



Steps to Becoming a Competitive Applicant

I am Dr. Jane Ann Munroe, Director of Admission for SCCO. I counsel pre-optometry students to help understand the admissions process and plan their strategy to be the most competitive applicant they can be.

I tell students that I act like a personal trainer. I help applicants get ready for the competition they'll face in the admissions process; however, when the admissions season begins, it's up to each applicant to compete within the pool for an interview invitation. I cannot tell you exactly what it takes to be a competitive applicant because the process is not formulaic. It varies season to season depending on the size and average competitiveness of the applicants within the pool. But I can predict, based on past seasons, how you should best prepare. So, here goes!

1. Overall GPA and Prerequisite GPA

Your overall GPA should be at least 3.05 and your prerequisite GPA (a compilation of ALL your math, science, English and psychology grades) should be at least 2.95.

All pluses and minuses are factored into both your prerequisite and overall GPAs. For the *FAQ* explaining how we calculate your GPAs and for advice on how to raise your GPA, send your request to jmunroe@scco.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 your scores from one single test date. For example, if you have taken the OAT several times, we do not take 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. For more information regarding the OAT, email jmunroe@scco.edu and request *FAQ* entitled "OAT Preparation and Scores."

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

One of the most common reasons why an applicant fails in an interview setting is lack of shadowing experience. Key to the interview process is exploring your decision-making process to become a doctor of optometry. You'll need a broad experiential base to answer that all-important interview question, "Why do you want to be an optometrist?"

Shadowing Objectives

- Be able to explain the difference between an optometrist and an ophthalmologist.
- Explore the sub-specialties of optometry: 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 community.
- Be able to project yourself into the profession and its future with enthusiasm and develop working goals specific to your future career in optometry.
- It's well-understood that being an optometrist is synonymous with being an advocate. Ask to attend local chapters of the American Optometric Association (AOA) meetings as a guest of the shadowing

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optometrist. Such an experience will help you understand why, through optometry's long history, it's been dubbed "The Legislated Profession."

Shadowing can be done in a 1-2 day experience. Shadowing is not an internship nor is it work-experience. The most important part of a shadowing experience is gaining a working knowledge about the profession—its past, present and future. For more tips on shadowing, send your request to jmunroe@scco.edu.

4. Community Service with Emphasis on Leadership Experience

Good doctors have a heart for service, not only for their patients but to their communities as well. Applicants demonstrate these qualities by the way they spend their discretionary time. Having a track record of community service demonstrates this quality.

Optometry is always on the lookout for its future leaders. Being a relatively young profession (a little over 100 years), optometric fore fathers 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! We are looking toward the future and those willing to join our "Band of Brothers" to continue this process. SCCO is looking for applicants who are willing to take the initiative and be active "optometric citizens", keeping optometry politically strong. Applicants showing a penchant for and a history of roles in leadership will stand out when it comes time to interview. SCCO's President, Dr. Kevin Alexander, served as president of the AOA (American Optometric Association), optometry's national political force, from 2007-08. Showing leadership potential, and especially leadership experience, is a way to be a most 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 jmunroe@scco.edu.

6. Visit the SCCO Campus. 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 met with me—we call them "Stealth Applicants." The internet has streamlined the process of learning about the optometry program of your choice and has personalized the admissions process for applicants and Student Affairs Department interactions. Having no personal knowledge of SCCO looks conspicuous by its absence! When asked during the interview, "Why do you wish to attend SCCO?" you will look very foolish should you express your supposed ardent desire to attend SCCO without ever having visited the campus or spoken to a school representative!

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. I give a talk about optometry and a general overview of the admissions process, a guest speaker discusses some aspect of their experience and student panels share experience about student life at SCCO. The campus is decked out for touring. For an event flyer, email jmunroe@scco.edu.

Admissions Workshops are designed specifically for the pre-optometry student who is ready to apply. Two 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. For a flyer, email jmunroe@scco.edu.

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7. Join SCCO's Pre-Optometry Group on Facebook

A personal, ongoing forum hosted by yours truly! Get your questions answered on the Wall, participate in Discussion Forums. I post links to important news which will help you to gain perspective on legislature and events shaping the profession—important information come shadowing and interview time! One of the longest running, most informative Discussion Boards is on OAT preparation. I use Facebook to post breaking news about all things related to optometry admissions. Learn by dialoguing with applicants about their strategies.

Link to the Facebook Pre-Optometry Group: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=4816879678>
SCCO has a Facebook Fan Page: <http://www.facebook.com/reqs.php#!/pages/Southern-California-College-of-Optometry-The-Official-Page/150496418333951>

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 is “One bite at a time!” If you don't think you could strategize a plan to eat a whole elephant, you should become a student of wisdom in this area. Questions related to this topic are an integral part of the interview process because each year, we have interns who struggle academically, who we know to be well-qualified academically but have poor experience with the demands of a jam-packed, lock-step quarter system. To be able to articulate practices with time and stress management is a quality we seek in an applicant.

9. Gain Understanding of Your Own Subjective Personal Bias

I often counsel applicants who are clueless when it comes to how they are perceived in a personal interaction. I explain that everyone has a personal bias to dispel when entering into a brand new conversational opportunity—the interview being a prime example of such an encounter. My advice is to take an acting or speech class—both are perfect forums to learn more about yourself through the process of subjective peer review. A mock interview given by a person willing to be brutally honest is also very helpful. You might be thinking this seems like an extreme measure of preparation just for an interview. Not so. Effective communication is a vital part of any successful patient/doctor interaction.

We have a staff clinic chief who does many interviews every year. He's a very effective interviewer, very perceptive and 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 this practice, his response bowled me over with its truth: “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

I don't know what causes applicants to think this way but some make the erroneous assumption that all the colleges of optometry are part of the same organization. This couldn't be further from the truth! You should contact each school you're applying to and find out specifically what they are seeking in an applicant! If you were romancing your beloved, would you make the lethal mistake of not asking questions about their personal preferences or are you the guy who shows up with chocolates, champagne, flowers, theater tickets and a Justin Timberlake CD, lamely instructing the object of your affection to make her own choice!? The same principle applies to the admissions process. Take time to read and understand the optometry program by first, knowing its mission statement and history and then, asking questions about what makes it stand out and what contribution within optometric education for which it is most well known. Fundamentally, SCCO wants interns who have been contemplative about their choice of schools which will in the long run, produce a mutually beneficial association which is going to last a career lifetime!

My point: Don't make assumptions about the process. Find out just who it is that you are romancing? Be a specialist on the way the admissions process unfolds. Check on the status of your application. Keep the Student Affairs Office updated on your contact information. To best do this about SCCO, use e-mail. Yours truly is very good at answering email by replying with FAQ formatted information to keep you up-to-date and ready to compete within the applicant pool!

There you have it—my prescription for success with the admissions process.

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