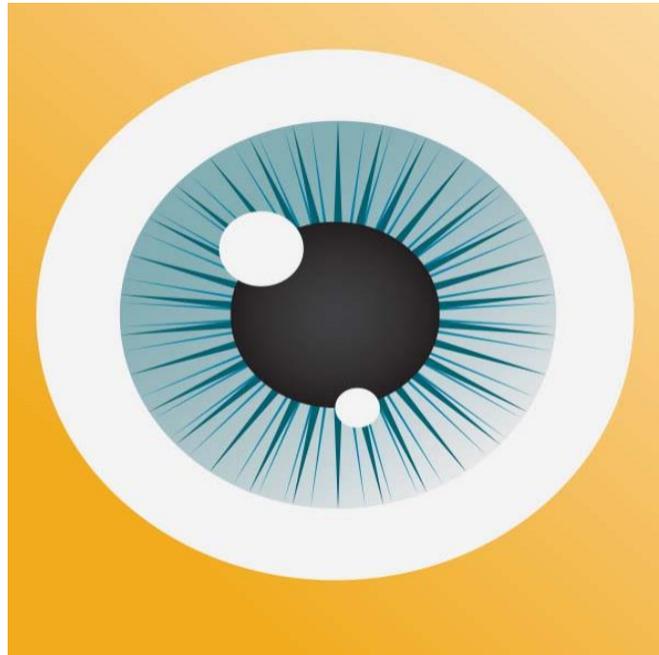




The University of Texas at Austin
Health Professions Office
College of Natural Sciences

PRE-OPTOMETRY GUIDE



UT Austin

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Table of Contents

What is Optometry	3
Optometry vs Ophthalmology vs Optician	3
Selecting a Major	4
Pre-Optometry Self-Assessment.....	4-11
Pre-Optometry Prerequisite Courses & Timeline	12
Pre-Optometry Activities	13
Taking Courses Away from UT	13
Studying Abroad	14
Claiming AP/IB Credit	14-16
Q Drop or Pass/Fail	16-18
Academic Assistance.....	18
OAT Information.....	18
GPA Boosters/Post Bacc.....	19-20
Researching Schools.....	19-20
Timeline for Applying to Optometry School.....	19-20
Application Services & Resources.....	21
Letters of Evaluation	21
Personal Statements	22
Interview Tips & Preparation	22-23
Research Current Events	23
Financing Your Optometry Education	24
Pre-Health Professions Services	25

Preface

The information presented in this document provides important resources for UT Austin Students planning on applying to optometry school. Remember it is important to research optometry schools and evaluate their fit before you apply.

Additional Pre-Health Professions resources including prerequisites, timelines, and application information for the following Health Professions: Medical, Dental, Physician Assistant, Pharmacy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Veterinary Medicine can be found at: <https://cns.utexas.edu/health-professions>

What is Optometry (OD)?

A Doctor of Optometry (also called an OD or optometrist) is a primary health care provider that specializes in eye care and visual health.

An optometrist evaluates and treats visual conditions. They find, diagnose, and treat eye injuries, diseases, and various visual disorders of the visual system. They prescribe eyeglasses and contact lenses, deliver vision care, and provide care before and after eye surgery.

Optometrists can work in a wide variety of practice settings with a wide variety of populations. They can work in private practice, retail/optical, military, hospital, VA, research, consultant, research or academic settings.

To become an optometrist you must complete 4 years of education in a professional level optometry program.

Find out more at:

- <https://www.aoa.org/about-the-aoa/what-is-a-doctor-of-optometry?sso=y>
- <https://www.neco.edu/admissions/explore-optometry>

Optometry vs Ophthalmology vs Optician

Optometrists and Ophthalmologists each play an important role in providing eye care to patients or customers. However, the levels of training and expertise are quite different for each type of provider. It is important to fully understand each field before pursuing an education in either. The range of services and procedures that can be performed by each provider also range by state. It is important to research the rules and regulations of your state licensing board. Listed below are some general similarities and differences between the two fields.

Optometrist – Doctor of Optometry

- General vision services like eye exams, and treatment of conditions like strabismus and amblyopia
- Diagnosis and basic treatment of eye conditions like glaucoma, cataracts, macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy and conjunctivitis
- Prescribes medications for certain eye conditions such as antibiotics for eye infections
- Prescribes and fits eyeglasses and contact lenses
- Vision therapy services, such as eye exercises and low-vision aids
- Pre- and postoperative care for people who have had eye surgery or Lasik surgery.

Ophthalmologist - Doctor of Medicine (M.D. or D.O.)

- Provides vision services including eye exams
- Medical eye care for conditions such as glaucoma, iritis, and chemical burns
- Performs surgical eye care for trauma, crossed eyes, cataracts, glaucoma, and other problems
- Diagnosis and treatment of eye conditions related to other diseases such as diabetes
- May also perform plastic surgery related to wrinkles or sagging eyelids

Optician

- Design, measure, adapt, and fit lenses according to patient's prescription
- Assist patient with lens and contact lens care
- Measure patient for frame sizes according to patient's need.
- Reshape glasses as needed

Selecting a Major

Most Pre-Optometry students major in a science discipline within the College of Natural Sciences; however it is important to choose a major based on your academic interests and that you are passionate about. While certain degrees may cover the pre-optometry prerequisites, schools also accept students who show broad interests in their academic coursework through a non-science major as long as they are also strong science students.

