



## Quick Facts: Optometry

<p><b>Is this career right for you?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Would you enjoy developing long-term relationships with your patients by serving as their primary care doctor for eye care?</li> <li>• Do you like the idea of working with patients who are not necessarily sick or injured every time they see you?</li> <li>• Are you drawn to a helping profession that allows you to set your own hours and enjoy a relatively low-stress work environment?</li> <li>• Would you be happy in a job that involves a fair amount of routine work but that also promises interesting cases on a regular basis?</li> </ul>
<p><b>What do Optometrists Do?</b></p>	<p>Optometrists are primary care doctors who diagnose and treat vision problems. They have prescribing privileges to treat disorders of the eyes. Optometrists are not to be confused with <i>ophthalmologists</i>, who are physicians (MDs or DOs) who have completed medical school and a residency in eye surgery. They also should not be confused with <i>dispensing opticians</i>, who are trained to make and fit eyeglasses and corrective lenses, but do not perform medical diagnoses.</p>
<p><b>Degree</b></p>	<p>Doctor of Optometry (O.D.)</p>
<p><b>Length of Professional Training</b></p>	<p>After completing a bachelor's degree, optometry school takes an additional four years. After becoming an O.D., you may choose to go straight into practice. Some optometrists, however, choose to complete a residency program, to gain advanced training and experience in general optometry or in a specialized area of optometry. A residency is not required to go into a specialized area of optometry, but does provide valuable additional training in a specific field.</p> <p>Some of the specialized areas of optometry include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pediatrics</li> <li>• geriatrics</li> <li>• cornea and contact lenses</li> <li>• low vision rehabilitation</li> <li>• vision therapy</li> <li>• sports vision</li> <li>• learning disabilities</li> <li>• head trauma</li> <li>• school consultant</li> <li>• teaching and/or vision research</li> </ul>
<p><b>Pre-Optometry Clinical Experience</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Shadowing</b> is defined as the observation of a health care provider while that person cares for patients. We recommend spending ½ to 1 day <i>each</i> with the following types of clinicians: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A general practice optometrist in private practice</li> <li>○ A general practice optometrist in a corporate chain, optical retail store, or HMO</li> <li>○ An optometrist in a sub-specialty (see list in row above)</li> <li>○ An ophthalmologist</li> <li>○ One other clinician in a related field (such as medicine, dentistry, PA, etc.)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Direct patient interaction</b> is defined as being in a position to offer comfort and moral support to conscious patients in a health care environment. Most successful applicants have spent <i>at least one year volunteering or working for 4 hours/week</i> (often more) in a direct patient interaction role in an optometry clinic. Your objectives are to become comfortable interacting with patients and to learn about the way in which optometry clinics are run.</li> </ul> <p>We recommend asking the optometrists whom you shadow if they might have openings for a volunteer optometric technician. In many cases, clinics will train you to perform pre-testing on patients, and the volunteer position can turn into a paid job as you gain experience.</p>

