

## Institutional and Programmatic Accreditation in Optometry

Accreditation is a system for recognizing that educational institutions and programs affiliated with those institutions have attained a level of educational effectiveness, integrity, and quality that entitles them to the confidence of the educational community and public they serve. In most countries, the establishment and maintenance of educational standards is the responsibility of a central government bureau. However, the American system of voluntary non-governmental evaluation, called accreditation, has evolved to promote both regional and national approaches to the determination of educational quality.

Two forms of accreditation are recognized in the U.S.

1. **Institutional accreditation**
2. **Specialized or programmatic accreditation.**

**Institutional accreditation** is granted by the regional and national accrediting commissions of schools and colleges, which collectively serve most of the institutions chartered or licensed in the United States and its possessions. Institutional accrediting bodies recognize the entire institution rather than individual programs.

**Specialized accreditation** of professional and occupational programs is granted by councils or commissions on accreditation established by national professional organizations in such fields as dentistry, optometry, medicine, engineering and law. Each specialized accreditation group defines its own eligibility criteria or standards for accreditation and operating procedures. Specialized accrediting bodies recognize programs located within educational institutions rather than the entire institution. A major rationale for specialized accreditation activities is to provide quality assurances concerning educational preparation of members of the profession or occupation.

The institutions which house the schools and colleges of optometry that are accredited or pre-accredited by the [Accreditation Council on Optometric Education \(ACOE\)](#) are accredited by a regional institutional accreditor. The regional institutional accreditors and the ACOE are reviewed periodically and recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDE) as reliable authorities pertaining to the quality of education offered by the institution or program.

The mission of the ACOE follows:

"The ACOE serves the public by establishing, maintaining and applying standards to ensure the academic quality and continuous improvement of optometric education that reflect the contemporary practice of optometry. The scope of the ACOE encompasses professional optometric degree programs, optometric residency programs, and optometric technician programs."

The list on the following pages indicates which regional accreditor accredits the institution housing O.D. programs, and the ACOE accreditation status of the programs.

	<b>Regional/Institutional Accreditor</b>	<b>ACOE Status of OD Program</b>
1. Ferris State University Michigan College of Optometry	<a href="#">Higher Learning Commission</a>	Accredited
2. Illinois College of Optometry	<a href="#">Higher Learning Commission</a>	Accredited
3. Indiana University, School of Optometry	<a href="#">Higher Learning Commission</a>	Accredited
4. Inter American University of Puerto Rico, School of Optometry	<a href="#">Middle States Commission on Higher Education</a>	Accredited
5. MCPHS University School of Optometry	<a href="#">New England Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education</a>	Accredited with conditions
6. Midwestern University Arizona College of Optometry	<a href="#">Higher Learning Commission</a>	Accredited
7. New England College of Optometry	<a href="#">New England Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education</a>	Accredited
8. Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry	<a href="#">Higher Learning Commission</a>	Accredited
9. Nova Southeastern University, College of Optometry	<a href="#">Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges</a>	Accredited
10. Pacific University, College of Optometry	<a href="#">Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities</a>	Accredited
11. Pennsylvania College of Optometry at Salus University	<a href="#">Middle States Commission on Higher Education</a>	Accredited
12. Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University	<a href="#">Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Senior College and University Commission</a>	Accredited
13. Southern College of Optometry	<a href="#">Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges</a>	Accredited

	<b>Regional/Institutional Accreditor</b>	<b>ACOE Status of OD Program</b>
14. State University of New York College of Optometry	<a href="#">Middle States Commission on Higher Education</a>	Accredited
15. The Ohio State University, College of Optometry	<a href="#">Higher Learning Commission</a>	Accredited
16. University of Alabama at Birmingham, School of Optometry	<a href="#">Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges</a>	Accredited
17. University of California, Berkeley, School of Optometry	<a href="#">Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Senior College and University Commission</a>	Accredited
18. University of Houston, College of Optometry	<a href="#">Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges</a>	Accredited
19. University of Missouri-St. Louis, College of Optometry	<a href="#">Higher Learning Commission</a>	Accredited
20. University of the Incarnate Word Rosenberg School of Optometry	<a href="#">Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges</a>	Accredited
21. Western University of Health Sciences College of Optometry	<a href="#">Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) Senior College and University Commission</a>	Accredited

Oversight of and approval of educational institutions in Canada is performed by a provincial ministry of education. ACOE currently accredits two doctors of optometry programs that are sponsored by Universities recognized by their respective ministries of education.

