

Frequently Asked Questions: Pre-Optometry Track

Q. How long is optometry school?

A. In general, doctors will spend 4 years in medical school and then complete 3-7 years of residency training before becoming eligible for medical licensing

Q. What is the difference between an optometrist and an ophthalmologist?

A. An optometrist is an eye doctor who has earned the Doctor of Optometry (OD) degree. Optometrists examine eyes for both vision and health problems, and correct refractive errors by prescribing eyeglasses and contact lenses. Some optometrists also provide low vision care and vision therapy.

Optometrists in the United States also are licensed to prescribe medications to treat certain eye problems and diseases. The scope of medical care that can be provided by optometrists is determined by state law. (For details about the scope of practice of optometrists where you live, visit the website of your state's board of optometry.)

An ophthalmologist is a medical doctor (MD) or a doctor of osteopathic medicine (DO) who specializes in eye and vision care. Ophthalmologists are trained to perform eye exams, diagnose and treat disease, prescribe medications and perform eye surgery. They also write prescriptions for eyeglasses and contact lenses.

Q. Do optometry schools accept AP credit or classes taken Pass/No Pass?

A. Policies regarding AP credit and Pass/No Pass credit may vary from program to program. We encourage students to review the policies at each school they plan on applying to in order to determine whether AP credits may be used to meet prerequisite course requirements. Note: At UCSB, AP credits earned that have been applied to certain degree requirements *will not appear* on the official UCSB Transcript, which is required by many schools that do accept AP credit. In order to cover all bases, we encourage students to take all prerequisite courses at UCSB or another 4-year institution for *graded credit*. We do not suggest students take prerequisite courses Pass/No Pass.

Q. If I believe I am going to get a C- in a class, should I intentionally get a D or F so I can retake the class and get a better grade? What do I do if I am going to get a low grade in a class?

A. UCSB has a number of campus resources designed to help students who are struggling. We strongly encourage students to seek assistance as soon as possible to try to avoid these situations. We do not encourage students to purposefully fail courses, for any reason. If you believe that you may earn a grade that you feel is unsatisfactory, then please stop in to see a pre-health advisor during drop-in advising to discuss other options.

Q. Can courses I take abroad count as optometry school prerequisites?

A. Courses taken abroad that have direct UCSB equivalents may be taken in order to meet professional school requirements; however, we caution students on taking a large number of science prerequisite courses abroad.

Q. Will participating in more experiences make up for a low GPA?

A. No.

Q. Does all prerequisite coursework have to be completed prior to applying?

A. No, but most programs do require that all prerequisite coursework be completed prior to matriculation.

Q. When should I take the OAT?

A. The OAT consists of 4 sections: Survey of the Natural Sciences, Reading Comprehension, Physics, and Quantitative Reasoning. Students should plan to complete, at minimum, full-year introductory

course sequences in Biology, General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, and Physics, as well as college-level math and statistics courses, prior to preparing for the OAT.

Q. When should I start studying for the OAT?

A. That is up to you; however, we suggest studying during a time when you have very few distractions and can ensure that you are able to dedicate, at least, 8 weeks of studying, during which you also complete several full-length practice tests under simulated test-taking conditions.

Q. Do I need a test prep course?

A. Test prep needs vary from student to student. Some aspects to consider when determining which types of test prep materials you will need include the costs associated with purchasing materials/courses as well as your own preferred learning style(s).

Q. When should I apply?

A. When you are ready and feel that you are at your most competitive as an applicant. This will be different for each student, so we encourage you to schedule an appointment to discuss with a pre-health advisor.

Q. Should I take a gap year?

A. Reasons for taking a gap year vary for each student, and choosing to take a gap year or not requires weighing a number of factors, such as current/anticipated GPAs (Cumulative and Science-only), OAT score, and experiences, to name a few. Please schedule an appointment with a pre-health advisor to discuss your individual needs further.

Q. Will taking a gap year hurt my application?

A. No.

Q. When should I begin writing my personal statement?

A. Students should begin considering—and possibly writing a response to—the question, “Why do I want to be an optometrist?” as soon as they begin considering the pre-medical track. In some cases, this becomes the precursor to a personal statement. Beyond that, students should begin drafting their personal statement as early as during the fall prior to their application season (following summer) because most personal statements will go through several edits and revisions.

Q. What is the average cost of optometry school?

Prep: (Exam prep, applications, interviews) OAT exam \$465, OpmtomCAS \$180 (1 school; + \$70 for each additional school)

Attendance (Tuition, Room/Board, Other Expenses): \$19,691 - \$55,007 (Public Schools, May vary by residency status) and \$18,381 – \$46,823 (Private Avg.)

A. According to the Southern College of Optometry’s website (<https://www.sco.edu/optometry-schools-in-usa>), it may cost as much as \$220,028 (or more) to become an optometrist, which *does not include* the cost of an undergraduate degree.

Q. Is an undergraduate degree required?

A. Typically, yes.