Pre-Optometry

What does it mean to be Pre-Optometry at WWU?

Pre-Optometry students are those who identify themselves as such, formally or informally with Pre-Healthcare Advising. Western does not offer a "Pre-Optometry" major, and there is no formula for getting into optometry school. Selection committees evaluate applicants across multiple areas through a holistic review process. Important components include OAT score, GPA (both cumulative and science/math), letters of recommendation, extracurricular activities, community service, diversity awareness, and an interview, as well as background checks (including legal, conduct, and social records).

Pre-Optometry Education

Optometry schools vary somewhat in admission requirements. Research the schools of your choice to confirm all required courses. Schools do emphasize the importance of a liberal arts education giving you flexibility in planning your educational program around pre-optometry requirements. 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. Align with a major in which you both excel and enjoy. While Biology and Chemistry are popular choices, majors of recent pre-healthcare students include Anthropology, Behavioral Neuroscience, Business, Kinesiology, Languages (i.e. Spanish), Psychology, and Fairhaven self-designed programs. Some pursue combined majors such as Anthropology/Biology, Biochemistry, and Cellular & Molecular Biology.

Core Courses

Regardless of your major, certain prerequisite courses expected by most schools include:

CHEMISTRY (a sequence of eight courses)

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

- General Chemistry series (includes labs): CHEM 161, 162, 163 [or Honors equivalent]
- Organic Chemistry lecture series: CHEM 351, 352, 353;
  - with two accompanying labs: 354 and either 355 or 356 (depending upon major)
- Biochemistry: CHEM 471, 472

BIOLOGY

- General Biology series (includes labs): BIOL 204, 205, 206
- Additional courses under advisement to possibly include Microbiology and A&P

PHYSICS

- Physics series (includes labs): PHYS 114, 115, 116 [or PHYS 161, 162, 163 series]

MATHEMATICS

- Calculus: MATH 124, 125
- Statistics: MATH 240 [or major equivalent; i.e. BIOL 340 for Biology majors]

OTHER (NON-SCIENCE)

- Psychology: PSY 101 and either 210 or 220
- 1-2 English composition courses: ENG 101 plus select from 201, 202, 301, or 302

This document is for preliminary advising purposes only.

We encourage you to meet with a Pre-Healthcare advisor on a regular basis to determine a plan that is best for you.

Keep informed

- WWU students may join the Advisor’s Pre-optometry Listserv. To join, e-mail Anna.Tognazzini@wwu.edu with the following SUBJECT information: Pre-optometry listserv, Last name, First name, WWU student number, and major (if declared).
- Pre-Optometry Club: Join this and other WWU Associated Students clubs at www.as.wwu.edu/clubs/.
Notes

ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP): Check with targeted schools whether they recognize AP as college-earned credit. Not all do. It is better to view any earned credits as qualifying to enroll in upper-division courses rather than as “testing out” of prerequisites.

DECLARING A MAJOR: Departments vary in how to declare majors. Behavioral Neuroscience, Biology, Chemistry, and others allow students to declare as a “pre-major” while taking their specified prerequisites. Some majors require a specific GPA in certain courses. Declare early, even as a “pre-major”, to help shorten your time to degree. While working on any pre-major content, explore many disciplines to keep your options open.

ACCESS TO CLASSES: High demand exists for upper-division courses, especially in the sciences. Many departments grant enrollment priority to students declared in specific majors over those seeking enrollment for professional school purposes. Registration access procedures for courses can change, and departments generally provide updates via their websites and email notifications, or by checking with the department’s program coordinator.

REPEATING/DROPPING COURSES: When you repeat a course, only your most recent grade is used when Western calculates your GPA. However, the class still shows up on your transcript. Although some students think that repeating a course will help them get into professional schools, this is almost always untrue. Medical schools will take into account ALL college-level coursework when performing their own calculation of your GPA, and this will include any courses you have repeated at Western. Still, in some circumstances it may be appropriate to repeat a course so talk to an advisor to be sure. Also, dropping a course can have an impact on eligibility for financial aid, scholarships, and athletic participation so consider your options carefully and speak with an advisor before making a decision.

SHADOWING: Students should gain shadowing experience with a non-relative optometrist to develop awareness of the profession and generate a professional letter of recommendation. Discuss your shadowing options with Pre-healthcare advisors.

OAT: The Optometry Admission Test is administered year round at Prometric test sites. Applicants typically take the exam within the year preceding anticipated admission. OAT information is available at www.ada.org/en/oat.

Additional Resources

WWU Allied Health Advising: www.wwu.edu/alliedhealth
WWU Pre-health Pinterest: www.pinterest.com/wwuprehealth/
Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO): www.opted.org
American Optometric Association (AOA): www.aoa.org
Explore Health Careers: www.explorehealthcareers.org

Pre-Healthcare Advising Events

Typical programming events offered by Pre-Healthcare Advising include (but are not limited to):

Fall:
Orientation Session: Getting you from WWU to professional school (EYE DOC)
Health Professional & Grad School Info Fair, October 18 in MAC gym
Winter Registration Walk-in Advising: Nov 14 and Nov 15, 12-2 in BI 415

Winter:
Kaplan-sponsored practice MCAT in late January/February
Spring Registration Walk-in Advising: Feb 27 and 28, 12-2 in BI 415

Spring:
The Healthcare Professional School Application: A session overviewing the process
Fall Registration Walk-in Advising: May 15 and 16, 12-2 in BI 415