

Pre-Optometry Advising Guide

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Overview of Career

When a person makes an appointment regarding their vision, they may consult with an ophthalmologist, an optometrist, or an optician. All three of these eye care professionals serve an important and unique role in the eye care process. Each type of eye care professional has different levels of education, training, and expertise. As a result of these differences, each professional will provide different levels of service based on their scope of practice in relation to a person's vision care.

Optometrists are healthcare professionals who provide primary vision care ranging from sight testing and correction to the diagnosis, treatment, and management of vision changes. An **optometrist is not a medical doctor (MD/DO), instead they are America's primary eye health care providers, and are the frontline of eye and vision care.** An optometrist receives a Doctor of Optometry (OD) degree after completing four years of optometry school, preceded by three years or more years of undergraduate education. They are licensed to practice optometry, which primarily involves performing eye exams and vision tests, prescribing and dispensing corrective lenses, detecting certain eye abnormalities, and prescribing medications for certain eye diseases. Depending on state laws, optometrists can perform minor surgical procedures.

An **ophthalmologist** is a medical or osteopathic doctor who specializes in eye and vision care. **Ophthalmologists differ from optometrists and opticians in their levels of education and training.** As a medical doctor who has completed four years of undergraduate education, followed by four years of medical school, and four to five years of additional medical training after medical school, an ophthalmologist is licensed to practice medicine and surgery. An ophthalmologist diagnoses and treats all eye diseases, performs eye surgery, and prescribes and fits eyeglasses as well as contact lenses to correct vision problems. Many ophthalmologists are also involved in scientific research on the causes and cures for eye diseases and vision disorders

**** Students interested in ophthalmology must apply to medical school and should pursue a pre-medicine.****

Opticians are technicians trained to design, verify, and fit eyeglass lenses and frames, contact lenses, and other devices to correct eyesight. They use prescriptions supplied by ophthalmologists or optometrists, but do not test vision or write prescriptions for visual correction. **Opticians are not permitted to diagnose or treat eye diseases.** Opticians have a year or two of education and training, with some states requiring a license.

You can learn more about the career through [Explore Health Careers](#), [Occupational Outlook Handbook from the Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), or the [American Academy of Ophthalmology](#).

Major Map

By using major maps, students are able to engage in academic and career exploration while gaining experience in their field of study, ultimately graduating on time, with minimal debt, and the greatest professional success.

APPOINTMENT HOURS

Monday - Friday, 8 A.M. - 5 P.M.
Schedule on Handshake.
Log in at careers.vcu.edu.

OFFICE LOCATION

University Student Commons,
1st Floor, Rm. 143

CONTACT INFORMATION

careers.vcu.edu
careers@vcu.edu
(804) 828-1645

- ☐ Review the Pre-Optometry (Pre-Opt) [Major Map](#).

Academic Requirements & Declaring a Pre-Optometry Minor

Students can pursue any major at VCU while completing the academic prerequisites for admission to optometry school. Admissions committees do not give preference for any specific major. It is highly recommended that students take all prerequisite courses at VCU or a 4-year institution as well as completing 2-3 recommended science and math courses each semester within a full course load.

- ☐ To declare a Pre-Optometry minor while at VCU:
 - Complete a minimum of 12 graded credit hours
 - Obtain a minimum cumulative VCU GPA of 3.0
 - Complete BIOL 151 and BIOZ 151 with minimum grades of C
- ☐ Review the [VCU Bulletin](#) for a detailed overview of the academic requirements for each of the pre-professional health minors.
- ☐ After completing the declaration requirements students must complete the [Change of Minor Form](#). You must indicate which pre-professional health minor you wish to declare. Students are strongly encouraged to **declare one pre-professional health minor at a time**. Please consult with your Academic Advisor if you have any questions regarding completing the Change of Minor Form.
- ☐ Establish a partnership with your Pre-Professional Health and STEM Career Advisor. [Schedule an appointment](#) now.

Pre-Professional Health Hub

Join the [Pre-Professional Health Hub in Canvas](#) to access resources specifically for pre-professional health students. Joining the PPH Hub as a student will enable you to continue to have access after graduation. Resources available to students who declare a Pre-Professional Health minor include:

- Pre-Professional Health Journal - track your shadowing, volunteering, research, and other opportunities
- GPA Calculator
- Pre-Professional Health Admissions & Application Resources
- Pre-Professional Health Admissions Program Tracker

Application Process and Timeline

Students should plan to complete all academic and experiential prerequisites at least 12 months prior to their desired start date in optometry school. Essentially, if a student is planning on starting a program the fall after graduation, the student would apply to an optometry school in the Summer after their junior year.

