



OPTOMETRY APPLICATION GUIDE

2025 CYCLE





CONGRATULATIONS!

You're one step closer to applying in the 2025 application cycle.

Please take a look at the contents of this packet and prepare for application submission. Please reach out to your individual PreHealth Advisor if you have any additional questions.

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What are the next steps in the Application Readiness Program, submitting individual letters, and application submission process?

Application Readiness Program Deadlines:

January 31: Self-Assessment Due (uploaded to MAP)

May 15: Deadline to complete required Application Readiness Meeting (ARM) with your assigned PreHealth Advisor

Individual Letters of Evaluation:

When requesting individual Letters of Evaluation, please do not request them through your Medical Applicant Portal. Instead, review your schools' individual letter requirements and follow the instructions for requesting letters in the centralized application service for your health professional school application, or the directions of the specific schools if they have a different application process. Candidates applying with individual letters are encouraged to consult with their individual PreHealth Advisor to establish a timeline for requesting letters.

Application Dates

While some applications will open for editing several weeks before they can be submitted and others will open for immediate submission, we encourage applicants to spend ample amounts of time (2-3 weeks) reviewing for accuracy, typos, grammar, etc. Before you submit, we recommend printing and reading it one final time. Very few sections can be edited after submission, so it is imperative that your work is proofread.

The **2025 OptomCAS Application** will launch at the end of June/beginning of July. Applicants may start and submit the OptomCAS application as soon as it is available. Application deadlines will vary for each school or college of optometry. Information on application deadlines can be found at [Deadlines and Other Information](#). We recommend that you work on your application for two to three weeks before submitting your application to ensure you've been thorough. You can make [limited changes](#) after submission, but may add evaluation requests and programs.

The **2025 VMCAS Application** will launch in January. Applications will usually open for submission late spring/early summer. This means you are able to work on your application for several months before you are able to submit your application. We recommend that you work on your application for two to three weeks before submitting your application to ensure you've been thorough. You can make [limited changes](#) after submission.

TMDSAS (for Veterinary programs in Texas). The TMDSAS application will open at the beginning of May. Applicants may start to submit their TMDSAS application May 15th. We recommend that you work on your application for two to three weeks before submitting your application to ensure you've been thorough. You can make [limited changes](#) after submission. You may review the [TMDSAS Applicant Guide](#) for more information.

For more detailed instructions on your specific application, please refer to pages 10-11 of this packet.

Apply Early!

The early bird catches the worm! Health Professional programs receive thousands of applications each year. An early application submission is strongly recommended as applicants applying early have a significantly higher chance of success compared to their peers who apply later in the cycle. Once applicants submit their application, it may take several weeks for their application to become verified (as long as six weeks during peak processing times).

Applications must be verified before the Central Application Service transmits them to health professional programs. Some programs may not release secondary or supplemental applications until the verification process is completed.

Requesting Your Individual Letters

Those applying to Optometry or Veterinary program will apply with individual letters of recommendation. Please do not request individual letters through MAP. Instead, follow the instructions in the common application for your profession ([OptomCAS Letters of Evaluation for Optometry applicants](#), and the [Veterinary School Directory](#) for Veterinary applicants).

COMPETENCIES

What do health profession programs look for in applicants?

While the competencies below derive from the AAMC, they are applicable to all health profession admission processes. Review the competencies throughout your application process, making sure to reflect these in your essays, experience/activities descriptions, and interviews.

Professional Competencies

Commitment to Learning and Growth: Practices continuous personal and professional growth for improvement, including setting and communicating goals for learning and development; reflects on successes, challenges, and mistakes; pursues opportunities to improve knowledge and understanding; and asks for and incorporates feedback to learn and grow.

Cultural Awareness: Appreciates how historical, sociocultural, political, and economic factors affect others' interactions, behaviors, and well-being; values diversity; and demonstrates a desire to learn about different cultures, beliefs, and values.

Cultural Humility: Seeks out and engages diverse and divergent perspectives with a desire to understand and willingness to adjust one's mindset; understands a situation or idea from alternative viewpoints; reflects on one's values, beliefs, and identities and how they may affect others; reflects on and addresses bias in oneself and others; and fosters a supportive environment that values inclusivity.

