



Career Guide  
Office of Health Professions Advising

## 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. They may also 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. The variety of conditions covered by optometrists 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 have been made in eye care and optometrists are on the cutting edge of this 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 also not be confused with ophthalmologists who are physicians (MDs or DOs) who do eye surgery as well as diagnose and treat eye diseases and injuries.

### How do I become an Optometrist?

To 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 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 2001, the American Optometric Association reported the average income as \$138,846.

## 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 requirements. Optometry schools typically require 1 year of biology with lab, 1 semester of microbiology, 1 year of general chemistry with lab, 1-2 semesters of organic chemistry with lab, 1 year of physics with lab, 1 year of English (including at least 1 semester of composition), 1-2 semesters of calculus and several social science/humanities courses. Other programs may also 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/prerequisites.pdf>.

### Prerequisite Courses for Indiana University School of Optometry

IU Requirement	Purdue Equivalent
1-2 semesters of Biology	BIOL 110 & 111 <b>OR</b> BIOL 131 & 231
1 semester advanced biology	Any 200 level or above, recommend: BIOL 301 & 302 <b>OR</b> BIOL 203 & 204
1 semester of Microbiology	BIOL 221 <b>OR</b> 438-439
1 year of General Chemistry	CHM 115-116 <b>OR</b> CHM 125-126 <b>OR</b> CHM 123-124
1 semester of Organic Chemistry* *some programs require 2 semesters of organic	CHM 255/255L <b>OR</b> CHM 261/263 & 262/264
1 year of Physics	PHYS 220 & 221 <b>OR</b> PHYS 172 & 272
1 year of English	ENGL 106 <b>OR</b> ENGL 108 <b>AND</b> another English course with strong writing component
1 semester psychology	PSY 120
1-2 semesters of calculus	MA 161 <b>OR</b> MA 223 & MA 224
Statistics	STAT 301 <b>OR</b> 503, some schools will take PSY 201 or SOC 382

## 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), for admissions. They also look for communication skills, leadership, empathy, extra curricular and community activities, and shadowing experiences in optometric facilities.

## How do I apply?

Application is made directly with the individual schools of optometry. Your letters of recommendation/evaluation can be collected in the Health Professions Advising Office and will be distributed for you to the programs of your choice.

## Where can I get more information?

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry

Information on the OAT

American Optometric Association

American Optometric Student Association

Programs in Indiana:

Indiana University School of Optometry

<http://www.opted.org>

[http://www.opted.org/info\\_oat.cfm](http://www.opted.org/info_oat.cfm)

<http://www.aoa.org>

<http://www.theaos.org>

<http://www.opt.indiana.edu/>

For more information about optometry programs or your interests in the health professions, contact the Health Professions Advisor, Amy Terstriep, Ph.D., at 765-494-4747 or [prehealth@purdue.edu](mailto:prehealth@purdue.edu).

Information for this career guide came from [www.explorehealthcareers.org](http://www.explorehealthcareers.org), the above websites, the Bureau of Labor Statistics <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos073.htm> and those of individual schools.

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