Optometry and Vision Science
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The School is one of the largest in Asia and the only optometry school in NSW. We are committed to forming partnerships with the best of the industry in the world. Collaborations include a $30 million joint project between the Centre for Eye Health and Guide Dogs Australia, to offer unique teaching support, ensuring our students can make a difference. The School of Optometry and Vision Science is committed to translational research which will lead to practical application and significant improvements in ocular health. The best in practice experience, the optometry clinic has 65 volunteer staff and supports optometry education, providing on campus clinical training for students. The School runs a Vision Education Centre offering eye screening to primary school children. Since 1990, the Centre has treated more than 18,000 children.

Undergraduate Studies in Optometry and Vision Science

Bachelor of Vision Science/ Master of Clinical Optometry

Optometry combines the theoretical discipline of vision science with the clinical art of primary-eye care. It includes the diagnosis and management of ocular diseases, the dispensing of spectacles and contact lenses, the management of people with special needs (children, low vision), sports vision and vision in the workplace. Vision science includes the optics of lenses, the physiology of the eye, the psychophysics of vision and the neuroscience of the brain. The dual-degree Bachelor of Vision Science/Master of Clinical Optometry is designed to offer advanced disciplinary knowledge in optometry and the clinical skills and training required to practice optometry.

The Bachelor of Vision Science/Master of Clinical Optometry degree is taken over five years, and when successfully completed, graduates become an accredited optometrist in Australia, New Zealand and most parts of Asia, offering great career opportunities. Over the first three years you'll be undertaking the Bachelor of Vision Science. In your first year you'll cover foundation sciences including physics, chemistry, mathematics and biology, as well as two vision science courses. Over your second and third years you will become more focused on vision science course such as physiology, pathology, pharmacology, ocular disease and advanced vision science and clinical eye imaging.

After completing the Bachelor of Vision Science [with a weighted average mark (WAM) of at least 65 %] students will commence the Master of Clinical Optometry where years four and five begin your journey to become a registered optometrist.

Alternative Entry into the Master of Clinical Optometry

Students who complete the standalone Bachelor of Vision Science or equivalent from an external institution may be eligible to transfer to the Master of Clinical Optometry subject to a number of conditions. Progression into the Master of Clinical Optometry is a competitive process that is based on academic performance. To be considered for entry into the Master of Clinical Optometry, students must have an overall CREDIT average (65% WAM) in the Bachelor of Vision Science. Completion of a Bachelor of Vision Science does not guarantee a place in the Master of Clinical Optometry as only a limited number of places will be available. Students who are unsuccessful in obtaining a place in the Master of Clinical Optometry are expected to graduate with a Bachelor of Vision Science or may wish to apply for Science honours program.

Career Opportunities

On graduation, optometrists may enter private practice on their own behalf, in partnership with a colleague, or as an employee in an established practice. Specialities of clinical optometry include paediatrics, contact lenses, occupational optometry, public health optometry, co-management (shared care), low vision, sports vision, behavioural optometry and binocular vision.

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Bachelor of Vision Science

Vision Science is the study of the sensory processes that underlie vision, and the development and use of Vision-related technologies. This is broad discipline degree that provides comprehensive knowledge and direct training in areas relevant to a career in Vision Science such as: Optics, anatomy and functioning of the eye, eye disorders, clinical optometry, ocular therapy, sensation and perception, psychophysics, and research design, methods and experimentation.

This Bachelor of Vision Science is designed to develop scientists who can work with ophthalmic industries in the development of new technologies, diagnostic instruments, and patient care options, as well as develop persons who can liaise with ophthalmic practitioners dealing with the patient directly. Students who have successfully completed the degree with a WAM of 65% may wish to apply for Science honours (4500) to continue their research training (see also the Higher Research Degree section).