Empathy and Compassion: Recognizes, understands, and acknowledges others' experiences, feelings, perspectives, and reactions to situations; is sensitive to others' needs and feelings; and demonstrates a desire to help others and alleviate others' distress.

Ethical Responsibility to Self and Others: Behaves with honesty and integrity; considers multiple and/or conflicting principles and values to inform decisions; adheres to ethical principles when carrying out professional obligations; resists pressure to engage in unethical behavior; and encourages others to behave honestly and ethically.

Interpersonal Skills: Demonstrates an awareness of how social and behavioral cues affect people's interactions and behaviors; adjusts behaviors appropriately in response to these cues; recognizes and manages one's emotions and understands how emotions impact others or a situation; and treats others with dignity, courtesy, and respect.

Oral Communication: Effectively conveys information to others using spoken words and sentences; actively listens to understand the meaning and intent behind what others say; and recognizes potential communication barriers and adjusts approach or clarifies information as needed.

Reliability and Dependability: Demonstrates accountability for performance and responsibilities to self and others; prioritizes and fulfills obligations in a timely and satisfactory manner; and understands consequences of not fulfilling one's responsibilities to self and others.

Resilience and Adaptability: Perseveres in challenging, stressful, or ambiguous environments or situations by adjusting behavior or approach in response to new information, changing conditions, or unexpected obstacles, and recognizes and seeks help and support when needed; recovers from and reflects on setbacks; and balances personal well-being with responsibilities.

Service Orientation: Shows a commitment to something larger than oneself; demonstrates dedication to service and a commitment to making meaningful contributions that meet the needs of communities.

Teamwork and Collaboration: Collaborates with others to achieve shared goals and prioritizes shared goals; adjusts role between team member and leader based on one's own and others' expertise and experience; shares information with team members and encourages this behavior in others; and gives and accepts feedback to improve team performance.

Science Competencies

Human Behavior: Applies knowledge of the self, others, and social systems to solve problems related to the psychological, sociocultural, and biological factors that influence health and well-being.

Living Systems: Applies knowledge and skill in the natural sciences to solve problems related to molecular and macro systems, including biomolecules, molecules, cells, and organs.

Thinking and Reasoning Competencies

Critical Thinking: Uses logic and reasoning to identify the strengths and weaknesses of alternative solutions, conclusions, or approaches to problems.

Quantitative Reasoning: Applies quantitative reasoning and appropriate mathematics to describe or explain phenomena in the natural world.

Scientific Inquiry: Applies knowledge of the scientific process to integrate and synthesize information, solve problems, and formulate research questions and hypotheses; is facile in the language of the sciences and uses it to participate in the discourse of science and explain how scientific knowledge is discovered and validated.

Written Communication: Effectively conveys information to others by using written words and sentences.



LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Applying with Individual Letters

As composite letters of evaluation (i.e., Committee Letter or Letter Packet) are not a traditional piece of an optometry or veterinary school application, those applying to optometry or veterinary programs will apply with individual letters of recommendation. Please do not request individual letters through MAP. Instead, follow the instructions in the common application for your profession

Optometry Applicants:

Review the OptomCAS Letters of Evaluation, or the directions of the specific schools if they have a different application process. You can learn more about the OptomCAS Letters of Recommendation Process [here](#).

Veterinary Applicants:

Review the [Veterinary School Directory](#), under the “Entrance Requirements” tab of each program, or the directions of the specific schools if they have a different application process. You can learn more about the VMCAS Letters of Recommendation Process [here](#). You can learn more about the TMDSAS Letters of Recommendation Process [here](#).

Additional Resources:

Review a recording of our Letters of Evaluation Workshop [here](#).

Helpful Resources for Letter Writers:

The Association of American Medical College (AAMC) [Guidelines for Writing Letters of Recommendation](#) are applicable to all health professions. You are encouraged to share this resource with your letter writers.





THE PERSONAL STATEMENT

Tips for developing a strong essay

At this point, you most likely have brainstormed topics and/or written at least a preliminary draft of your personal statement. As you prepare to finalized your statement for your application, remember the following:

Be Creative

Though you may feel as though your statement needs to contain a specific number of details, experiences, and references, please remember that your personality and ideals should shine through the words on the page. This is an admissions committee's closest look at who you are as an applicant before making the decision to invite you on campus for an interview.