Explore an Optometry Career further:

- Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) - <http://www.opted.org/>
- American Optometric Association is an excellent resource for news and information about optometry. - <http://www.aoa.org/?sso=y>
- Texas Optometric Association - <http://texas.aoa.org/>

Explore Majors/Health Professions further at one or more of the following resources:

- Wayfinder <https://wayfinder.utexas.edu/>
- My Next Move <http://www.mynextmove.org/>
- Occupational Outlook Handbook <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/home.htm>
- Explore Health Careers: <http://explorehealthcareers.org/en/home>

How do I get in?

Selection criteria vary around the country. Most optometry programs require at least a 3.0 GPA and a minimum OAT score of 300. Read further for more specific tips and guidelines about application and admission.

Pre-Optometry Self-Assessment

Use to assess your Optometry School application strengths. If you are a new Pre-Optometry student, use this assessment as a planning guide for your Pre-Optometry Pathway. (Check out the New-Pre Health Students page at the Health Professions website: <http://cns.utexas.edu/health-professions>).

Are you working towards submitting a well-rounded application?

Start by Developing Your Personal Qualities

Individuals who are successful in their pursuit of a health care career possess a set of qualities that they develop as young adults. These include: Good Judgment, Self-Discipline, Maturity, Compassion/Empathy, Integrity, Intellectual Curiosity, Strong Work Ethic, Leadership, Accountability, Reliability, Motivation/Persistence, Honesty, and Cultural Competency. Develop these qualities through the experiences and activities you choose to get involved in.

I want to develop the following qualities:

How will I develop these qualities (be specific):

Here are some ideas to get you started:

Get Involved & Gain Experience

There are several ways you can get involved. Get involved in what you are interested in, this is key! There are many things you can do to build your application these can include but are not limited to: Volunteering, Shadowing, Studying Abroad, and/or participating in a summer program. Get involved on campus, Tutor, Mentor, Teach, participate in Rec Sports, the list goes on and on. If you are considering studying abroad, check out the study abroad section in this guide. Always remember to be yourself and do what you enjoy.

Community Service

Any experience giving back to the community will be looked upon favorably by professional school admissions committees. If some of your volunteering is in a healthcare setting, you can combine volunteering with exposure to the field. A community service activity in which you are directly helping people face-to-face is of the most value, and making an ongoing commitment to that community service gives you time to grow and gain real value from the experience.

Volunteer Experience	Dates (can list time period or individual dates)	Hours	Responsibilities

What have I learned about myself through these volunteer experiences?

Have I involved myself in a diverse set of experiences? What skills have I enhanced/gained through these experiences? (For example: I have become a better communicator through my volunteering experiences at the local hospital – explain how you have done this)

I want to explore the following volunteer activities:

Quick Tip: Any experience giving back to the community will be looked upon favorably by professional school admissions committees. Get in the habit of tracking your volunteer hours, as most professional school applications will ask for the actual hours you spent volunteering.

Healthcare Experience

It is good to gain hands on experience in optometry. Look for opportunities to work (as a volunteer or an employee) in an optometry practice. Becoming an Optometry Assistant or Optical Technician can be a pathway to the Optometry profession. Look for Optometrists who have students working in their optical shops.

Healthcare Experience	Dates (can list time period or individual dates)	Hours	Responsibilities

What have I learned about myself through these healthcare experiences?

Have I involved myself in a diverse set of experiences? What skills have I enhanced/gained through these experiences? (For example: I have become a better communicator through my volunteering experiences at the local hospital – explain how you have done this)

I want to explore the following healthcare activities:

Shadowing and Observation

Shadowing means working directly with a health care provider in their professional environment. You have the opportunity to observe how they plan their day, how they interact with their patients, how they chose their career, how they feel about current events, and what types of problems they solve.

Optometrist's Name or Name of Experience	Specialty	Hours	Type of Experience: Shadow/Volunteer/Paid

What have I learned from these experiences?

I want to reach out to the following Optometrists to see about shadowing:

Quick Tip:

Finding a healthcare provider who is willing to allow you to shadow can be a challenge, but it is worth the effort. Many students start with their own healthcare providers. You may also network with other pre-health students to see where they have shadowed.

You may also do an informational interview, where you can ask a practicing Optometrist about their experiences. See [HPO's Informational Interview Resources](#)

Leadership

Leadership can be developed in many different ways. Leadership needs to be demonstrated. Think about how you are developing your leadership qualities and skills. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Tutoring
- Mentoring
- Teaching / TA a course
- Get involved in Student Organizational leadership

Name of Organization	Position/Title (ex: Director Communication, President, Member, etc.)	Total participation time (ex. 2 years, 3 semesters, etc.)	Duties/Activities participated in with this organization/group

What is the most important thing I have learned about myself from these experiences?

Brainstorm some specific ways you can develop your leadership skills:

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities help you become a well-rounded student because you develop not only knowledge and thinking skills but also social skills, group work, empathy, team building, organizational and motivational skills that are necessary for professional success.