22. University of Waterloo, School of Optometry and Vision Science	Ministry of Education of Ontario	Accredited
23. University of Montreal, École d'Optométrie	Ministry of Education of Quebec	Accredited

The following two programs are located in institutions that are accredited by a regional institutional accreditor. The programs are pre-accredited by the ACOE and can be considered for accreditation when they are fully operational and have at least four years of classes enrolled.

	<b>Regional/Institutional Accreditor</b>	<b>ACOE Preaccreditation Status</b>
24. Midwestern University Chicago College of Optometry	<a href="#">Higher Learning Commission</a>	Preliminary Approval
25. University of Pikeville Kentucky College of Optometry	<a href="#">Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges</a>	Preliminary Approval

Although accreditation is basically a private, voluntary process, accrediting decisions are used as consideration in many formal actions -- by governmental funding agencies, state licensing boards, scholarship commissions, foundations, and potential students. Accreditation at the post-secondary and professional level performs a number of important functions, including the encouragement of efforts to increase educational effectiveness.

Accreditation promotes continuous quality improvement, and the following steps are included in the accreditation process conducted by ACOE and most other recognized accreditors:

- 1. Development and publication of standards-**Accrediting bodies, with input from educational institutions, programs, practitioners and the public, develop and publish standards, by which the institution or program can be evaluated. In the context of accreditation, a standard is a measurable criterion of the quality of one or more components of an educational institution or program. Accrediting agencies review standards periodically and revise them as needed.
- 2. Application procedures-**The accrediting body establishes application procedures, which the institution or program must follow.
- 3. Self-study-**The institution or program examines itself in light of how well it achieves its own mission, goals and objectives for the purpose of self-improvement and planning. It engages members of the community in a critical review of institutional mission, goals and objectives; in considering the impact of societal and economic changes affecting the institution or programs; and in identifying institutional strengths and weaknesses in the achievement of intended outcomes. A self-study is essential to orient the evaluation team and to allow the evaluation team member to obtain substantial knowledge about the program prior to the site visit.
- 4. The site visit and review-**In order to determine whether an institution or program meets the standards of accreditation, accrediting bodies conduct on-site visits to the institutions and programs it accredits following receipt of the self-study. A team of qualified individuals, frequently composed of practitioners, educators and administrators, visit the educational institution or program to validate the self-study by interviewing students, faculty and administrators; reviewing records and files; and examining the facilities. Steps are taken by accrediting bodies to ensure that the team is impartial, objective and without conflict of interest. Following the site visit, the evaluation team prepares a report on the team's findings that is forwarded to the program or institution for review of factual accuracy.
- 5. The decision-**After the program has had an opportunity to correct any factual errors, the finalized report is reviewed by the accrediting body. The accrediting body determines compliance with the standards, develops recommendations for actions the program must take to bring the program into full compliance with the standards and suggestions for program improvement, and makes a decision concerning accreditation of the program. The accrediting agency conveys its decision in writing to the institution or program giving the reasons for its action. The opportunity for appeal is built into accreditation process. The accrediting body publishes its accrediting decisions, including the basis for

any final decisions, and when a program is accredited, the date of its next scheduled site visit is included on the published list.

**6. Follow-up-**Most accrediting bodies have developed a follow-up system to monitor programs in the interim between site visits. These systems include annual reports, interim visits and other special reports.

Since accreditation status is reviewed on a periodic basis, accredited institutions and professional programs are required to maintain continuous self-study and improvement mechanisms. Accrediting agencies also review and revise their standards and procedures periodically, using feedback from evaluations performed of their site visit process and from other sources such as surveys.