Establish Your Theme

One of the best ways to construct a statement if you are truly struggling is to form the backbone first. Now that you have completed your Self-Assessment, look back on all of your experiences and identify one or more themes that have persisted throughout. How have these themes informed your current choice to apply to a health graduate program? How have all of your experiences connected either in real life or in your mind to create a larger picture of healthcare or patient care? For example, a theme of "Overcoming Adversity" in your journey could easily translate into how you wish to help patients facing a difficult road ahead. A theme of "Discovery/Self-Motivation" could translate into your excitement for research or advancing best practices in a clinical setting.

Who's The Main Character?

Remember that you are the protagonist of your own personal statement. This may sound obvious, but applicants frequently misjudge how little they inject themselves, their reactions, their lessons-learned into their essay. Introducing doctors, PI's, professors, supervisors, etc. can be a great way to demonstrate an experience you hope to emulate, but keeping yourself in the background throughout will lead to a lack of understanding of who *you* are as an applicant.

A Balance of Humility

This is the time to talk about your accomplishments, your victories and bright spots along your PreHealth journey. It is not the time, however, to push the boundaries of reality to brag. An essay that exudes arrogance or superiority will not impress an admissions committee, but instead act as a concern that the applicant would not be able to work well within a team.

One Statement = One Writer

While we wholeheartedly advise you to ask for feedback from various sources, both professional and personal, we ask that at the end of the day, the statement is a document wholly written by you in your own voice. If you receive heavy edits or content suggestions from others, make sure to ultimately rewrite them from your own perspective rather than copying and pasting. Different voices can cause dissonance when reading through a personal statement.

Resources

If you are experiencing trouble coming up with a strong statement or would like additional support, we encourage applicants to review the [Personal Statement Workshop](#) and/or connect with the [Writing Center](#). Walk-in and scheduled appointments are available to current students and alumni. Appointments can be made on their website. Additional resources can be found on the PMPH website for your respective profession under the "[Applying](#)" drop-down.



CHOOSING SCHOOLS

How should I approach creating my schools list?

Program Databases

Selecting a program can be one of your biggest decisions. Utilizing an online database enables you to browse, search, sort, and compare information about programs, and more. Applicants are encouraged to review the [Optometry Programs Admissions Directory](#), the [Veterinary Medical School Admission Requirements \(VMSAR\)](#), and/or [Texas programs](#) for their respective health profession in order to better understand programs they are considering. Applicants are expected to additionally review the individual websites for each program they are considering.

How Many Schools to Choose

We advise applying to 6 to 9 optometry or veterinary programs - give or take a few. This allows you to still apply to a broad range of schools but requires you to narrow choices to programs for which you are a good fit, which will ultimately lead to a higher chance of success.

Academic Metrics

Most likely, you will not be able to create a final program list until you have received your entrance exam score (if required for your chosen health profession) and understand where you fall against each program's admissions data. If data is available on highest and lowest GPA/exam score per school, use this data to understand if you are a realistic applicant. Depending on your entrance exam scores and GPA, applicants should include schools they believe may be highly competitive, schools they believe are a great match, and schools for which they believe they are highly qualified, with a majority in the match range.

Institutional Fit

Browsing a program's website is vital to understanding the key factors that set it apart from its peers. The mission statement will provide a window into the guiding principles that drive the goals of the program. Additionally, you should consider if you would personally be happy at the institution regarding factors like geographic location, commitment to diversifying healthcare, religious affiliation, etc.

Student Opportunities


Outside of the academic nature of each school, you will find specific clinical, service, and research opportunities that are unique. Are you able to find transparency regarding research funding? Is there flexibility for you to create your own projects? What kinds of patients do the school's students typically work with? Are there opportunities to give back to the local community? Keep these questions in mind as you create your final list.

Public vs Private

When considering institutional acceptance rates, public vs private can play a large role. Public institutions typically reserve a certain number of seats for in-state applicants for a variety of reasons, including funding. Private institutions are not bound to the same expectations and are more accessible to out-of-state applicants. School status can also affect the cost of tuition, with private programs often costing more per year on average.