I am active in the following:

List activities you want to participate in and what you hope to get out of the activity:

ACADEMICS

Academics include your GPA and OAT Scores. How well are you doing? Are you taking between 14-17 credit hours per semester? Are you keeping your grades up? Use the GPA calculator in your UT Direct account to calculate your GPA.

Overall GPA _____

*This includes all courses taken at UT and other institutions

Prerequisite Math and Science GPA _____

Quick Tip:

To be competitive for optometry school, you will need a GPA above 3.5. This means you need to be making A's and B's with more A's than B's. If you feel that you are behind in your classes, please don't wait until you get your first poor test score to ask for help. There are numerous resources on campus to help you with tutoring! Start with visiting your faculty members & teaching assistants during office hours and get academic coaching at [Sanger Learning Center](#)

Your OAT Score

OAT Section	My Score	Avg. Score
Survey of Natural Sciences		
Physics Test		
Reading Comprehension Test		
Quantitative Reasoning Test		

Get in the habit of personal reflection

Your insights about who you are as a person and how your experiences have shaped you will be of tremendous benefit when it is time to write your personal statement (a required part of your professional school application). Keep a journal handy so you can jot down your thoughts, observations, insights and skills learned!

Track Your Progress

Why do I want to be an optometrist?

Do I understand the differences between an Ophthalmologist, Optometrist, and Optician?

Self - Evaluation

Mark Yes or No for each question. This will allow you to identify areas in which you feel strongest and areas in which you wish to grow.

Can I explain to someone why I want to be an optometrist?	Y	N
Is my GPA above a 3.5?	Y	N
Have my grades improved over time?	Y	N
Have I shadowed more than one optometrist?	Y	N
Does my resume reflect a diverse set of extracurricular activities over time?	Y	N
Have I shown commitment with my volunteer activities/community service?	Y	N

Once you have completed this assessment, if you have not made an appointment with a Pre-Health Professions Coach, we recommend that you do so to discuss these topics as well as your application strengths as a whole.

Get to know your faculty

This can be challenging at UT Austin—the campus is large and most of the classes in your first year have a high number of students. Even though the professors can sometimes seem tough or intimidating, most of them are very approachable one-on-one. Visit your professors during office hours, even if you are doing well in their classes. It will make your request for a future letter of evaluation much easier! Get to know your faculty, check out this quick video for some tips: [Get to know your faculty](#).

Who are your letter writers?

I would like to ask the following faculty for letters of evaluation:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____

I would like to ask the following third letter writer for a letter of evaluation; this letter will add a different dimension to my application:

- 1) _____

**UHCO requires 3 letters, 2 of which should be from science professors*

UIW requires 2, but will accept more

We recommend at least 1 from an Optometrist and 1 from a professor

Notes:

Optometry School Prerequisites Time Line

This timeline is an example of how UT Austin students interested in applying to Texas Optometry (OD) professional schools may complete the minimum pre-optometry course requirements. Plan on at least 3 years to prepare for professional school.

For students who start pre-health professions after freshman year it is common to have a bridge year or years after undergraduate school during which you continue to prepare for and apply to professional school.

[Individual schools may require or recommend additional courses not included here]

See details and options for these courses on the [prerequisite courses pdf](#)

FIRST YEAR	<u>Fall</u> Calculus Biology I Chemistry I Rhetoric	<u>Spring</u> Biology II Chemistry II Chemistry Lab Statistics	<u>Summer</u>
SECOND YEAR	<u>Fall</u> Genetics Biology Lab Organic Chemistry I English Literature	<u>Spring</u> Organic Chemistry II Organic Chemistry Lab Anatomy Psychology	<u>Summer</u> Physics I Physics I Lab
THIRD YEAR	<u>Fall</u> Physiology Physiology Lab Physics II Physics II Lab Additional Courses Required or Recommended by Individual Schools	<u>Spring</u> Microbiology Microbiology Lab (OAT: Optometry Admissions Test)	<u>Summer</u> (Apply)
FOURTH YEAR	<u>Fall</u> Biochemistry Continue in required or recommended course work and activities	<u>Spring</u>	

First and Second Year Pre-Optometry Activities

First and Second Years

- ☞ Subscribe to **HPOinfo**, click on the Join HPOinfo button: <http://cns.utexas.edu/health-professions>
- ☞ Take an average to heavy course load: 14-16 hours is considered an average course load. It is okay to take 12-13 hours your first semester at UT Austin.
- ☞ **Get to know your professors.** You will need faculty evaluations when you apply to professional school. Two from science faculty are recommended.
- ☞ Meet with a pre-health professions coach in the Health Professions Office to discuss health careers, goals, and preparation, especially how to make the most out of your first two years.
- ☞ Declare a major by your second year on campus.
- ☞ Get involved in extracurricular activities (e.g., student organizations, volunteering and shadowing in optometry settings, community service).
- ☞ Attend the Health Professions Fair each year, generally held in February or March, to visit with representatives from optometry schools and other health professions programs.
- ☞ Take advantage of opportunities to visit with school admission representatives when they speak at the Pre-Optometry Professional Society (POPS) meetings here at UT Austin
- ☞ Keep viable career alternatives open.

Can I take Courses Away From UT?

Completing your coursework at UT (your home institution) is considered best preparation for health professions schools. For students who find it necessary to take courses away from UT, we offer the following recommendations.

