; 30200 OR BIOL 20300 &amp; 20400 OR a biochemistry course</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 semester of Microbiology</td>
<td>BIOL 22100 OR BIOL 43800-43900</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 year of General Chemistry</td>
<td>CHM 11500-11600 OR CHM 12500-12600 OR CHM 13200-12400</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 semester of Organic Chemistry (some programs require 2 semester)</td>
<td>CHM 25500/25501 and 25600/25601 OR CHM 26100/26300 &amp; 26200/26400 OR CHM 26505/26500 &amp; 26605/26600</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 year of Physics</td>
<td>PHYS 22000 &amp; 22100 OR PHYS 17200 &amp; 27200 OR PHYS 17200 &amp; 24100</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 year of English</td>
<td>ENGL 10600 OR ENGL 10800 AND another English course with strong writing component</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 semester psychology</td>
<td>PSY 12000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1-2 semesters of calculus</td>
<td>MA 16100 OR MA 22300 &amp; MA 22400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>STAT 30100 OR 50300, some schools will take PSY 20100 or SOC 38200</td>
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What is the job outlook?

♦ Currently there are approximately 30,000 optometrists involved in direct patient care. In fact, about 70% of eye care is delivered by optometrists.
♦ With an aging population and better reimbursement for eye care by many insurance plans, the market for optometric services is anticipated to increase.
♦ Optometrists practice in many settings including solo and group practices, as part of hospitals or HMOs, retail settings, veterans hospitals, research, industrial settings, and consulting.
♦ In 2010, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics reported the average salary as $94,990.

What else do I need to do before I apply?

♦ Optometry programs are very competitive.
♦ Generally they look for well-rounded students who are strong in science and have good communication skills.
♦ Programs consider GPA as well as the score on the aptitude test, the Optometry Admissions Test (OAT).
♦ They also look for leadership, empathy, extracurricular and community activities, and shadowing experiences in optometric facilities.

How do I apply?

♦ Application is made through an online application system called OptomCAS.
♦ Your letters of recommendation/evaluation can be submitted by letter writers directly on this system.
♦ Your online application will include an essay explaining why you are interested in becoming an optometrist.
♦ The individual optometry programs will ask for supplementary information and will hopefully invite you to their campus for an interview.
♦ Early application is essential.

Where can I get more information?

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
http://www.opted.org

Information on the OAT
https://www.ada.org/oat/index.html

OptomCAS
http://optomcas.org

American Optometric Association
http://www.aoa.org

American Optometric Student Association
http://www.theaosa.org

Programs in Indiana:
Indiana University School of Optometry
http://www.opt.indiana.edu/

For more information about optometry programs or your interests in the health professions, contact the Center for Pre-Professional Advising at 765-496-2690 or preprofessional@purdue.edu.

Information for this career guide came from the above websites, the Bureau of Labor Statistics
http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos078.htm, the Explore Health Careers website
http://www.explorehealthcareers.org, and those of individual schools.