

**ESSENTIALS OF AN ACCREDITED CERTIFICATE PROGRAM  
FOR  
OPHTHALMIC LABORATORY TECHNOLOGY**

Initially adopted 1974  
**Revised 1978, 1982, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1995, 2001, 2008,  
2009, 2014**  
Effective May 1, 2014

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*Essentials* present the minimum accreditation standards for an educational program. *Essentials* are qualitative requirements stated in broad terms, designed to promote program stability, yet accommodate reasonable variations. The extent to which a program complies with the standards determines its accreditation status. The *Essentials*, therefore, include all requirements for which an accredited program is held accountable. Guidelines, and explanatory statements which clarify the *Essentials*, are enclosed in parentheses. The guidelines are not standards but provide examples and clarification to assist in interpreting the *Essentials*.

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**PREAMBLE**

**SCOPE of accreditation for the Commission on Opticianry Accreditation**

The Commission on Opticianry Accreditation (COA) accredits two-year Opticianry degree programs in the United States that are sponsored by post-secondary institutions accredited by agencies recognized by the Department of Education or CHEA.

**OBJECTIVES**

The Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology profession cooperates to establish, maintain and promote standards of quality for educational Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Programs and provide recognition for those educational programs that meet or exceed the minimum standards specified in these *Essentials*.

These "Essentials" are to be used in the development and self-evaluation of Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Programs. The evaluation of a program's compliance is accomplished by site team visits. Lists of accredited programs are published for the information of the public, prospective students and employers.

**ORGANIZATION**

- Section I of the *Essentials* constitutes the requirements for a program to be eligible to apply to the Commission for accreditation.
- Sections II – VII constitutes the accreditation standards that must be met for the program to be accredited.
- Section VIII constitutes the requirements for maintaining accreditation.

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## **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROFESSION**

Ophthalmic Laboratory Technicians are broadly defined as those individuals who manufacture eyewear by fabrication and assembly of the various components. His/her wide range of duties includes transcribing prescriptions, selecting appropriate lens forms, and processing the materials to the desired prescription. In addition, his/her duties may include contact with other ophthalmic professionals as well as persons from ophthalmic supplier firms.

Upon completion of the program, the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technician should, at the minimum, be able to:

- Analyze lens and frame combinations;
- Demonstrate knowledge of practical optics and lens forms;
- Grind and polish lenses;
- Manufacture eyewear by fabrication and assembly of the various components;
- Tint and coat lenses;
- Neutralize lenses and verify eyewear/vision aids prescriptions;
- Apply rules and regulations for equipment safety;
- Demonstrate proficiency in the operation and function of equipment and utilize equipment to its full potential;
- Demonstrate knowledge of the principles of laboratory management;
- Understand and apply current industry standards for ophthalmic products.

## ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

### I. INSTITUTION

- A. The institution offering the program must be accredited by an organization recognized by an appropriate governmental agency (E.g. the U.S. Department of Education), or the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). In Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Programs which have laboratory phases provided in more than one institution, the institution granting the certificate or diploma is responsible for assuring that assigned student activities in the laboratory settings are aligned with student learning objectives.
  
- B. The Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program must have been in operation for at least one academic year, or the equivalent, and have graduated at least one class, graduates having been awarded a certificate or diploma appropriate to Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology. However, for initial accreditation of new programs, if a letter of intent to seek accreditation is filed within the first year of the program and an on-site evaluation is made within one (1) year of the graduation of the program's first class, that first graduating class is eligible for retroactive accreditation. For initial accreditation of an existing program, accreditation will include the graduating class within one year prior to the date the accreditation is granted, where appropriate.

## **II. MISSION, GOALS, AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Goals refer to those long-range purposes or aims which the program must sustain year after year. Goals define those end results to be achieved. Goals taken collectively constitute the mission of the program. Learning objectives refer to those relatively short-term conditions to be achieved within a given period of time, which is measurable evidence of progress toward achievement of the program's goals. The Mission, Goals, and Learning Objectives must be published and available to the students.

A. Mission  
The program must have a clearly stated mission, which is appropriate for Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology.

B. Goals  
The program must have clearly stated goals, which are appropriate for Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology.

It is recommended that a goal of the program be to eliminate hazardous waste and to reduce non-hazardous waste to the minimum levels economically and technically practical, and to be in full compliance with all federal and state environmental regulations.

C. Learning Objectives  
The program must have clearly stated competency based learning objectives which are appropriate for Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology.