- KEY:** **UT:** Take classes at UT Austin
 4YR: If necessary, okay to take class at other 4 year institution
 CC: If necessary, okay to take class at community college

	Pre-Medical	Pre-Dental	Pre-Veterinary	Pre-Optometry	Pre-Pharmacy	Pre-Physician Asst	Pre-Physical Therapy	Pre-Occupational Therapy
Biology & Chemistry	UT	UT	UT	UT	UT	UT	UT	UT
Physics	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR or CC	Not Required	4YR or CC	4YR or CC
Statistics, Calculus	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR or CC	4YR or CC	4YR or CC	4YR or CC
English & Rhetoric	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR	4YR or CC	4YR or CC	4YR or CC
Other Pre-requisites	Generally, it seems to be okay to take other prereqs away from UT Austin, if needed; however, students should contact individual professional schools' admission offices for questions about specific courses.							

General Recommendations:

1. Taking courses away from UT can give the impression that the student is avoiding UT Austin's rigorous courses; therefore, it is important to earn excellent grades at both community colleges and other four-year institutions.
2. It generally appears to be okay with professional schools to take government and history requirements at other four-year institutions or community colleges.
3. For other general requirements students can check with professional schools' admission offices.

Studying Abroad?

Most health professions schools require that prerequisites be taken at U.S. accredited schools, and some will accept credits from Canadian accredited schools.

Although exchange program courses and some affiliated program courses are counted as in-residence credit by UT Austin, according to Texas state law, foreign course work cannot be counted in the GPAs for application to graduate and post-baccalaureate professional schools. The rules and policies can vary among the professional schools. Students who plan to study abroad should research this carefully for the schools and application services they plan to apply to. Look in the education requirements, transcripts, and FAQ sections of their web sites for information about foreign course work and study abroad. [See example at bottom of page.]

UT Austin faculty-led courses are “in-residence” courses as well as U.S. credits, and so courses like Organic Chemistry II (CH 320N) taught in Spain by UT Austin faculty can be used to satisfy a prerequisite; however, for many students taking these rigorous courses in only 5 weeks may not be recommended. It is important that pre-health professions students master these courses and retain this knowledge for success in entrance exams and in advanced studies.

The UT Austin Health Professions Office very strongly recommends that our students satisfy their health professions prerequisites at UT Austin. Use the study abroad opportunity to study the culture and language of that country and to satisfy general education requirements if approved by your academic advisor. Science courses that are not considered direct preparation for the health professions can be considered as well. (Examples: research, ecology, environmental science; but NOT cell, molecular, microbiology, anatomy, physiology which figure heavily into your preparation and readiness for professional school and the admissions committee’s assessment of your application) EXAMPLE: from TMDSAS (Texas Medical and Dental Schools Application Service)

FAQ - Foreign Applicants, Coursework from Foreign Schools and Study Abroad

Do you accept foreign coursework?

No! State law requires that academic work taken at foreign colleges, universities or preparatory schools shall be excluded from the calculation of the grade point average for students seeking admission to graduate or post-baccalaureate professional school.

Foreign coursework will not count towards satisfying any of the required coursework.

Undergraduate foreign coursework that appears as transfer credit on the transcript of a regionally accredited US college will count towards the 90 hour requirement. Each individual transfer course credit granted by the US school must be listed on the transcript. Lump sum credit with no specific course and hour identification will not be accepted.

What about Claiming AP/IB Credit for Prerequisites?

While we generally recommend that as a Pre-Health Professions student you not “claim” AP/IB credit for prerequisite courses such as Biology, Chemistry, English, Physics, and Mathematics, these are important decisions that you must make and that require your careful consideration.

It may seem like a convenient way to eliminate hours from your degree plan and accelerate your path to professional school, but claiming credit can actually be detrimental to your preparation for success on entrance exams and in professional studies. Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses vary in rigor, and they are generally not equivalent to the rigor of UT Austin courses. However, your AP/IB

courses can be very good preparation for taking these courses at UT Austin, providing the opportunity to master that material, become better prepared, enhance your GPA, and demonstrate your academic ability and readiness for advanced study in health professions schools.

Unless you are academically very well prepared, it is best to start with the introductory courses. Please consult with your academic advisor for help in determining your readiness for higher level science courses. Most schools that accept AP/IB credit will expect you to take additional upper-division course work in that area of study.

Science Courses

Biology and Chemistry

If you claim credit in courses like BIO 311D and BIO 311C you may not be adequately prepared for the rigorous next course here at UT Austin, BIO 325 (Genetics). If you claim credit for CH 301 and CH 302, your first college level chemistry course at UT Austin will be CH 310M (Organic Chemistry I).

Honors students in Biology and Chemistry may claim test credit, register in the honors sequence for Biology or Chemistry, and will take additional upper-division credits in those areas, making up for the lack of first-year hours in those disciplines.

Your UT Austin faculty will expect you to be prepared to learn and understand the material conceptually and theoretically in order to understand test questions well enough to earn A's on your exams. They will teach material beyond the textbook that was not presented in your high school courses. You will be in second year courses with many students who took General Biology and General Chemistry here and are well prepared to handle the exams in the more advanced courses. They will set the standard for the grade scale or curve in your classes.

