

Career Description

- Doctors of optometry examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system and eye. They may be the first to recognize systemic diseases in their patients such as diabetes or high blood pressure.
- Besides routine eye exams and fitting patients for corrective lenses, optometrists treat many other eye problems including glaucoma and visual skill problems such as the inability to move, fixate and focus the eye.
- Although the majority of optometrists practice primary care optometry, some specialize in particular populations or treatments including pediatrics, low vision rehabilitation, sports vision, learning disabilities, and head trauma.
- Optometrists collaborate with ophthalmologists who are physicians (MDs or DOs) who perform eye surgery as well as diagnose and treat eye diseases and injuries.
- Optometrists also encourage preventive measures such as monitoring children's vision, evaluating school vision, and promoting nutrition and hygiene education.

Becoming an Optometrist

- Generally schools require at least two or more years of undergraduate work (90 credit hours). The preference, however, is for students with a bachelor's degree.
- Optometry school is a four year program. The first two 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.

Preparation

- Optometry programs 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 observation experiences in optometric facilities.
- Prerequisite courses vary between programs. When narrowing choices of schools, pay special attention to their particular requirements.
- All required courses must have a minimum C grade.

Common Prerequisite Courses (pre-reqs determined by each optometry school but similar to this list)

Requirement	Purdue Equivalents (specific courses may vary by major)
General Biology with lab	BIOL 11000-11100 or BIOL 13100 & BIOL 23100 & 23200 (lab)
Anatomy & Physiology	BIOL 20300-20400 or BIOL 30100-30200
Microbiology with lab	BIOL 22100 or BIOL 43800
General Chemistry with lab	CHM 11500-11600 or CHM 12500-12600 or CHM 12901 (CHM 11500 Credit Exam recommended along with CHM 12901)
Organic Chemistry with lab (some schools require 2 semesters/some require only one semester)	CHM 25700 or CHM 25500-25600 or CHM 26100-26200 or CHM 26505-26605 or MCMP 20400-20500
Biochemistry	CHM 33300 or CHM 33900 or CHM 53300 or BCHM 30700 or BCHM 56100 or MCMP 20800
Physics with lab	PHYS 22000-22100 or 23300-23400 or PHYS 17200 & 27200 or PHYS 17200 & 24100* (may need 1 hr lab such as PHYS 25200)
English	ENGL 10600 or ENGL 10800 and another English course with strong writing component (either writing or literature)
Psychology	PSY 12000
Calculus	MA 16100 or MA 22300 & MA 22400
Statistics	STAT 30100 or 50300, some schools will accept PSY 20100 or SOC 38200
Pre-Med Planning Seminar (Optional)	BIOL 39600 is a 0 credit 10 week class covering how to apply to optometry school and other health professions programs

Student Organization: Pre-Optometry Club

Research Programs

- [OptomCAS Information about Schools and Colleges](https://www.optomcas.org/information-about-schools-colleges) <https://www.optomcas.org/information-about-schools-colleges>
- A list of all the [programs and their prerequisite courses](https://www.optomcas.org/information-about-schools-colleges/school-college-prerequisites) is available at <https://www.optomcas.org/information-about-schools-colleges/school-college-prerequisites>
- One source of information about the field is the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry [Career Guide](https://optometriceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/EyesHaveIt_CareerGuide.pdf) https://optometriceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/EyesHaveIt_CareerGuide.pdf

Applying

- Application is through an online application system called OptomCAS.
- 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.
- Competitive applicants have:
 - Strong academic performance including a GPA of 3.5 or better
 - High scores on the OAT
 - Leadership, teamwork, and communication skills
 - Undergraduate research experience is valued
 - Volunteer and shadowing/observation experiences
 - Strong positive letters of recommendation
- Early application is essential—generally within a month of OptomCAS opening.

Fee Assistance

- [OAT Partial Fee Waiver](https://www.ada.org/en/oat/oat-fee-waiver-information) <https://www.ada.org/en/oat/oat-fee-waiver-information>
- OptomCAS – No fee waivers are available for the application at this time.

Employment Outlook

- Currently there are approximately 40,600 optometrists involved in direct patient care. In fact, optometrists deliver about 70% of eye care.
- 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.
- The average net income of optometrists in a 2014 American Optometric Association Survey was \$129,000. The Bureau of Labor Statistics is expecting 18% job growth (much higher than average) through 2026.

Programs in the Region

- [Indiana University School of Optometry](http://www.opt.indiana.edu/) Bloomington, IN <http://www.opt.indiana.edu/>
- [Illinois College of Optometry](http://www.ico.edu/) Chicago, IL <http://www.ico.edu/>
- [Midwestern University, Chicago College of Optometry](https://www.midwestern.edu/course_catalog_home/downers_grove_il_campus/chicago_college_of_optometry/admissions.html) Downers Grove, IL https://www.midwestern.edu/course_catalog_home/downers_grove_il_campus/chicago_college_of_optometry/admissions.html

More Information

- [Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry](https://optometriceducation.org/) <https://optometriceducation.org/>
- [Information on the Optometry Admissions Test \(OAT\)](http://www.ada.org/en/oat/) <http://www.ada.org/en/oat/>
- [OptomCAS](https://www.optomcas.org/sample-page/how-to-apply) (application service) <https://www.optomcas.org/sample-page/how-to-apply>
- [American Optometric Association](http://www.aoa.org) <http://www.aoa.org>

Other Careers to Consider

- Certified Orthoptist
- Physician
- Physician Assistant
- Nurse Practitioner

Information for this career guide came from the above websites, the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/optometrists.htm) <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/optometrists.htm> and [Explore Health Careers](https://explorehealthcareers.org/career/optometry/optometrist/) <https://explorehealthcareers.org/career/optometry/optometrist/>.

