

WCSU Pre-Health Programs

Pre-Optometry Pathway



Background on optometry school

There are 25 schools and colleges in the continental United States that offer a Doctor of Optometry (OD) (a list of schools is included at: <https://optometriceducation.org/about-asco/asco-member-schools-and-colleges/>). These schools are part of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO). Students apply to such programs using the OptomCAS system, which is a centralized application service for ASCO. In addition, there are two associate member schools that are defined as non-United States schools or colleges of optometry that are accredited through the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education.

OD programs are four-year, doctoral-level programs to prepare students for primary optometric care, which includes performing routine exams, removing material from the cornea, fitting a patient that requires contact lenses, prescribing medications, offering follow-up care post-surgery, and fitting patients with a magnifying medical device. The ASCO provides information about how to fund your education: <https://optometriceducation.org/future-students/resources/financing-an-optometric-education/>, which includes scholarship opportunities.

Pre-Requisite Coursework

Each optometry school has their own pre-requisite course requirements, so make sure that you consult each school's website in advance so that you can organize your coursework as appropriate. The table below provides a summary of required courses that you can use as a general framework.

Courses	Optometry School Pre-requisites
MAT 181 (Calculus I)	Most optometry schools
MAT 115/120 (Statistics)	Most optometry schools
CHE 110/111 (General Chemistry I and II)	All optometry schools
CHE 210/211 (Organic Chemistry I and II)	All optometry schools
CHE 421 (Biochemistry)	Most optometry schools
PHY 120/121 (General Physics I and II – non-calc) or PHY 110/111 (calc-based)	Most optometry schools
BIO 103/104 (General Biology I and II)	All optometry schools
Science Electives (e.g., Microbiology and Anatomy and Physiology)	Depends on the optometry school – check with individual institutions <i>*Many schools strongly recommend the Anatomy and Physiology sequence</i>
Humanities/Social Sciences Electives (e.g., Psychology and Sociology)	Depends on the optometry school – check with individual institutions
English (1 year of college English or equivalent writing intensive courses)	All optometry schools

WCSU Pre-Health Programs

Pre-Optometry Pathway



Note: If a student has AP credits or has taken online coursework, they should consult with the individual institution to determine if such credits will be accepted.

Entrance Exams

All colleges of optometry will accept the Optometry Admission test (OAT). Many schools will also accept the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), and Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT) instead of the OAT. A list of tests that are accepted by each college of optometry is outlined at: <https://www.optomcas.org/information-about-schools-colleges/deadlines-and-other-information/>. This website also outlines whether there are supplemental fees and the corresponding OptomCAS deadline.

The OAT is offered year-round and has four parts to the exam: survey of natural sciences (including biology, general chemistry, and organic chemistry), reading comprehension, physics, and quantitative reasoning. Information about the OAT can be found at: <https://oat.ada.org/>, which includes an OAT guide that organizes how you can register for the exam. There is a strict retesting policy in which candidates must wait 60 days between testing events with a maximum of four tests in a 12-month period. The OAT is based on a scale of 200 to 400, with some institutions viewing a score of at least 300 being competitive, while others cite that a score of 360 or higher makes a candidate competitive for top optometry schools.

Some schools require Computer-Based Assessment for Sampling Personal Characteristics (CASPer) testing (see below), so make sure that you consult with each school that you are interested in applying to.

Experiential Preparation

Experiences that can be entered on OptomCAS include employment (i.e., work done outside the optometry field), extracurricular activities (including academic clubs and teams), optometric experience (includes paid and unpaid experience, but does not encompass shadowing/observation), shadowing (defined as time spent formally following and observing a working health care professional), and volunteer work (e.g., tutoring and fundraising).

Not all schools require shadowing experience, but since the ASCO recommends that a letter of support be submitted by an optometrist (see below) that can comment on the applicant's experience, it is highly encouraged that students engage in shadowing activity. The number of hours that is recommended can differ based on individual programs, so it is advised that students check with the programs to which they wish to apply to.

Letters of Recommendation

ASCO recommends that applicants secure letters of recommendations from an optometrist that can provide detailed information about the applicant's experience, a professor that the applicant either conducted research with or took a class with, and an employer that can assess the applicant's maturity, diligence, and conscientiousness. Each school requires 2 to 3 letters of recommendation, but it is always best practice to consult the websites for the institutions that you are interested in applying to. Most schools require a letter from an optometrist. The maximum number of letters that can be requested is 4. If you want to submit more than that, you should contact the individual schools to determine an appropriate course of action.

WCSU Pre-Health Programs

Pre-Optometry Pathway



Many schools accept a committee letter written by a Pre-Health Committee currently comprised of Dr. Kristin Giamanco (Biology), Dr. Helena Prieto (Chemistry), Dr. Russ Selzer (Chemistry), Dr. Joshua Cordeira (Biology), and Dr. Emily Stevens (Health Promotion and Exercise) and some schools even recommend procuring a committee letter. A committee letter holistically considers an applicant's portfolio including the individual letters of recommendation. In addition, a committee letter counts as one letter of recommendation. Please note that there is a committee letter request form that you must complete in addition to have those writing you letters of recommendation fill out a pre-health evaluation form. Your pre-health professions advisor can provide you with more detailed information and the deadlines associated with those forms.

To determine which letters of recommendation may be accepted by the specific institution, consult the following website: <https://www.optomcas.org/information-about-schools-colleges/letters-of-recommendations/>.

Application Process

The centralized application service is called OptomCAS and each year the application opens in late June (make sure that you check the specific date for the year in question). Submission deadlines are between December and May, which depends on the individual institution (those deadlines can be found at: <https://www.optomcas.org/>). The application ends in late May. Currently, all 25 schools of optometry participate in OptomCAS. For the 2024–2025 cycle, the application fee was \$187 for a single institution and \$80 for each additional institution and OptomCAS does not offer any fee waivers. Some institutions/programs may have additional supplemental fees.

