

Pursuing a Career as an Optometrist

Profession Overview

Optometrists diagnose, manage, and treat conditions of the human eye and visual system.

Typical Duties:

- ▶ Examine eyes, using observation, instruments and pharmaceutical agents, to determine visual acuity and perception, focus and coordination and to diagnose diseases and other abnormalities such as glaucoma
- ▶ Prescribe medications to treat eye diseases if state laws permit
- ▶ Prescribe, supply, fit and adjust eyeglasses, contact lenses and other vision aids
- ▶ Educate and counsel patients on contact lens care, visual hygiene, lighting arrangements and safety factors
- ▶ Provide patients undergoing eye surgeries, laser vision correction, with pre- and post-operative care
- ▶ Prescribe therapeutic procedures to correct or conserve vision
- ▶ Provide vision therapy and low vision rehabilitation

Optometrists practice in many different kinds of situations and with different types of employers, including hospitals, retail optical settings and the military. Many optometrists set up a private or group practice with other optometrists or with ophthalmologists. Check out more information about this career [on the Explore Health Careers webpage](#).

Education Programs

Optometrists need a Doctor of Optometry (O.D.) degree. In 2025, there were 25 accredited Doctor of Optometry programs in the United States. Doctor of Optometry programs take 4 years to complete. [View a list of optometry schools on the ASCO website](#). After finishing the O.D., some optometrists do a 1-year residency program to get advanced clinical training in a specialty. Specialty areas for residency programs include family practice, primary eye care, pediatric or geriatric optometry, vision therapy and rehabilitation, cornea and contact lenses, refractive and ocular surgery, low vision rehabilitation, ocular disease, and community health optometry.

Admission Requirements: Knowledge and Strategies

Work with your faculty advisor and/or a member of [Kenyon's Health Professions Advising Committee \(HPAC\)](#) to plan for prerequisite requirements. Start early and consult each institution's website for specific requirements. [ASCO has a program admission directory](#) that is a great starting point for understanding admission expectations and the [ASCO prerequisite comparison chart](#) is also a useful tool. Common course requirements include: general biology, microbiology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, calculus, statistics, physics, english and general psychology. Some programs will require courses such as anatomy & physiology. Individual schools determine how many prerequisites must be completed prior to applying, with many allowing 1-2 uncompleted classes at the time of application.

Shadowing optometrists is a recommendation from most optometry schools and a requirement of some. Requirements range from 10-40 shadowing hours. Programs generally encourage applicants to shadow multiple optometrists as preparation, with some programs requiring at least two different settings for fulfilling their shadowing requirement.

When you submit an application, remember you will do so through a centralized application site: Optometry's Centralized Application Service, [OptomCAS](#). OptomCAS generally opens in June of each year, and early applications are recommended as schools operate on a rolling admissions cycle.

Standardized Test

Optometry programs typically require the [Optometry Admission Test \(OAT\)](#). The OAT focuses on natural sciences (Biology, General Chemistry, and Organic Chemistry), reading comprehension, physics and quantitative reasoning. Some schools and colleges of optometry may accept other standardized exams such as the GRE, MCAT, or DAT. Check with the programs directly for their exam requirements.

General Advising Information

- Strive for academic success: The average cumulative GPA for optometry applicants during the 2025 application cycle was 3.45 and the average GPA of the 2025 entering class was 3.57.
- Build relationships: create a strong network of pre-health advisors, faculty, peers and professionals. Remember, such connections can open up opportunities for you and letters of recommendation will be required to apply. Providing three letters of recommendation is common, with some Optometry programs requiring a letter of recommendation from an Optometrist as well as a professor.
- Plan financially: Costs of attending individual programs also vary widely. Visit the [ASCO page on Financing an Optometric Education](#) for help developing a financial plan for optometry school.

Want more information?

Make an appointment with Sara Stasko in the CDO via [Handshake](#) or email stasko1@kenyon.edu. Connect with a faculty advisor on the [Health Professions Advising Committee \(HPAC\)](#).