

PRE-OPTOMETRY

JMU Pre-Professional Health Programs



GENERAL INFORMATION

Optometrists (O.D.) are the major providers of primary vision care in the United States. They examine, diagnose, treat and manage diseases and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures, as well as diagnose related systemic conditions. Treatments include prescription glasses, contact lenses, vision therapy, aids for low vision, and in an increasing number of states, therapeutic drugs for specific diseases. As the independent primary eye care provider, the optometrist is many times the first to detect symptoms of eye disease including glaucoma and cataracts, as well as systemic diseases, e.g., diabetes, hypertension and arteriosclerosis and, in some states, is able to treat eye diseases such as glaucoma.

CHOOSING A MAJOR

Most pre-optometry students obtain a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) or Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degree while completing the requirements for admission to optometry school. **Optometry school admission committees do not require or prefer a particular undergraduate major**, as long as applicants have completed the course requirements and have demonstrated proficiency in the sciences as evidenced by the science GPA and the scores on the Optometry Admission Test (OAT).

PREREQUISITES

There are 19 programs of optometry in the continental U.S. and one in Puerto Rico. All have prerequisites in Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics and English. The required coursework is often school-specific and students are encouraged to consult the **Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)** website (www.opted.org).

The general requirements for admission to optometry school can be met at JMU with the following coursework:

BIO 114 Organisms (4 credit hours)	PHYS 140/150 College Physics I & II
BIO 214 Cell and Molecular Biology (4 credit hours)	(8 credit hours; including laboratory 140L-150L)
BIO 280 or 380 Microbiology (4 credit hours)	GPSYC 101 General Psychology (3 credit hours)
CHEM 131/132 General Chemistry I & II	
(8 credit hours; including laboratory 131L-132L)	MATH (statistics and calculus) (6 credit hours)
CHEM 241/242 Organic Chemistry I & II	ENGLISH (composition and literature): ENG, GENG,
(8 credit hours including laboratory 242L)	GHUM200 or GWRIT) (6 credit hours)

Students are encouraged to take additional coursework in **Anatomy** (BIO 290 or 320), **Physiology** (BIO 270 or 370), and/or **Biochemistry** (CHEM 361). **Students should also check the specific admissions requirements of individual optometry schools for additional recommended courses.**

ACADEMIC RECORD

For approximately the first two years of their graduate experience, optometry students are taught mainly in the lecture format and in the laboratory, in a heavily scheduled block of courses in the basic health and visual sciences. How students perform in science courses in college predicts performance at this stage. This accounts for the fact that optometry schools emphasize the science grade point average and the course loads you took as an undergraduate. In general optometry schools usually accept those who show evidence of strong intellectual ability, a good record of accomplishments, and personal traits that indicate the ability to communicate with and relate to patients.

PREPARATION TIMELINE

The application process typically begins in the summer or early fall, one year before you expect to begin classes. In order to meet this schedule, applicants are encouraged to complete their required coursework by the end of their third year of undergraduate work.

REQUIRED STANDARDIZED TEST

The Optometry Admission Test (OAT) is a standardized examination designed to measure general academic ability and comprehension of scientific information. The OAT is sponsored by the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) (www.opted.org). More information about the OAT is available at the ASCO site. All schools and colleges of optometry in the United States require the OAT. The OAT exam is computerized and examinees are allowed to take the OAT an unlimited number of times but must wait at least 90 days between testing dates

EXPERIENCE

Optometry schools view extracurricular activities as positive signs that you a student handle a rigorous curriculum and still participate in campus or community affairs. Commitment, leadership, service, responsibility, and the ability to interact effectively with others are the qualities, which the optometry school admission committees evaluate. The level and quality of participation is more important than the number or diversity of your activities.

EVALUATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

All optometry schools and colleges require evaluations to support application (OptomCAS) materials. JMU students and alumni can utilize the Pre-professional Health Programs' centralized evaluation service to provide a composite evaluation that will meet the requirements of all U.S. optometry schools.

JMU ADVISORY RESOURCES

The Institute for Innovation in Health and Human Services (IIHHS) and its staff of dedicated coordinators function to assist pre-professional students in their health career endeavors and help them realize their aspirations by providing the specific information, advice and assistance that is unique to the health professions and critical to their success. **Dr. Jeffrey Andre is the Pre-optometry Program Coordinator** (andrejt@jmu.edu, Miller Hall 1163, 540-568-1648).

The Pre-Optometry Club and the JMU Virginia Epsilon Chapter of Alpha Epsilon Delta (Health Pre-professional Honor Society) welcome students to their meetings and encourage students to become members. Pre-professional student organizations provide health career information that is invaluable to the pre-professional student. Active involvement in student organizations is evidence of students' desire to enhance their undergraduate experience.

Note: Students planning professional health careers should discuss these goals with their pre-professional health program and undergraduate major advisors. It is important to begin this planning process when students' studies are initiated; it is imperative that students plan career options. The admissions requirement information presented above should be used only as a guide when planning students' pre-professional health curriculum. It is important that students do not interpret these guidelines as definitive statements regarding the admission requirements or policies of the individual schools and colleges of professional health. Each institution specifies its own requirements and procedures. It is essential that students become familiar with these requirements and make appropriate course selections in consultation with their pre-professional health and academic advisors. Absolute admission requirements are limited to provide necessary flexibility in the undergraduate program. The course requirements for most professional health programs are similar and usually specify minimum credit in biology, chemistry and physics. Schools of professional health recognize the desirability of students having a variety of interests and diverse backgrounds. Applicants are urged to obtain a broad cultural background in such fields as literature, social science, psychology and the fine arts.

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