****Although you technically only have to finish three years of undergraduate coursework to apply, most optometrists have a bachelor's degree. In addition, most optometry schools prefer or require that you receive your undergraduate degree before entering optometry school. Therefore, it is highly recommended that you plan to obtain a bachelor's degree to become a competitive applicant.****

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- ☐ Review [OptomCAS Deadlines](#) for specific application deadline dates as Optometry schools have varied applications.
- ☐ Review these [15 Tips for Applying to Optometry School](#) through the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)'s [website](#).
- ☐ Establish a partnership with your Pre-Professional Health and STEM Career Advisor. [Schedule an appointment](#) now.

Considering & Navigating a Gap Year(s)

"Gap year" reflects the year(s) after graduation before beginning health professions school. The term gap year is often misunderstood or misleading. While it does refer to the gap in time between graduation and matriculation, you should still use the year(s) to engage in experiences and opportunities to strengthen your application. It is important to use this time to explore, grow, and develop yourself as a future healthcare professional.

Students and alumni that are considering taking a gap year or more before applying to professional health programs should view our [Gap Year Planning Resource](#) to learn more about the reasons, advantages, various educational options, and timelines to consider before starting your gap period. The [Gap Year Planning Resource](#) includes links and information about the popular admissions exam tests that professional health programs require or recommend. We encourage each person to do their research on what test preparation resources are a good fit based on cost, time, or any other personal preferences.

Informational Resources

- ☐ Review the Optometry Centralized Application System (OptomCAS)'s [website](#) for a comprehensive overview of the optometry school application process.
- ☐ View the list of [Optometry schools in the U.S.A.](#)
- ☐ Visit the Explore Health Careers website to learn about [optometry](#) career options.
- ☐ Visit and review the [American Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry \(ASCO\) website](#) for access to articles, news, videos, and additional information about the field of optometry.
- ☐ [Vault Guides](#) – A sample of careers in healthcare. Each guide gives, among other valuable information, an overview of the job and entry-level requirements.
- ☐ Explore the career summary for an optometrist on [O*Net Online](#).
- ☐ Use VCU's online community, [VCU LINK](#), which connects students, alumni, and friends of the university for career advice, industry contacts, and meaningful professional relationships.

Gaining Experiences

- ☐ Review [Explore Health Careers Enrichment Programs](#).
- ☐ Review our [Summer Research Guide](#).
- ☐ Review our [Healthcare Opportunities Guide](#).
- ☐ Review our [Health & Research Opportunities Spreadsheet](#) (updated throughout the year).
- ☐ Review our [Volunteering with Vulnerable Populations in RVA resource](#).
- ☐ Visit our Undergraduate Research Office's [website](#).

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Professional Organizations

- ☐ Follow and/or join the [American Optometric Association \(AOS\)](#).
- ☐ Follow and/or join the [Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry \(ASCO\)](#).
- ☐ Join the [American Optometric Association](#).
- ☐ Join [Optometrists Network](#) to build an international working network.

**Find more professional organizations using the [CareerOneStop Association Finder Tool](#)!*

Student Organizations

The VCU student body offers a variety of organizations designed to help you build your student-based network. We strongly recommend joining both career-interest and personal-interest specific groups using [RamsConnect](#).

- ☐ Join one or more student groups.
 - Utilize the keyword function to narrow down groups. Good ones to start with would be “healthcare” or “optometry”.

Appointments

If you are interested in making an appointment with one of our Career Advisors to review your resume or discuss any other career-related topics/questions, [see which advisor advises your industry of interest](#).

We recommend that first appointments with our office are with a career advisor. In addition, we offer several different appointment mediums to better meet your needs. Choose the medium that best fits your needs.

You can [schedule an appointment](#) by logging into Handshake and selecting the time that works best for you.

Events and Career Fairs

To see our upcoming events and career fairs you can check our [website](#) or log into [Handshake](#).

Questions

If you have any questions, call our front desk at (804) 828-1645, or email us at careers@vcu.edu.

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