Physics

Physics is required to prepare for some optometry schools. In some cases, you will be tested on Physics in your professional school entrance exam. We strongly recommend taking physics at the college level if you are preparing for a professional school that requires physics. Also, some optometry schools require that your physics class should have an optics section dedicated to the study of wave theory and the propagation of light.

Calculus and Statistics

For the Texas health professions schools, if you take statistics in the classroom here at UT Austin, you can use statistics to satisfy the math prerequisite. Then if your degree plan or any of your science courses require calculus, you can decide with your academic advisor whether to use credit-by-exam or take the course(s) in the classroom.

For all health professions schools, both in Texas and out-of-state, it is important to check their admissions web sites for any restrictions and preferences on credit-by-exam.

Non-Science Courses

It is usually acceptable to claim credit-by-exam for general education or core curriculum requirements such as history and government. Claiming this type of credit may give you time to take the courses that will prepare you for professional school and school entrance exams. On the other hand, critical thinking skills and an understanding of ethics, society, community, cultures, history, and human behavior are important for your

success now and throughout your professional and personal life. Taking college level courses is a good way to develop these areas of knowledge.

English Literature, Rhetoric, Writing

If you claim credit for freshman writing and literature courses, we recommend taking additional courses in the classroom at the college level. Even if your high school verbal skills were strong, this type of academic skill weakens over time if you do not use it.

Verbal skills are extremely important to your success in your undergraduate course work, your entrance exams, in professional school, and as a health care professional. You must be able to read efficiently, at a good rate, with high comprehension and critical thinking skills. You must develop and maintain a good vocabulary, not just for the sciences but also for social and behavioral sciences, ethics, policies and regulations, and procedural information. Many admissions deans recommend reading well-written novels in addition to your textbook material.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Pre-optometry students should not rely on AP credits to fulfill optometry school prerequisites. Not all optometry schools accept AP credit, particularly for the science prerequisite courses, even if UT accepts AP course credits for those same courses. Each optometry school has the final say if a student meets their admission requirements and every optometry school has different policies regarding AP credit. In order to prepare students to meet the requirements of as many institutions as possible, it is advisable that UT students complete the science prerequisite courses at the university-level for a grade and credit and not rely on AP credits to fulfill prerequisite coursework.

Review the information on our prerequisite courses lists and check individual school admissions web sites or contact their admissions offices to be sure about each school's expectations. Taking courses in the college classroom will help you to compete for admission and to succeed in professional school. We strongly recommend that you use these courses as building blocks that will be the foundation for your future career.

To Q or Not to Q (or to switch to pass/fail)

No admissions committee for any health professional school likes to see "Q drops" on a transcript. This is an indication that something became too much for you to handle and that you chose to drop the course rather than see it through. There are times when the Q-drop is the best course of action, however, keep reading to see how your choice may affect your competitiveness for professional school.

More of a problem if:

1. **Q-dropping is a pattern on your transcript.** Two Q-drops can signal a possible pattern; three Q-drops create a definite pattern.
2. **It occurs in a context of inconsistent grades.** To be competitive for professional school, you should be making A's and B's with more A's than B's. If you have semesters which include B's and C's – even one or two C's, your grades are inconsistent by a professional school's standard.
3. **It's one of your prerequisite courses for professional school.** In this case, you might consider sticking with the class on a pass/fail basis. Then you only need to earn a D to earn credit. **Check with your academic advisor** about whether you can use the pass/fail option.
4. **It's any science-based course,** since the bulk of professional school curriculum will be science based.

Less of a problem if:

1. **It's the only Q-drop on your transcript at time of application to professional school.** You will want to choose wisely however, depending on the course. If you are taking a lower division or introductory course, keep in mind that upper division courses will be more challenging. You may want to hold on to that "one and only Q-drop" for later.
2. **It's a non-science course.** While professional schools want you to do well in all classes, they are likely to be less concerned if you dropped a sociology or business class.

What if there are non-academic reasons for needing to Q-drop?

Sometimes personal or family emergencies and other special circumstances make it difficult to find time for and focus on your studies. Sometimes for new students it is difficult to make the transition to UT. If you are dealing with something that is getting in the way of your school work, it is very important that you get help.

1. Talk to your academic advisor and/or an advisor in your college student division office
2. Check out the support services at the Counseling and Mental Health Center

When is switching to pass/fail a better option?

This should really only be undertaken when you are reasonably certain that you can pass the class, in other words, earn at least a D. An F from a pass/fail course is just the same as an F from a letter grade course. If you are taking a pre-requisite course that you must repeat (and you meet the above criteria of being reasonably sure you can pass), you should consider the pass/fail option. This will allow you to continue your exposure to the material for the entire semester. This will create a much stronger foundation when you repeat the course.

What if I keep the class and then I make a C or lower?

No one wants to explain a poor grade in a class, but there is actually much to be learned about being responsible for your grades (see exercise below) Talking about how you might change your strategy going forward can be not only a sign of maturity and integrity, it can also demonstrate your resilience. All of these qualities are important to future health professionals.

What did you learn from this experience?

While it can be tempting to blame others for the need to Q drop a class, you must understand that the responsibility is 100% yours. To help you identify your responsibility, ask yourself these questions.