Additional Resources

For additional support in selecting programs you may review the [Choosing Your Schools Workshop](#). We also recommend attending virtual and in-person admissions events ahead of application.



THE NORTHEASTERN ADVANTAGE

How can I highlight Northeastern experiences on my application?

Co-op

One of the most unique experiences that the majority of NU students enjoy is co-op. These months-long, full-time employment experiences can easily set you apart from your peers around the country. Make sure to refer to co-op as full-time employment, not just as an "internship". Many students have a full year of employment in the industry before submitting an application. Take advantage of this experience when reflecting on your professionalism, your adaptability, and your preparedness for graduate education.

Global Experiences

Northeastern offers programming beyond its flagship Boston campus through a global university system. This means you have global access to innovation and immersive education, research, and workforce experience. Highlighting a global experience on your application demonstrates your ability to think on a global scale, appreciate and collaborate with cultures different than your own, and in some cases showcase professional experience in an international setting. If you had the opportunity to travel abroad through NUin/NUBound/Global Scholars, a Dialogue of Civilization (DOC), a Global Co-op, a traditional study abroad semester, etc., make sure to weave these experiences into your application.

The Honors Program

If you have ever been a part of the Honors Program consider the additional academic rigor and experiential learning opportunities you have experienced while at Northeastern. Consider how global citizenship (i.e. Honors DOC), leadership (i.e. Honors Ambassadors), networked communities (i.e. Honors LLC), etc. have been integrated into your PreHealth experience through Honors.

Non-Traditional/Post-baccalaureate Applicants

CPS post-baccalaureate students, and applicants with significant time between graduation and the application, have unique professional and interdisciplinary experiences that should be highlighted rather than hidden on their application to health professional school. We highly recommend applicants with this background include their diverse professional experiences, demonstrated ability to manage multiple demanding responsibilities, and proven commitment to their chosen healthcare path. Avoid the temptation to leave out experiences that may not fit the traditional pre-health mold and lean into the qualities that make you an asset to your future health professional school cohort and the future of medicine.



SCHOOLS ATTENDED & TRANSCRIPTS

Colleges/Schools Attended:

If you have ever taken a post-secondary course anywhere other than at Northeastern University, taken foreign coursework including a study abroad course, or taken any military coursework, you must add these schools to your application. This includes college courses taken while in high school and courses taken at another institution even if credit was transferred. NOTE: Dialogues of Civilization are NU courses, and should not be entered separately from your NU coursework.

Transcripts:

Official transcripts must be sent to your application from the Registrar's Office at any US and English-Canadian colleges and universities you have attended or taken coursework including: Northeastern University, Overseas US Institutions (i.e. American College of Thessaloniki), and/or any institution you were previously enrolled in a degree program or took individual courses (including dual enrollment courses taken in high school). Request transcripts early, once your application launches, as your application cannot be verified until they are received! If you are currently enrolled in courses, it is best to wait until grades are posted before requesting transcripts.

Requesting Transcripts from Northeastern University:

The Northeastern University Registrar's Office utilizes Parchment to provide and deliver official transcripts electronically. You can navigate to Parchment and request transcripts via Parchment, [here](#). When setting your Delivery Destination in Parchment, search and select OptomCAS or VMCAS and/or TMDSAS. Attach your completed corresponding Transcript ID Form to your request while submitting your request through Parchment. NOTE: A hold on your student account will not prevent you from requesting a transcript through Parchment, but the University will not be able to release your transcript until the hold is resolved.

Requesting Transcripts from other US or English-Canadian institutions:

For all other US or English-Canadian colleges and universities, or Overseas US Institutions (i.e. American College of Thessaloniki), where you have attended or taken coursework, follow their process to request transcripts (as found on their website) and include your completed corresponding Transcript Request Form or Transcript Matching Form (as applicable) in your request. Again, courses taken at foreign institutions are typically eligible for a transcript waiver, which will be indicated on the application.

Foreign Transcripts:

Courses taken at foreign institutions are typically eligible for a transcript waiver, which will be indicated on the application. Do not send foreign transcripts to your application, including those printed in English or translated into English; they will be discarded.

