Pre-Optometry

What does it mean to be Pre-Optometry?

Pre-Optometry students are those who identify themselves as such, formally or informally. Western does not offer a “Pre-Optometry” major, and there is no specific major optometry schools recruit for. Admission is highly selective and includes holistic evaluation of multiple areas, all of which are important: Optometry Admission Test (OAT), GPA (cumulative and science), letters of recommendation, exposure to the profession, extracurricular and community activities, and personal interview, as well as legal and social records.

Pre-Optometry Education

Western offers undergraduate coursework that addresses prerequisites of most optometry programs but optometry programs vary in admissions requirements. General requirements include at least one year of Biology, Chemistry (general and organic), Physics, English, and College Math. Research schools of your choice to confirm all required courses.

Optometry schools emphasize the importance of a liberal arts education. Thus, you have flexibility in planning your Pre-Optometry educational program. Use your undergraduate years to explore many academic fields, to develop basic skills and knowledge, to demonstrate expertise, and to experience a field of study (major) of your choice. Pick one in which you both excel and enjoy. Majors of recent pre-optometry students include Anthropology, Art, Behavioral Neuroscience, Biology, Geology, Math, Psychology, and Spanish.

Program Checkpoints (Note: each person’s path will look different; use this as a guide ONLY)

Freshman year:
- Take Math Placement Test; begin appropriate math sequence to complete Calculus: MATH 124, 125.
- Begin General Chemistry series as soon as possible: CHEM 121, 122, 123 [or Honors: 125, 126, 225].
- Begin General Biology series winter or spring quarter: BIOL 204, 205, 206.
- Work on GUR courses, including ENG 101 and PSY 101.
- Begin prerequisite and co-requisite courses for possible major.
- Meet with Pre-Healthcare Advisors (OM 280) to develop a plan of study.

Sophomore year:
- Begin Organic Chemistry series: CHEM 351, 352, 353, 354, and 355 or 356 (depending upon major).
- Begin Physics sequence: PHYS 114, 115, 116 or 161, 162, 163 (depending upon major).
- Begin Microbiology sophomore or junior year: BIOL 345, 346 or BIOL 245 (depending upon major).
- Take stats class: MATH 240 (or equivalent in major, if offered).
- Take a second English composition course: ENG 201 or 202.
- Take a second Psychology course: PSY 210 or 220.
- Declare or apply for major.
- Begin shadowing Optometrists sophomore and/or junior year.

Junior year:
- Research optometry schools and graduate programs.
- Take Anatomy & Physiology: BIOL 348, 349 (if required; varies by school).
- Begin Biochemistry: CHEM 471, 472.
- Take a third English composition course: select from ENG 201, 202, 301 or 302.
- Prepare for the Optometry Admission Test (OAT)*; take the summer before anticipated admission.
- Begin primary application to the Optometry Centralized Application Service (OptomCAS).
- Draft personal statement.
- Request letters of recommendation from professors and professionals.

Senior year:
- Prepare for possible optometry school interview with a mock interview (or do spring of junior year).
- Complete major, GUR, WP, and other graduation requirements.
- Meet with declared major advisor and apply for graduation two quarters before graduation.

NOTE: Advanced Placement may not be recognized by all professional schools as college-earned credit. Check with each school. [It is better to view any earned credits as qualifying to enroll in upper-division courses rather than as “testing out” of prerequisites.]

*OAT—Optometry Admission Test is comprised of four scored sections: Natural Sciences (Biology, General Chemistry, Organic Chemistry), Reading Comprehension, Physics, and Quantitative Reasoning.

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Pre-Healthcare Professions Advising
Website: www.wwu.edu/careers/prehealth.shtml

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Core Courses

Academic course requirements for optometry schools vary but, regardless of your major, certain prerequisites are expected by most schools and include:

- General Chemistry with labs series: CHEM 121¹, 122, 123 (5, 5, 4 credits) [or Honors: CHEM 125¹, 126, 225 (5 each)]
- General Biology with labs series BIOL 204², 205, 206 (5 each), and additional courses under advisement
- Organic Chemistry with lab series: CHEM 351, 352, 353 (4, 4, 3); labs: 354 & 355 or 356 (3 or 2)
- 1-2 quarters of Anatomy & Physiology: BIOL 348, 349 (5 each)
- 1-2 quarters of Biochemistry: CHEM 471, 472 (4 each)
- Physics with labs series: PHYS 114³, 115, 116 (5 each) or PHYS 161⁴, 162, 163 (5 each)
- 1-2 quarters Microbiology with labs: BIOL 345, 346 (3, 2) or BIOL 245 (5)

 Additional Resources

Courses listed below apply to WWU GUR as well as some prerequisites for optometry schools and preparation for the OAT.

ACOM: ENG 101
BCOM: ENG 202
QSR: MATH 124, 240
SSC: PSY 101
LSCI: BIOL 204, 205, 206
CHEM 121, 122, 123 [or Honors: CHEM 125, 126, 225]
PHYS 115, 116, 161, 162, 163
SCI: PHYS 114

DECLARING A MAJOR: Always check with the department of your intended major for clarification about how to declare. Many programs (such as Behavioral Neuroscience, Biology, Chemistry, Kinesiology, and others) do not allow students to declare a major until certain prerequisites have been met, such as having taken specific courses or maintaining a specific GPA. Many departments allow you to sign up as a “pre-major” which will keep you updated on major requirements as well as events happening within the department.

ACCESS TO CLASSES: Due to high student demand for many upper-division courses, especially in the sciences, many departments give enrollment priority to students who are declared in the major over those seeking enrollment for elective credit or as a prerequisite for professional school. Registration details for heavily impacted courses and programs change frequently and are posted at department websites.

REPEATING COURSES: In general, this is not viewed favorably by professional schools but an isolated case may be acceptable. It will likely also require an explanation on your application, so discuss your options first with a Pre-healthcare Advisor. Both dropping and repeating courses can have impact on eligibility for financial aid, scholarships, and athletic participation. Speak to an advisor in each area that applies to you when making your decision.

NOTE: It is imperative that students begin general chemistry as early in their program as possible.

Additional Resources

To join the advisors’ Pre-optometry Listserv, e-mail Renee.Murray@wwu.edu with SUBJECT: pre-optometry listserv, Last name, First name, student number, and major and concentration (if declared).

WWU Pre-Health Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/wwuprehealth/

Pre-Optometry Club: Join this and other WWU Associated Students clubs at http://as.wwu.edu/clubs/.

Association of Schools & Colleges of Optometry (ASCO): www.opted.org provides links to:
- Optometry Admission Test (OAT)
- Optometry Centralized Application Service (OptomCAS)

OAT—Take the exam no later than August of the year preceding anticipated admission. OAT information, including registration and preparation guides, is available at www.aoa.org/en/oat.

American Optometric Association (AOA) www.aoa.org