1. Could I have met with the professor to see what I could do to improve my understanding?
2. (If my professor was difficult to understand or hard for me to follow) Did I look for other sections of the courses to sit in on so that I could learn the material in a different way?
3. Could I have identified that I needed assistance earlier in the semester? (In time to have possibly salvaged my grade)
4. Could I have managed my time better so that I had appropriate time to devote to the class?
5. Could I have checked out resources for tutoring through the Sanger Learning Center?
6. Could I have adjusted my priorities (lowering especially those which are non-academic) to allow focus on my studies?

Preparing for the possible professional school interview question

You will want to spend some time reflecting on what you could have done differently so that you did not have to drop the class (see above). If you are asked about the Q-drop, you should be able to explain where things went wrong, what you learned from the experience, and how you might choose differently in the future. Remember the Health Professions Office does Interview Prep appointments to help you prepare for your interview

Academic Assistance

[Sanger Learning Center](#) is great place to go if you need assistance succeeding academically. They have tips and appointments centered on the following:

Academic Support

Utilizing Faculty Office Hours

Visiting with Your Teaching Assistants (TAs)

Improving Your Study Skills

Course-specific Study Groups

OAT Information

Optometry schools require that applicants take the Optometry Admissions Test (OAT). The OAT is a computerized test administered year round at Prometric Testing Centers. Register for the OAT on the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) [website](#). Examinees are allowed to repeat the OAT, but must wait at least 90 days between testing dates. Applicants who have three or more OAT attempts must apply for permission to test again, and from that point forward may retest only once per twelve-month period. Scores from the four most recent attempts and the total number of attempts will be reported. On average you should aim for a 300+. The OAT covers four areas of study: 1) a survey of natural sciences (biology, general chemistry, and organic chemistry); 2) reading comprehension; 3) quantitative ability; and 4) physics knowledge.

Students can prepare for the OAT in a variety of ways, including taking a test preparatory course or by purchasing study materials individually. Students can be successful using either strategy, so you should weigh your personal needs when deciding on an approach.

Scheduling Your Exam & Preparation

Plan on taking the OAT in the early spring of your junior. Only take the exam early if you are totally prepared.

To learn how to register for the OAT along with prep tips, fees, score reporting and more, check out the OAT page on the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry website: <http://www.ada.org/en/oat>.

COURSE CONTENT TESTED ON THE OAT

- BIO 311C, BIO 311D, BIO 205L or 206L (Biology)
- BIO 325 (Genetics)
- CH 301, CH 302, CH 204 (General Chemistry)
- CH 320M, CH 320N, CH 220C (Organic Chemistry)
- E 316L or E316M or E316N or E316P (Literature)

Any of the physics sequences below:

- PHY 302K, 102M & PHY 302L, 102N **OR** PHY 317K, 117M & PHY 317L, 117N

Need a GPA Booster?

A post-baccalaureate program is for students who have already completed an undergraduate degree, and are interested in a health professions career. They need either to finish pre-requisite courses and/or need to improve their academic standing for a more competitive professional school application.

What Different Post-Bacc Programs are Available?

Essentially there are two different types of programs for students hoping to attend health profession school:

Basic Sciences: This type of program is for students who have not completed the basic requirements for optometry school. Generally this is for “career changers” who have decided to pursue medicine. The coursework can be done in a formal post-bacc program or individually at a local university.

Advanced Sciences/GPA Boosters: This type of program is designed for students who were science majors or have completed the basic science requirements. These are for students who:

- Want to stay academically engaged during a gap year while applying to medical or dental schools.
- Need to raise their GPA to become a more competitive medical school applicant.

There are not many post-bacc programs specifically directed towards optometry. However, there are post-bacc programs such as the University of North Texas (UNT’s) Master of Medical Sciences Program that prepare students for application to a variety of health professions which include optometry.

Research schools before you apply!

Thinking about what type of optometry school you are looking for? Not sure what you want in a school? Check out the following possible criteria for evaluating an optometry school’s fit for you!

What type of optometry school am I looking for?

1. Size of school’s entering class
2. Prestige of the institution
3. Training facilities
4. Opportunity to do research
5. Support programs –tutoring, counseling, student health services, childcare
6. Community building – student organizations
7. Options for financial aid/scholarship
8. Outreach/Service to Community
9. Family/Friends (Support in close proximity)
10. Lifestyle - outdoorsy, athletic, cultural arts, etc.
11. Centers/ Institutes /Programs that align with your Optometry School Goals

My Top Schools (In & Out of State) Are:

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____

REMEMBER

Make sure to research Optometry schools before deciding where to apply. Check out the list of [ASCO member schools and colleges](#) and [HPO's List of Schools](#) to help you get started and answer school specific questions.

