



10 Steps to Becoming a Competitive Applicant

It is our pleasure to counsel pre-optometry students about the admissions process and how to plan a strategy to be the most competitive applicant they can be.

We act like “applicant personal trainers” by helping an applicant prepare for the competition they’ll face during the admissions process. It’s important to understand that when the admissions season begins and the competition gets underway, it’s up to each applicant to compete within the pool for an interview invitation. For any given admissions cycle, it’s impossible to predict what it takes to be a competitive applicant because the process is not formulaic. Each season’s competition varies depending on the number and competitiveness of the applicants within the pool. The advice given here is based patterns of past seasons.

Please note, the recommendations for GPA and OAT scores outlined in 10 Steps are not what you need to get accepted; rather, they are objectives to aim for and will most definitely make you a competitive applicant for our program.



Dr. Jane Ann Munroe, Assistant Dean of Admissions
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1. **GPA:**

Competitive applicants are advised to have an overall GPA of 3.0. For advice on how to strategically plan to raise your GPA, send your request to ODadmissions@ketchum.edu

2. **OAT Scores:**

OAT section scores are based on an index ranging from 200 to 400 with a score of 300 being the 50th percentile. A competitive applicant has OAT section scores for “Academic Average,” “Total Science” and “Reading Comprehension” of at least 300.

The OAT must be taken no more than 2 years prior to the date of your application submission. You are not penalized for taking the OAT multiple times. If you take the OAT more than once, we will look at your best “set” of scores, which are scores from one single test date. For example, if you have taken the OAT several times, we do not use your Physics section score from one test date and combine it with your Biology section score from another test date. We consider **ONLY** your best score set.

3. **Shadow, Shadow, Shadow and then Shadow Some More:**

The most common reason why an applicant fails in an interview setting is lack of shadowing experience. Key to the interview is exploring, understanding, and being able to articulate your reasons for making the decision to become a doctor of optometry. You’ll need a broad experiential base to answer that all-important question, “Why do you want to be an optometrist?”

Shadowing Objectives:

- Taking on the responsibility for making autonomous decisions about a patient's care—in short, taking on the yoke of being a doctor.
- The daily task of patient care: does your temperament lend itself to this duty?
- Explore the sub-specialties of optometry: cornea and contact lenses, ocular disease, low vision, vision therapy, and pediatrics.
- Understand optometry's role in U.S. healthcare delivery and how optometrists function within the healthcare system.
- Understand the difference between an optometrist and an ophthalmologist.
- Commitment to being a life-long learner.
- Being an optometrist is synonymous with being an advocate for the profession—find out what this means. Ask to attend local chapters of the American Optometric Association (AOA) meetings as a guest of the shadowing optometrist. Such an experience will help you understand why, through optometry's long history, it's been dubbed "The Legislated Profession."
- Be able to project yourself into the profession and its future with enthusiasm and develop working goals specific to your future career in optometry.

Shadowing can be done in a 1-2 day experience or even by interviewing an optometrist. Shadowing is not an internship nor is it work-experience. The most important objectives for shadowing are: 1) to gain a working knowledge of the profession—its past, present and future and 2) to learn why it's a good fit for you personally. For more tips on shadowing, send your request to ODadmissions@ketchum.edu

4. Community Service with Emphasis on Leadership Experience:

Good doctors have a heart for service, not only to their patients but to their communities as well. Applicants demonstrate these qualities by the way they spend their discretionary time.

Optometry is always on the lookout for its future leaders. Being a relatively young profession (a little over 100 years), optometric forefathers had to fight hard! Using the courts and political system as their battleground, they carved out and molded this great profession which you are about to inherit. The profession is looking toward the future, for those willing to join our ranks and continue this process. SCCO is looking for applicants who are willing to take the initiative to help keep optometry effective politically. Applicants showing a penchant for and a history of roles in leadership will stand out when it comes time to interview. Showing leadership experience and potential are ways to be a distinctive applicant.

5. Join the Pre-Optometry Club on Your Campus—No Club? Start One!

A great way to keep on top of admission trends, get tips from students just like you who wish to be doctors of optometry and hear talks from optometry school representatives is to join the Pre-Optometry Club on your campus. What, you say there isn't one? You've now been presented with a golden opportunity! Demonstrate your leadership initiative by starting a club on your campus. Pre-Optometry Clubs serve the profession in perpetuity—you'll be doing your profession a great service by starting a club. Need information about starting up a Pre-Optometry Club, email and ask for the flyer that will explain how at ODadmissions@ketchum.edu

6. Visit SCCO's Campus. Talk to an Advisor. Take Advantage of an Admissions Workshop or Attend an Admissions Open House:

We have a name for applicants who show up to interview and have never visited our campus or communicated with admissions counselors—we call them "Stealth Applicants." Learn about SCCO online

through its website (www.ketchum.edu) and social media. Have a compelling response to the question, “Why do you wish to attend SCCO?”