Admission Details

Program | UAC Code | UNSW Program Code | Length of Study | Entry Requirements
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Bachelor of Vision Science/Master of Clinical Optometry | 429750 | 3182 | 5 years full time | ATAR cut off: 98.00 or equivalent
Bachelor of Vision Science | 429740 | 3181 | 3 years full time | Bachelor of Vision Science WAM 65% or equivalent
Master of Clinical Optometry | NA | 8095 | 2 years full time | Bachelor of Vision Science WAM 65% or equivalent

Higher Degree Research (PhD, MSc, DOptom)

Those interested in enhancing their career by obtaining a research degree may apply for a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Master of Science (MSc) or Doctorate of Clinical Research in Optometry (DOptom). The School has a multidisciplinary approach to research and students with a broad Vision Science study for a variety of disciplines including ophthalmology, microbiology, psychology, education, biomedical engineering, physics, orthoptics and pharmacology. Students can choose from a diverse range of pure and applied research areas from clinical optometry to basic research and public health. UNSW Optometry and Vision Science graduates have internationally recognised qualifications and our alumni can be found worldwide in teaching, research and industry positions. To learn more about our flexible research programs and opportunities for scholarships, please contact the Postgraduate Research Director, Dr Blanka Golebiowska b.golebiowska@unsw.edu.au.

Postgraduate Coursework (MOptom)

For local and international optometrists interested in furthering their education, the School offers a Masters of Optometry (MOptom) intended to appeal to new and established practitioners. Many of the courses have been designed using a variety of teaching methods and are offered in a blended format (online and face to face), specifically to provide further education for optometrists in country areas, states and internationally that are physically remote from an optometry school. Optometrists may enrol in a full postgraduate coursework program or individual courses, for professional education purposes. Students can choose from a comprehensive range of courses including evidence-based optometry, advanced contact lens studies, ocular therapy, visual neuroscience, and epidemiology of blinding eye diseases. If you are interested in a postgraduate coursework master at the School of Optometry and Vision Science, please contact the Program Director, Dr Isabella Jabert i.jabert@unsw.edu.au.

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In industry, optometrists are called upon to advise on the protection of vision. They also analyse the visual demands of a task and advise on visual standards in order that the comfort and efficiency of employees can be improved. Optometrists participate in industrial safety programs, and advise on the visual capabilities needed for particular tasks. In addition, optometrists work closely with road safety organisations, applying visual science to problems such as visual standards for motorists, vehicle design and highway lighting.

Career opportunities for vision science graduates are available in a wide range of public and private sector areas that specialise in primary eye care, optical devices and technologies, teaching, and scientific research in vision and ophthalmology. For example, career opportunities are available in industries and commercial businesses that focus on the development and application of visual technologies – such as devices that correct refractive errors such as contact lenses, spectacles, drug development, medical devices (e.g. ocular implants) and imaging. Optometrists are also employed in defence technology (e.g. lasers and optical equipment), and video games. Vision Science graduates can also work in the Government sector – particularly in teaching, defence technology (e.g. lasers and optical equipment), and contributing to the development of health and occupational policy regarding the importance of vision to quality of life and in the workplace.

For those interested in furthering their career by obtaining a research degree, honours graduates in optometry and in vision science may proceed to a Master of Science or a Doctor of Philosophy degree by research.
Graduate Testimonials

After finishing school in 2009, I enrolled myself into Optometry at UNSW not knowing what to expect. In the earlier years I quickly learnt that Optometry was more than optics and lenses and the coined phrase ‘one or two’. It opened up into a vast network of sciences such as anatomy, pharmacology, pathology and psychology all of which are equally important in the real world of practicing as an optometrist. The program was at times demanding and difficult with complex theoretical optics and grueling hours, however the close knitted cohort provided the much needed mental and emotional support one could ask for. The program also allowed me to travel and help provide eye care for those in far more dire need in rural locations such as outback Western Australia and New South Wales in their mentoring programs and rural placements both developing experience and supporting communities. I would definitely choose Optometry at UNSW again if I had the opportunity.

This is my third degree awarded by UNSW. I was awarded a Bachelor of Optometry in 1988, and after developing an interest in ergonomics and occupational optometry, completed a Master of Safety Science in 2000. In each case I selected UNSW as it offered the most appropriate study program for my needs.

Completing a PhD gave me the opportunity to explore one of my research interests in depth, under the guidance of some of the world’s most recognised optometrists and ergonomists. What is exciting is that I know that my research into work-related discomfort in Australian optometrists is going to have an enormous impact on the future health and wellbeing of optometrists everywhere.