Foreign Transcript Evaluations:

Enter ALL of your U.S. and Canadian (if Canadian transcript is in English) coursework on the application using personal copies of your transcripts (do not enter foreign courses). Submit foreign transcripts to the appropriate evaluation agency.

If you attended a foreign school, some programs require you to submit your foreign coursework to a US-based evaluation service for a course-by-course US equivalency report. This report should then be sent directly to the Central Application Service from the evaluation service. Do not send foreign transcripts to OptomCAS or VMCAS, they will be discarded.

[Learn more about documenting foreign coursework in your OPTOMCAS application here.](#)

[Learn more about documenting foreign coursework in your VMCAS application here.](#)

OptomCAS:
optomcasinfo@optomcas.org
617-612-2888
M-F, 9am-5pm ET

VMCAS:
vmcasinfo@vmcas.org
617-612-2884
M-F, 9am-5pm ET

TMDSAS:
info@tmdsas.com
512-499-4785
M-F, 9am-12pm & 1-4pm CST

PRIMARY APPLICATION: OPTOMCAS (CONT.)

Fee Assistance Program

Fee Assistance from OptomCAS is not offered. However, you may learn more about scholarships, grant opportunities and other support initiatives [here](#). Additional resources on financing your education can be found on the [PreMed/PreHealth Website](#).

Personal Information: Institutional Actions, Misdemeanors, and Felonies :

In addition to basic biographic information, this section will ask about felonies, misdemeanors and institutional actions (i.e. OSSCR write-up). If you are unsure of whether or not you may have been documented for a conduct violation in the past, please contact the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution at osccr@northeastern.edu or 617.373.4390. Their office is located in 204 Ell Hall. Even though conduct records are expunged upon graduation, disclosure is still encouraged. Admissions committees are unlikely to have concerns about minor incidents, but will rescind an acceptance if they find out you failed to disclose.

Transcript Entry

This section of the application requires you to input your coursework exactly as it appears on your transcript (s). We recommend that you obtain transcript(s) for personal use and set aside ample time (a couple of days) to complete this section of the application, as it is the most labor intensive.

How to enter Co-op: For many, 6-month co-ops appear as two entries on your transcript (one for the summer portion, and one for the Fall or Spring semester). Enter both separately under the semester they appear on your transcript. For example, course code is COOP 3945, course title is Co-op Work Experience, subject can be listed as Other Health Prof, credits are 0, grade is S.

How to enter Study Abroad coursework: How you enter coursework taken outside of the US depends on the status of the school. Overseas US Institutions (i.e. American College of Thessaloniki) should be entered as any other US school. List these courses under the US school abroad as they appear on your US school abroad transcript - do not then list them under Northeastern. More information [here](#).

How to enter Plus One coursework: Graduate coursework taken before completing your bachelor's degree should be entered both for your undergraduate degree and for your graduate degree. Label courses as the appropriate academic status (i.e. Senior) under your bachelor's degree and Graduate status under your graduate degree. The start date of your graduate degree would be **when you started taking graduate coursework**. This is the only instance where an applicant would enter a course they took twice.

Experiences/Achievements

OptomCAS does not have a limit to the number of experiences and achievements you list on your application. Depending on the number of hours you engaged in your experiences, 10-15 are typical. Remember you are writing for optometry school admissions. Write in terms of competencies. This section is expected to be narrative text, not bulleted like a resume. Write about what you learned and contributed – outcomes, not tasks!

Evaluations

Be sure to review individual school requirements regarding the letters they require. In this section, you can send requests for letters of recommendation. You may enter a maximum of 4 requests. Letters are submitted by the recommenders themselves via Letters by Liaison, the OptomCAS recommender portal; they cannot be completed or submitted by the applicant or another party on behalf of the recommender. [Visit the Applicant Help Center for more information](#).

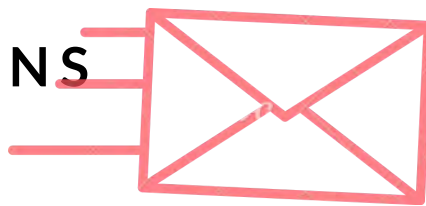
OAT & Optometry Schools

You can self-report your standardized test scores or report tests you plan to take in the Standardized Tests section of OptomCAS. Many schools require official scores to be sent directly to the institution. Please check with each program to determine their test score requirements and deadlines for the scores to be sent. [Visit the Applicant Help Center for more information](#). The schools and colleges of optometry may require you to take the OAT, or some may accept another official standardized exam such as the GRE. We encourage you to review schools at which you plan to apply to learn their exam requirements.

