

# Functional Guidelines for Didactic and Clinical Optometric Education

Approved by the ASCO Board of Directors on March 20, 1998

Revised: March 31, 2009

To provide guidance to those considering optometry as a profession, the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) has established functional guidelines for optometric education. The ability to meet these guidelines, along with other criteria established by individual optometric institutions, is necessary for graduation from an optometric professional degree program.

One of the missions of each school and college of optometry is to produce graduates fully qualified to provide quality comprehensive eye care services to the public. To fulfill this mission, each institution must ensure that students demonstrate satisfactory knowledge and skill in the provision of optometric care. Admission committees, therefore, consider a candidate's capacity to function effectively in the academic and clinical environments, as well as a candidate's academic qualifications and personal attributes.

The functional guidelines in optometric education require that the candidate/student possess appropriate abilities in the following areas: 1) observation; 2) communication; 3) sensory and motor coordination; 4) intellectual –conceptual, integrative and quantitative abilities; and 5) behavioral and social attributes. Each of these areas is described in this document.

In any case where a student's abilities in one of these areas are compromised, he or she must demonstrate alternative means and/ or abilities to meet the functional requirements. It is expected that seeking and using such alternative means and/or abilities shall be the responsibility of the student. Upon receipt of the appropriate documentation, the school or college will be expected to provide reasonable assistance and accommodation to the student.

## Observation Abilities

The student must be able to acquire a defined level of required knowledge as presented through lectures, laboratories, demonstrations, patient interaction and self-study. Acquiring this body of information necessitates the functional use of visual, auditory and somatic sensation enhanced by the functional use of other sensory modalities. Examples of these observational skills in which accurate information needs to be extracted in an efficient manner include:

Visual Abilities: (as they relate to such things as visual acuity, color vision and binocularity):

- Visualizing and reading information from papers, films, slides, video and computer displays
- Observing optical, anatomic, physiologic and pharmacologic demonstrations and experiments
- Discriminating microscopic images of tissue and microorganisms

- Observing a patient and noting non-verbal signs
- Discriminating numbers, images, and patterns associated with diagnostic tests and instruments
- Visualizing specific ocular tissues in order to discern three-dimensional relationships, depth and color changes

#### **Auditory Abilities:**

- Understanding verbal presentations in lecture, laboratory and patient settings
- Recognizing and interpreting various sounds associated with laboratory experiments as well as diagnostic and therapeutic procedures

#### **Tactile Abilities:**

- Palpating the eye and related areas to determine the integrity of the underlying structures
- Palpating and feeling certain cardiovascular pulses

#### **Communication Abilities**

The student must be able to communicate effectively, efficiently and sensitively with patients and their families, peers, staff, instructors and other members of the health care team. The student must be able to demonstrate established communication skills using traditional and alternative means. Examples of required communications skills include

- Relating effectively and sensitively to patients, conveying compassion and empathy
- Perceiving verbal and non-verbal communication such as sadness, worry, agitation and lack of comprehension from patients
- Eliciting information from patients and observing changes in mood and activity
- Communicating quickly, effectively and efficiently in oral and written English with patients and other members of the health care team
- Reading and legibly recording observations, test results and management plans accurately
- Completing assignments, patient records and correspondence accurately and in a timely manner

#### **Sensory and Motor Coordination Abilities**

Students must possess the sensory and motor skills necessary to perform an eye examination, including emergency care. In general, this requires sufficient exteroception sense (touch, pain, temperature), proprioceptive sense (position, pressure, movement, stereognosis, and vibratory) and fine motor function (significant coordination and manual dexterity using arms, wrists, hands and fingers). Examples of skill required include but are not limited to:

- Instillation of ocular pharmaceutical agents
- Insertion, removal and manipulation of contact lenses

- Assessment of blood pressure and pulse
- Removal of foreign objects from the cornea
- Simultaneous manipulation of lenses, instruments and therapeutic agents and devices
- Reasonable facility of movement
- Injections into the eye, lids or limbs

### **Intellectual Conceptual, Integrative and Quantitative Abilities**

Problem solving, a most critical skill, is essential for optometric students and must be performed quickly, especially in emergency situations. In order to be an effective problem solver, the student must be able to accurately and efficiently utilize such abilities as measurement, calculation, reasoning, analysis, judgment, investigation, memory, numerical recognition and synthesis. Examples of these abilities include being able to:

- Determine appropriate questions to be asked and clinical tests to be performed
- Identify and analyze significant findings from history, examination, and other test data
- Demonstrate good judgment and provide a reasonable assessment, diagnosis and management of patients
- Retain, recall and obtain information in an efficient manner
- Identify and communicate the limits of one's knowledge and skill

### **Behavioral and Social Attributes**

The student must possess the necessary behavioral and social attributes for the study and practice of optometry. Examples of such attributes include:

- Satisfactory emotional health required for full utilization of one's intellectual ability
- High ethical standards and integrity
- An empathy with patients and concern for their welfare
- Commitment to the optometric profession and its standards
- Effective interpersonal relationships with patients, peers and instructors
- Professional demeanor
- Effective functioning under varying degrees of stress and workload
- Adaptability to changing environments and uncertainties
- Positive acceptance of suggestions and constructive criticism

Applicants with questions or concerns about how their own conditions or disabilities might affect their ability to meet these functional guidelines are encouraged to meet with an optometry school counselor prior to submitting an application. Current ICO students with questions should meet with the Senior Director of Student Development.