<p><b>Other Desired Traits and Experiences</b></p>	<p>Refer to the <b>List of Core Competencies for Pre-Health Students</b>, taking note that optometry schools especially emphasize the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Service Orientation:</b> Optometrists typically have strong altruistic motivations. Most successful applicants have consistently engaged in paid and volunteer positions involving non-clinical service to others since high school. Examples include retail/restaurant jobs, working as a tutor, and volunteering in roles that allows you to directly help others who are in need. Greater consideration is given to long-term efforts that exemplify the applicant’s dedication and depth of commitment to the service chosen.</li> <li>• <b>Cultural Sensitivity:</b> Every optometrist cares for patients from a wide variety of racial, ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, a history of experiences with people of diverse backgrounds is valued. Such experiences may include living abroad for a period of time, involvement with multicultural organizations, or other volunteer or paid positions that have allowed you to understand and appreciate people whose backgrounds and belief systems are quite different from your own.</li> <li>• <b>Effective Teamwork and Leadership:</b> Optometrists serve as leaders within their clinics and must tactfully influence the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors of their patients. For this reason, OD programs value a history of serving as a leader of a team of people in an organized environment (such as serving as a teaching assistant, a resident assistant in a dormitory, a wilderness guide, a manager at work, the captain of an athletic team, or an officer in the military). Likewise, optometrists often work in close collaboration with other clinicians; thus, OD programs look for a past history of collaborating successfully with others on a team in a professional setting (such as in research, business, etc.).</li> </ul>
<p><b>GPA</b></p>	<p>The mean GPA for accepted students varies among optometry schools; the range is 3.0 to 3.6.</p> <p>You can look up mean GPAs for accepted students at your schools of interest by doing an online search for the <i>Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry Profile of the Optometry Entering Class</i>.</p> <p>Although it is ideal to apply with mean cumulative and science GPAs at or above the average GPA at each of your schools of interest, you can become a strong candidate with a lower GPA <i>if your recent academic history demonstrates a long-term trend of academic success</i>.</p> <p>If your GPA is currently below the mean for accepted students, you can still become a competitive applicant if each of your term GPAs <i>for the four consecutive terms leading up to the time of application</i> are at or above the values of the mean GPAs for accepted students at your schools of interest. If you have already completed the prerequisites, consider taking completing additional semesters with upper-division science elective courses or completing a one-year pre-health master's program before applying to optometry school.</p> <p><i>*Science GPA is defined as your average GPA in all biology, chemistry, and physics courses. (CU Boulder prefixes of EBIO, IPHY, MCDB, NRSC, CHEM, and PHYS.) Writing and Statistics courses taken in these departments do not count toward your science GPA.</i></p>
<p><b>Admissions Test</b></p>	<p>OAT: Optometry Admission Test</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biology: Complete one of the three-semester sequences listed on the prerequisite handout</li> <li>• Chemistry: General Chemistry 1, General Chemistry 2, Organic Chemistry 1</li> <li>• Physics 1 and 2</li> <li>• Math: algebra, trigonometry, geometry</li> <li>• Reading comprehension</li> </ul> <p>You can choose virtually any test date, year-round, to take the OAT. Scores typically “expire” after 2 years.</p> <p>Do an online search for the <i>Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry Profile of the Optometry Entering Class</i> to view a chart showing mean OAT scores for accepted students to each optometry school.</p>

<b>Common Application Service</b>	OptomCAS (Optometry Centralized Application Service)
<b>Timing of Application</b>	<p>Many optometry schools conduct admissions on a rolling basis, which means that early applicants have a greater chance of success than those who apply close to the deadlines. OptomCAS starts accepting applications around July 1 each year, for the following year’s entering class (i.e., 13 months before applicants would matriculate).</p> <p>You will have your best chance of acceptance in any given application year if you submit your OptomCAS application by end of August, take the OAT by the end of September (and get a competitive score, of course), and also have all of your letters of recommendation submitted by the end of September of your application year.</p>
<b>Reference Guide for School Selection</b>	The Optometry Programs Admissions Directory, maintained by the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)
<b>Number of schools to which to apply</b>	<p>There are over 20 accredited optometry schools in the United States. Colorado does not have an optometry school; Colorado residents may apply for the equivalent of in-state tuition for optometry schools through the WICHE (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education) program.</p> <p>Nationwide, optometry school applicants apply to an average of five optometry schools. It is important to research each school’s program and to be able to convey why you think it would be an especially good fit for you, rather than to apply to schools haphazardly.</p>
<b>Letters of Recommendation</b>	<p>Each optometry school sets its own guidelines regarding letters of evaluation; refer to their websites for details on their specific assortment requirements.</p> <p>As a guideline, a typical assortment of letters of recommendation would include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. One from an optometrist for whom you’ve worked (paid or unpaid) in an optometry clinic. Ask this person to comment upon your understanding of the profession, your passion for patient care, and your approach to working with patients and colleagues.</li> <li>2. One from a science* professor who has taught you in a lecture or seminar course. Ask this person to comment upon your intellectual engagement as a student.</li> <li>3. One from a supervisor from a long-term work or volunteer experience that was important to you. Ask this person to attest to your intrapersonal and interpersonal skills.</li> </ol> <p>*“<i>Science</i>,” for the purpose of applying to medical school, is defined as Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Math (CU Boulder prefixes: MCDB, EBIO, IPHY, NRSC, CHEM, PHYS, MATH)</p> <p><b>A note about advisor letters/Pre-Health Committee Letters of Evaluation:</b> Some optometry programs give you the option of including a letter from a pre-health advisor letter in your LOR assortment. We regret that we are unable to offer advisor letters to our students, with the exception of students who complete our Post-Baccalaureate Health Professions program <i>and</i> complete all of the steps (and meet all deadlines) in our Committee Letter Process. This process begins in the fall semester of the academic year before your application cycle and takes ~8 months to complete. Please visit <a href="http://www.colorado.edu/ceprehealth">www.colorado.edu/ceprehealth</a> &gt; Letters of Recommendation for details.</p>