D. Review  
Statements of mission, goals, and learning objectives must be reviewed annually and revised when necessary.

1. The reviews must determine whether stated mission, goals, and learning objectives are relevant; whether mission, goals, and learning objectives are being fulfilled; whether the mission, goals, and learning objectives are understood adequately by all those involved; and whether the mission, goals, and learning objectives should be modified based on experience.

2. A documented annual review of mission, goals, and learning objectives must include students, faculty members, administrators, and members of the Advisory Board.

3. A documented review process must ensure the appropriateness of the technology being used to meet the program's objectives.

E. Program Outcomes  
The program must evaluate outcomes through a systematic plan for assessing program effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance by achieving specified requirements with respect to:

- a. Program completion;
- b. Job placement.

### III. CURRICULUM

The minimal length of the educational program for the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program is one academic year or equivalent. Instruction must follow an educationally sound and sequenced plan, which documents:

- A. A structured curriculum with clearly written course syllabi which describe competencies and student learning objectives that are acceptable and applicable to the goals of the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program. Unless expressly prohibited by state law, the curriculum must include, but not be limited to:

#### Profession Related Content Areas

1. Fabrication Techniques
2. Frame Materials and Specifications
3. Inventory Control
4. Laboratory Management
5. Lens Applications
6. Ophthalmic Materials
7. Ophthalmic Terminology
8. Optical Theory
9. Evaluation of lens and frame combinations
10. Production and Quality Control Methods
11. Professional Ethics
12. Relationships with Eyecare Professionals
13. Safety and Environmental Health
14. State and National Opticianry Regulations

#### **General Education Content Areas**

1. Computer Technology
2. English
3. Mathematics

The curriculum must include a plan for a well-structured, competency-based Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program.

The complete and detailed up-to-date curriculum must be kept on file and be based on clearly stated learning objectives. Course syllabi should include learning objectives grading criteria, Instructor's name, office hours, didactic and clinical education schedules, and assigned texts. Individual course outlines, class schedules, and laboratory schedules must be distributed to students. Records of directed work experience, i.e., clinical, laboratory or cooperative, and student evaluation must be maintained According to institutional policies.

An Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program may teach dispensing courses only on orientation basis. Additionally, it is not in keeping with the "*Essentials*" of an Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program's

mission, goals, or learning objectives, to include a course on contact lens fitting in the course curriculum.

B. Instructional Material (textbooks, manuals, handouts, etc.)

Material required to meet educational goals and/or learning objectives of the program must be available and utilized. Sufficient resources must be available to support assignment of professionally related research papers. Sufficient learning resources must be made available to support student learning.

C. Classroom Presentations, Discussions, and Demonstrations. Classes must be held as scheduled and planned, and must be structured.

D. Examinations, Tests, and Evaluations (oral, written and practical) for Didactic and Laboratory Aspects of the Program. These tools must be consistent with mission, goals, and learning objectives. All educational activities and courses must provide timely evaluation of student's academic progress.

E. Supervised, Documented, and Structured Laboratory Experience.

Didactic laboratory instruction (application of theory under supervision) must be well structured, competency based, and appropriate for each student prior to rotation through a clinical externship or internship. Direct supervision must be provided by program faculty. Didactic laboratories must provide an environment supportive of learning and operate in accordance with environmental health and safety regulations as defined by the institution.

F. Graduate Competencies

Graduates of an Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program must demonstrate competencies including, but not limited to, those listed below. Graduates must be able to:

1. use effective oral and written communication;
2. maintain records;
3. perform basic algebra, trigonometry, and geometry;;
4. prepare ophthalmic laboratory job orders;
5. verify proper frames and lenses for job orders;
6. utilize and maintain equipment;
7. respond to inquiries and concerns;
8. apply rules and regulations for safe work practices;
9. demonstrate proficiency in the operation and function of equipment;
10. assist in the business related area of ophthalmic laboratory technology, including record maintenance, frame and lens inventory, supply, equipment maintenance, and third party forms;
11. neutralize eyewear/Ophthalmic devices prescriptions;
12. perform final inspection and verification;
13. grind, and polish lenses;
14. fabricate eyewear;
15. tint and coat lenses;
16. perform minor frame repair;
17. perform impact resistance treatment and testing;

18. discuss prescription eyewear vision aids and other related patient/customer/client information (verbal and written) with the dispenser;
19. have basic computer skills;
20. demonstrate knowledge of applicable state statutes and regulations;
21. demonstrate knowledge of safety and environmental health standards.

## IV. RESOURCES

Resources, both direct and indirect, must be sufficient to support the number of students enrolled in the program.