Texas Optometry Schools

- University of Houston College of Optometry (public) <http://www.opt.uh.edu/>
- University of the Incarnate Word, Rosenberg School of Optometry (Private) <http://www.uiw.edu/optometry/>

Time Line for Applying to OT School

Fall Semester before Application Cycle

- Begin compiling list of experiences; include details such as dates, hours, tasks and responsibilities
- Begin drafting personal statement and optional essays
- Schedule a Personal Statement Brainstorming appointment with HPO
- Ask evaluators for letters of reference
- Research schools to determine where to apply

June/July/August

- [OptomCAS Application Link](#): Application tends to open at the end of June.
- Print and read application service instructions; Make a plan or “to do” checklist
 - Be sure to read instructions about score reporting; these vary year-to-year and by schools

January

- We recommend students take the OAT in early Spring, if ready
- Continue to work on personal statement/gather letters of reference

September/October

- Submit when application is complete (this includes spring grades) and you're confident you've done your best! **(Earlier is better – Ideally by early fall)**
- Complete and submit secondary applications; **applications are not complete until secondary applications are submitted.**

Spring Semester before Application Cycle (May)

- Attend Health Professions Fair, usually held in February or March to visit with professional schools.
- Obtain official transcripts from all institutions attended. Review for accuracy of information and use as reference for completing application
- Request transcripts from all institutions attended to be sent to application services
- Schedule a personal statement review with the writing center
- Finish personal statement

Fall/Spring Semester during Application Cycle

- Follow up to make sure application is verified
- Schedule interview prep appointment with Health Professions Office
- Interviews are done throughout the fall semester, and have the possibility of going into the spring semester.
- If you have multiple admissions offers, talk with a Health Professions Coach

Quick Tips: *READ and understand all application instructions for OptomCAS and individual programs you are applying to.*

- *Try to send any time sensitive application materials based on the earliest deadline for each school you are applying to. **Example: If the deadline to submit any application materials is September 1st, try to finish all materials by that time, to prevent missing any deadlines.***
- *Pay attention to the interview cycle of every school you are applying to, times will vary based on when the application deadlines are.*
- *It can take 4-6 weeks for OptomCAS to process application so submit application at least 4-6 weeks before the deadline.*

Overview of Optometry School Application Service and Resources

There is one application service that you will use to apply to Optometry School in the United States.

- **OptomCAS** (<http://www.optomcas.org/>) is the Optometry Centralized Application Service. Through this service applicants may file one application and send it to multiple optometry programs. The schools and colleges of optometry will be able to process applications more efficiently. **All schools and colleges of optometry will participate.** It can take OptomCAS 4-6 weeks to process an application

Helpful Resources:

- OptomCAS Application Process Information <https://www.optomcas.org/sample-page/how-to-apply>
- OptomCAS FAQs https://help.liaisonedu.com/OptomCAS_Applicant_Help_Center

Texas Optometry School Secondary Applications

Both Texas Optometry schools require a supplemental application. It is the responsibility of the applicant to check the requirements for each school and college of optometry to make sure all requirements have been fulfilled. Failure to submit all required OptomCAS and supplemental materials by the deadline of the school or college may jeopardize an applicant's eligibility for admission consideration.

Letters of Evaluation

Letters are key pieces to your professional school application. The letters of recommendation for OptomCAS are comprised of two sections. Part I is a rating of attributes and Part II is the letter of recommendation. Designate your Recommenders early in the application process. Check the [OptomCas website](#) for additional details and guidelines.

Check out these tips for getting to know your faculty ([video](#))

Review resources on HPO's Application Resources webpage: [Application Resources](#)

Writing Your Personal Statement

OptomCAS ESSAY PROMPT:

Use your own words to create a personal essay that responds to the OPTOMCAS

Your personal statement will be sent to all OPTOMCAS programs to which you apply and should not be personalized to any specific program. You cannot make any edits to your personal statement after you have e-submitted your completed application to OPTOMCAS. OPTOMCAS does not review your essay response for grammar or content.

You are limited to approximately 1.5 pages (4,500 characters, including spaces). Some formatting characters used in programs, such as Word (angled quotes, accents, special characters, bold, underline or italics,) will not display properly.

Read the information on writing personal statements on the Application Resource Page and watch the Personal Statement Video on HPO's YouTube channel. You are welcome to make a Personal Statement Brainstorming appointment with a Pre-Health Professions Coach to discuss your ideas.

View HPO's [Application Resources](#) page for a list of action verbs, a strengths and skills word list, and much more to help you prepare your materials.

Interview Tips and Preparation

Review [Interviewing Skills](#)

Dress Professionally:

- View our Dressing Guide <http://tinyurl.com/InterviewDressGuide>

Practice Improving Your Interview Skills:

- Schedule an Interview Prep appointment with a Pre-Health Professions Coach by using the online scheduling system or calling our front desk 512-471-3172
- You may find it helpful to reflect on how your interview went. Check out the [Post-Interview Self Evaluation Form](#).

Prepare & Practice

Be prepared to discuss your strengths and weaknesses, obstacles and inspirations, current events and personal attributes. The following sample questions are meant to provide you with a better understanding of why the interviewer might be asking the questions that they do. By asking you certain questions, interviewers are attempting to gain a better understanding of your personality. When contacted for an interview, it may help to inquire about the interview style and format so that you are better prepared.

- Define professionalism.
- Describe the differences between optometry and ophthalmology.
- Did you feel your high school prepared you well for college?
- Did you shadow optometrists? Where they in partnerships? A group-based practice?
- Do you keep up with current events?
- Explain some of the current issues between Optometrists and Ophthalmologists, regarding laws, scope of practice, etc. and why they are being challenged.
- Do you plan on being politically active as a practicing optometrist?