For all other questions, please refer to the [OptomCAS Quick Start Guide & FAQs](#), which can be found [here](#).

SUPPLEMENTAL APPLICATIONS

I submitted my primary application, now what?



Timeline

Depending on the application service you use, some secondary or supplemental applications may be included within your primary application. In this case, you will need to answer these school-specific questions immediately. It's important to note that not all programs have supplemental or secondary applications. Traditionally, however, secondary/supplemental applications will be sent to you by each school you applied to, several weeks after you've submitted your primary application. Secondaries are sent via email and are often filtered to spam/junk. Check your junk mail often! Prioritize your top choice schools to return faster, but look at each secondary when it comes. Some may only have a few questions and take an hour or so to submit, in that case it's worth doing sooner. We advise completing and submitting each secondary application within two weeks of receipt.

Pre-Writing

Applicants may elect to begin writing secondary application responses before they receive them (if applicable). Common supplemental questions you may receive are typically program-specific. Be prepared to answer why specifically you're interested in that school, what you will add to the entering class, and why you would be a good fit for their program.

Stay Organized

Find a way to organize all your schools in a spreadsheet. For each school, include not only secondary questions and answers, but also their mission, why you are a good fit for the school, and other essential information. Once you receive secondaries you can add the date you received & submitted your secondary application. Later, you can refer back to this information if you're invited to an interview.

Situational Judgement Tests

Some programs may require the Casper test as a part of their secondary application. We encourage you to review your school list to determine if any of those programs require such exams. Casper is an online, open-response situational judgment test (SJT). It asks what you would do in a tough situation, and more importantly, why. This helps determine behavioral tendencies of applicants pursuing people-centered professions. The same company that owns and operates Casper, Acuity Insights, offers additional modules included with the price of Casper, which may or may not be required by your programs. For example, Duet is a value-alignment assessment that compares what you value in a program with what the program has to offer and can be taken at any time after taking Casper. Applicants should thoroughly read through their program websites to understand if any additional modules are necessary to take, however there is no harm in completing them regardless. Casper & Duet [here](#). Most applicants take Casper & additional Acuity Insights modules after submission of their primary application.

Anything Else?

Many secondary applications will have an optional question that asks if the applicant has anything else to add, or wants to address any areas of concern on their application. This is the space to mention any of your strengths or major points of interest in the program that were not asked in the previous questions, or to address inconsistencies in your GPA, entrance exam scores, academic timeline, or experiential preparation.



A note from your advisors...

Congratulations on reaching your application year!

This marks a significant and exciting phase in your journey.

Please mark your calendars for the remainder of our 2025 cycle workshops. These sessions aim to assist you in crafting a compelling personal statement, strategically building your school list, navigating both the primary and secondary applications, and ultimately preparing for your interviews. A complete list of all upcoming 2025 cycle workshops can be [found here](#). Don't forget to mark your calendar for these important dates! Recordings of these workshops will be available on our website [here](#).

Additionally, applicants participating in our Application Readiness Program process will receive ongoing application support and coaching, beginning with the Application Readiness Meeting, scheduled after submission of the required [Self-Assessment](#), due January 31, 2024, for first-time applicants.

We understand that the application process can be overwhelming. Rest assured, the PMPH team is here to support and guide you every step of the way!

Best of luck,

The PreMed and PreHealth Advising Program Staff

Ciara O'Donnell: PreMed (MD/DO) last names T-Z, PreDental, PrePodiatry
Anna Pietrzak: PreMed (MD/DO) last names L-M, PreOptometry, PreVeterinary
Courtney Martinez: PreMed (MD/DO) last names: A-D and all Northeastern CPS Post-Baccalaureate Pre-Medical Certificate students & alumni
Emily Henderson: PreMed (MD/DO) last names E-K & PrePA last names A-L
Tyler Rock: PreMed (MD/DO) last names N-S & PrePA last names M-Z

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