

Required Technical Standards

Applicants to New England College of Optometry (NECO) are selected on the basis of their scholastic record, college recommendations, interview and involvement in college and community activities, but also by less tangible qualities of personality, character, and maturity. With a focus on providing students with an interdisciplinary, patient-oriented optometry education, NECO seeks to graduate students who will have the knowledge and skills to function in a broad variety of clinical situations and to render a wide spectrum of patient care. Therefore, applicants must have the intellectual, physical and emotional capacities necessary to undertake the required curriculum in a reasonably independent manner, without having to rely on intermediaries, and that all students must be able to achieve the levels of competence required by the faculty.

New England College of Optometry will consider for admission any applicant who meets its academic and nonacademic criteria and who demonstrates the ability to perform the skills listed in this document, with or without reasonable accommodations, consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act. The principle of nondiscrimination against any applicant on the basis of disability or handicap unrelated to job or course-of-study requirements is consistent with New England College of Optometry's mission and the law.

New England College of Optometry is firmly committed to helping students with physical or learning disabilities find access to the necessary resources to do their best work. Admitted students can connect with a team of staff members in the Center for Academic and Professional Achievement (CAPA), who collaborate with faculty and staff colleagues to provide student support. Students who have a disability and need accommodation should ideally initiate discussions with Marianna Toumpourou, the Associate Director of Student Advising and Accommodations, as soon as possible upon receiving and accepting the offer of admission. Accommodations requests and proper documentation of existing conditions must be submitted to her by the beginning of the semester. In instances where the student is diagnosed with a disability during his or her time at the College, the student is expected to provide the documentation well before the time for which the accommodations are sought. The full process for requesting accommodations, including what documentation is required is outlined in detail on the NECO website as well as in the Student Portal.

The following technical standard guidelines specify the attributes required by the New England College of Optometry faculty and contain many of the attributes approved by the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry Board of Directors. Because these standards describe the essential functions that students must demonstrate to meet the requirements of a general optometry education, they are pre-requisites for entrance, continuation, promotion and graduation.

Technical Standards for Optometry School Admission, Continuation and Graduation

The functional standards for optometric education require that the candidate/student possesses abilities and skills in the following five 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 or skills 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 appropriate documentation, the College will engage in an interactive dialogue 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 paper, 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 presentation 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 all members of the health care team. The student must be able to demonstrate established communication skills using traditional and alternative means. Examples of required communication skills include:

- Relating effectively and sensitively to patients, conveying compassion and empathy
- Perceiving verbal and non-verbal communications 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 members of the healthcare 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 skills required include:

- 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 limb

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:

- High ethical standards and integrity
- 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 inherent in-patient care
- Positive acceptance of suggestions and constructive criticism

Candidates with questions or concerns about how their own conditions or disabilities might affect their ability to meet these functional standards are encouraged to contact New England College of Optometry prior to applying.

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