- Do you think it is a good idea to advertise your practice?
- Have you considered other professional programs? e.g. medicine, dentistry, etc. and why you did you choose optometry?
- How did you become interested in the field of optometry?
- How do you organize your day?
- How do you study or prepare for a test?
- If your friends were to describe you, what would they say?
- In your eyes what makes _____s optometry program different from the other schools that you have applied to?
- Is there one person in your life that gave you the greatest motivation to become an Optometrist?
- Tell me about an accomplishment you are particularly proud of.
- Tell me about two current events in the U.S.
- Tell us about any internships you have had.
- What are some current legislative issues optometry faces?
- What are your biggest strengths/weaknesses?
- What are your goals as an optometrist?
- What characteristics do you appreciate in your own optometrist?
- What did you learn about optometry during your time observing?
- What differentiates you from the rest of the pack?
- What direction do you see optometry moving in the next 5 year? 10 years?
- What do you do when you are stressed?
- What do you think about corporate optometry? Positive or negative for the profession?
- What is the difference between a patient and a customer?
- What are the differences between optometry, ophthalmology?
- What kind of books do you read?
- What motivates you to be a healthcare provider?
- What organizations were you in?
- What was your hardest class and why?
- What would you do if you are having trouble in class?
- What's your favorite ice cream flavor?
- Why do you think _____ is a good fit for you?
- What is your favorite food?
- What do you do for fun?
- How would you change your study habits to study for 20+ hours of classes?

Research Current Events

Optometry Times

A great place to keep up on news and important issues in the profession of optometry

<https://www.optometrytimes.com/>

American Optometric Association (AOA) News

Stay up to date on the current topics in optometry on the AOA website.

<http://www.aoa.org/news?sso=y>

ADVOCACY Learn about policy and legislation affecting optometry <http://www.aoa.org/advocacy?sso=y>

Financing Your Optometry Education

Financing your professional school education can be difficult. Tuition is depending on variables such as residency status and the type of institution. Tuition information can be found on the latest [Profile of Applicants](#). Many of the schools and colleges of optometry have financial arrangements or contract programs which allow students from various states to attend their institution at the resident rate. Contact the admissions officer at the school(s) or college(s) of your choice for specific tuition and fee information. There are many things to consider when looking into financing your optometry education. Some questions you can ask yourself can consist of:

- Evaluating your financial resources
- Evaluating your financial status
- Determining your eligibility for financial aid

Looking for more information?

Looking at the financial aspect of your optometry education may also be a factor in your optometry school search.

Check out the [AOA's Guide to Optometric Loans, Grants, and Scholarships](#) & [Take Charge of Your Financial Wellness in Optometry School and Beyond](#)

Add It Up! – Don't forget to include all Living Costs – Cost of Attendance is often more than tuition alone	
Tuition:	
Rent:	
Food:	
Entertainment:	
Health Insurance:	
Laboratory Fees:	
Car Insurance:	
Gas:	
Other Travel:	
Other Expenses:	

Pre-Health Professions Services

Applying to Professional School? We are here to guide you!

See an HP Peer Coach if you have questions in one or more of the following topic areas:

- Going over pre-requisites ("What do I have to take to get into X school?")
- Shadowing opportunities ("how to find, importance of, what is")
- Leadership opportunities ("how to find, importance of, what are")
- Patient care experience ("how to find, importance of, what is")
- Clubs/organizations
- How to ask for letters of recommendation/evaluation
- Course load ("Is this reasonable to take in one semester?")
- Study habits/tutoring resources
- Test-taking strategies
- How to use HPO services

Pre-Health Professions Coaching Appointments

Schedule a Pre-Health Professions Coaching session to meet with a Pre-Health Professions Coach. These appointments cover:

- Progress checks ("How am I doing?" "What else do I need to do?")
- Application Strategies/resources
- Choosing letter writers ("Who should I ask?")
- Academic turnaround ("I am worried about my GPA")
- Potential gap year planning/Post Bacc discussions
- Academic dishonesty/legal issues
- Reapplication strategies
- Study abroad timeline
- Alumni or Post-Bacc Student questions

To Q or Not to Q Discussions

Not sure what to do? Thinking of dropping a course? Then you can schedule an appointment with a Pre-Health Professions Coach about deciding on Q dropping or the pass/fail option. Check out our To Q or Not to Q guide in this guide before your appointment.

Personal Statement Brainstorming

Come speak to a Pre-Health Professions Coach to discuss your ideas before starting your personal statement. We will help you brainstorm ideas for the content of your essays. We have additional personal statement resources [here](#).

We no longer review personal statements in the Health Professions Office. However, we have developed a partnership with the University Writing Center for personal statements. The [University Writing Center](#) is an excellent resource to utilize when writing application essays. Their Writing Consultants can help you at any stage of writing, from getting started to making recommendations for a polished finished product. Some UWC Consultants are identified as knowledgeable about health professions personal statements.

Interview Prep Appointments

Discuss interview strategies with us! You can go over questions you have and perhaps practice a couple questions of your choice with a Pre-Health Professions Coach. You will receive tips and feedback to help you in your professional school interview. Dressing up for your HP Interview Prep appointment is optional, if you would like feedback on your clothing choice and you want to test whether it will be comfortable, or they can just discuss appropriate attire with you.