The primary application has four main sections: personal information, academic history, supporting information, and program materials. In the first section, you will provide contact, biographic, and citizenship information. In the next portion of the application, you will input details about the colleges you attended, standardized testing, and enter your transcripts. Requests for letters of recommendation are designated through OptomCAS and official OAT and/or GRE scores will be available to all schools that the applicant inputs. Transcripts must be sent directly to OptomCAS. If you enter any coursework, it must appear exactly as it does on your official transcript. In the supporting information section, your letters of recommendation will be linked to your application, and you will outline your achievements and experiences. There is no limit to the number of experiences/achievements that you can enter in this section. Such experiences should not read as a bulleted list and instead be a narrative that speaks to what you learned and contributed. Lastly, the program materials section encompasses any additional application requirements by the specific institutions you are applying to. Within the OptomCAS system, there is an instruction manual and frequently asked questions page to help in the application process.

Some schools might require a secondary application (see timeline information below) and as part of that, they might require the CASPer test, which is administered online, and it is an open response situational judgement test. This test assesses what you would do in difficult situations and why you would act in a particular way. Acuity Insights, the company that owns CASPer, also

WCSU Pre-Health Programs

Pre-Optometry Pathway



offers additional modules that could be required by specific programs. The secondary application also allows you to address any areas of concern including inconsistencies in GPA, comment on exam scores, or any experiences you engaged in that you could not include in the main application.

Application Timeline

Below is a timeline so that you can plan accordingly. This example timeline is for a student that would start optometry school in Fall 2025.

Before you officially start your application

- Research programs that you want to apply to with special attention focused on the cycle dates, specific deadline requirements, application fees, number of required letters of recommendations, any required coursework, and shadowing hours
- Many schools have rolling admissions, but it is important that you do not wait until the application deadline as the number of available spots will be small
- Procure transcripts to enter your coursework on OptomCAS
- Contact potential recommenders who can write you strong letters of support

April 2024

- Take the OAT or other appropriate examinations. Such exams do not have to be taken in April and instead can be taken later. Each school has a deadline for the last day that you can take the OAT, so be sure to consult with the specific institution

June 2024

- OptomCAS application cycle opens. The application cycle typically closes in May of the following year, in this case, May 2025, but please be aware of school specific deadlines

June – September 2024

- Submit the primary application. You can submit your application after September 2024, but it is recommended that you submit your materials as soon as possible and that you spend time before the application opens gathering all the necessary materials

July – October 2024

- Submit school-specific secondary applications. Not all schools require a secondary application and typically, the information about the secondary applications is sent to you via email after you submit your primary application. Make sure that you adhere to any deadlines for the secondary applications

September – December 2024

- Attend interviews. The timing of your interviews will depend on when you complete your primary and secondary applications

WCSU Pre-Health Programs

Pre-Optometry Pathway



Admissions Process

Your application is holistically examined and considers your academic performance, letters of recommendation, experiential preparation, essays, testing, and interviews.

For interviews, ASCO recommends three main tips that will be explained further below: Start with the basics, Understand that the interview is a two-way street, and Ace it!

- Start with the basics
 - Be on time for the interview
 - Dress professionally
 - Familiarize yourself with the organization of the interview
 - Act professionally
- Understand that the interview is a two-way street
 - Know why you are there
 - Be honest
- Ace it!
 - Be engaged
 - Ask good questions

Admissions Statistics

For the 2022–2023 application cycle, the mean GPA of students applying was 3.42 and the mean accepted GPA was 3.54. The overall mean science GPA of accepted students was 3.43. Importantly, the overall science GPA for applicants has risen from 3.17 (application cycle 2014–2015) to 3.30 (application cycle 2022–2023). The overall science GPA of accepted applicants increased from 3.30 (application cycle 2014–2015) to 3.43 (application cycle 2022–2023).

The average score of the academic average on the OAT for the 2022 optometry entering class was 320 and the average score of the total science OAT was 312.

Optometry Medicine Career Paths

Practicing optometrists detect, diagnose, and treat diseases of the eye which includes corneal abrasions, ulcers, or infections, glaucoma, visual problems, compromised vision-body coordination, and clarity problems. Additionally, optometrists also play a critical role in detecting and managing diseases that are first detected in the eye like diabetes and hypertension. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics employment of optometrists is projected to grow 9% between 2022 and 2032. Optometrists could work in the following realms:

- Private or group practices
- Retail/optical settings
- Collaboratively with ophthalmologists
- Military/public health
- Interdisciplinary care
- Academic or research
- Consulting

WCSU Pre-Health Programs

Pre-Optometry Pathway



Helpful websites

<https://oat.ada.org/> - This website provides information about the OAT, including what is on the test, how to apply, and frequently asked questions

<https://www.optomcas.org/> - Here you will find the OptomCAS main website to which you log into to start your application. In addition, you can find specific details about the programs you can apply to, applicant data reports, how to finance your education, and career guides

https://help.liaisonedu.com/OptomCAS_Applicant_Help_Center – OptomCAS has created an application guide, which includes information about how to start your application, complete your application, send official transcripts, and test scores to OptomCAS, how to submit and track your application

<https://www.eyeopeneression.org/> – The Eye Opener Sessions is a program that was created to foster connections between students that are interested in optometry with current, practicing eye doctors

<https://futureeyedoc.org/> – This resource provides a wealth of information about career options in optometry

<https://acuityinsights.app/> – Acuity Insights details what the CASPer test is and there is information on how to register