The Admissions Open House is an event held every spring. It is designed for a general audience of students and their families who wish to learn more about the profession. Both guest and students speakers discuss topics related to the profession of optometry, the admissions process and student life at SCCO. Guests are treated to campus tours and lab demonstrations.

Admissions Workshops are designed specifically for the pre-optometry student who is ready to apply. Three identical summer sessions are offered. Detailed information is provided about the admissions process and the interview. Clinical faculty who do interviews address the Workshop and help shed light on what they look for in an interviewing applicant. This is a reservation-only event.

Up-to-date information on Admissions Events, visit:

<http://www.ketchum.edu/index.php/admissions/news-and-events>

7. **Join SCCO on Social Media**

Join SCCO on Facebook:

SCCO’s Pre-Optometry Group on Facebook: Get your questions answered by admissions officers and SCCO students. This is a members-only group. <http://www.facebook.com/groups/SCCOadmissions/>

SCCO’s Admissions Facebook Page: For all levels of interest

<http://www.facebook.com/SCCOAdmissions>

Subscribe to SCCO’s YouTube Channel:

See videos on many different topics such as SCCO student life, an applicant interview and campus events. The ongoing series, “What You Should Know—Optometry. Admissions and SCCO,” features information on a wide range of topics related to the profession and the admissions process.

Link to SCCO’s YouTube Channel: <http://www.youtube.com/user/janeannmunroe?feature=guide>

Follow SCCO Admissions on Twitter:

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/ODadmissionSCCO>

Join the Conversation on SCCO’s Wordpress Blog:

A comprehensive source with articles on the admissions process, shadowing, and OAT preparation. Meet members of SCCO’s campus community

Wordpress Blog: <http://optometryadmissions.wordpress.com/>

8. **Learn and Practice Good Time-Management and Stress-Management Skills**

Successful students know how to prioritize. They are organized and have learned to be good time-managers. They are disciplined in their practices. How do you eat an elephant? Skilled time-managers know the answer: “One bite at a time!” Questions related to this topic are an integral part of the interview process. Having successful time and stress management skills is essential for the competitive applicant.

9. **Gain Understanding of Your Own Subjective Personal Bias**

Do you have an understanding how they are perceived in personal interactions? The interview is an example of such a setting. The first step toward gaining perspective is to understand your own personal bias through better understanding your own personality and how it differs from others. Myers-Briggs is a respected

personality profile test that will help. Free Myers-Briggs personality tests can be found online. Acting and speech classes are perfect forums to learn more about oneself through the process of subjective peer review. Mock interview are also helpful. Effective communication and understanding human typology will be skills you will use routinely in future patient interactions.

We have a member of the clinic faculty who does many interviews. His interview skills are effective and he's highly perceptive. Even though a standard interview lasts 45 minutes, this doctor is known for his 15 minute interviews. I used to question the efficacy of such a practice until I talked to said doctor. When asked to justify his interview philosophy, his response was profound: "It's simple. Either an applicant 'draws' me in within 15 minutes or they don't. If they can't draw me in, they won't be able to draw in a patient—they won't be an effective clinician." He's right!

10. Become a Specialist in SCCO's Admissions Process

Applicants make the erroneous assumption that all colleges of optometry are part of the same system and employ the same philosophy when recruiting applicants. This couldn't be more untrue! Contact each school you're applying to and find out specifically what they are seeking in an applicant. Take time to learn about and truly understand an optometry program by first thoroughly researching its website and especially its mission statement and history. Ask questions about what makes it stand out and for what contribution within optometric education it is most well-known.

SCCO wants students who have been contemplative about their choice in an optometric program. You choose us and we choose you—a process that produces a mutually beneficial association which is going to last a career lifetime! Email us for a copy of "Why Choose SCCO" at ODadmissions@ketchum.edu

Don't make assumptions about the admissions process. Be a specialist on the way the admissions process works for each program. Check on the status of your application. Keep the Student Affairs Office updated on your contact information. It's best to direct your communication via email. I'm very good at answering email by replying with FAQ formatted information for the questions you ask and ones you don't. Get yourself ready to compete within the applicant pool!

**A prescription for success for the admissions process....
It's all ahead of you!**