### A. Program Director

The Institution must identify a qualified individual responsible for administration, evaluation, development and revision of the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology program.

#### 1. Qualifications

In addition to serving on a full-time appointment, the Program Director must possess the following:

- At least 3 years of appropriate Ophthalmic Laboratory qualifications and experience, and meet the requirements of the institution;
- All credential for which the students are being prepared in the program, or hold comparable credentials that demonstrate at least equivalent training and preparation.

Current Program Directors of accredited programs reviewed under an earlier version of the Essentials are “grandfathered” according to those standards in effect at the time of their appointment to the position of Program Director. However, it is recommended that “grandfathered” directors not meeting these qualifications upgrade credentials accordingly. Grandfathered status is not transferrable to another institution.

The Program Director must demonstrate proficiency in program planning, curriculum design, instruction, and academic advising. It is recommended that the director have had at least two years experience as an instructor at an accredited Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program.

In the event of a change in Program Director, the Commission must be notified within thirty (30) days. A qualified person must be placed in the position within twelve (12) months of the date of the vacancy. The Commission must receive the new director's curriculum vitae within thirty (30) days of period of employment. The vitae must include details of education, certification, licensure, training, and general background experience.

#### 2. Responsibilities

In addition to teaching and other duties, the Program Director must be responsible for the organization, administration, periodic review, development, and general effectiveness of the program. The Program Director, the administration, and the institution must be responsible for the maintenance of a safe and healthful work environment for staff and students. The institution must be

responsible for maintaining the academic integrity of all ophthalmic educational activities. The Program Director's responsibilities for the program must not be adversely affected by educationally unrelated functions.

B. Instructional Staff

1. Qualifications

The faculty (instructors) must be individually qualified by education and experience, must be effective in teaching the subjects assigned, and must meet the standards required by the institution.

Teaching faculty for spectacle dispensing, if it is included in the curriculum, must be certified by the American Board of Opticianry or equivalent (e.g. licensed optometrist or ophthalmologist) and licensed (where applicable) in the state in which the program is located, or licensed, where applicable, in the state of residence, if this meets the institution's requirements. Federal programs must meet the directives to instruct by the Department of Defense (DOD).

2. Responsibilities

The faculty must be responsible for submitting course outlines and lesson plans for each course or block of instruction within the course assigned by the director, evaluating students, academic advising, preparing reports as required by the institution, and participating in the upgrading and review of course material.

Lesson plans must be on file and available for review by authorized persons. Lesson plans could include, but not be limited to:

1. Weekly subject material;
2. Handouts;
3. Tests;
4. List of videos or other technology or teaching tools;
5. Learning objectives;
6. Type of instruction; and
7. References for both student and instructor.

It is important to note that the lesson plans are flexible.

3. Instructor/Student Ratio

The instructor/student ratio must be adequate to achieve the stated learning objectives of the curriculum.

4. Professional Development and Review

- a. The institution and Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program must encourage and provide opportunities for the faculty members to improve their optical, educational, and professional expertise.
- b. The Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program must have established and published procedures for evaluation of instructors.

C. Financial

The institution must show financial responsibility and commitment to the program. Budget records identifying financial resources of the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program must be maintained and available for a period of three (3) years. The program director, with the assistance of the administration and faculty, should be responsible for planning the budget.

D. Facilities

1. General

Adequate classrooms, laboratories, administration offices, and other facilities, as required, must be provided in accordance with accepted educational standards.

Classrooms and laboratories must provide an environment supportive of learning. The equipment in use must be current. The facilities must include, but not be limited to, an Ophthalmic Laboratory to ensure adequate practicum and learning experiences for all students, and an Optical Fabrication. Laboratory supervisors must be present during laboratory hours. The program director's office must provide privacy. The location must be secure for record maintenance.

2. Equipment and Supplies

The institution must provide appropriate classroom, office, and laboratory equipment. Current laboratory materials in adequate quantities must be provided. There must be a plan for scheduled equipment replacement and repair.

3. Library

A library must be readily accessible and provide access for students to current and relevant materials; to include, but not be limited to: online resources, current books, scientific references, periodicals, and other materials related to the curriculum.

The library holdings must contain sufficient traditional and/or online reference material to facilitate required student and faculty study and research. The faculty must have input in the selection of Opticianry reference materials. A listing of the Opticianry material must be available to the students. Opticianry reference material must be accessible in terms of location and hours of operation

4. Records

Satisfactory records must be maintained for all student admissions, attendance, health (if required by the state or DOD), achievement, and evaluation.

E. Instructional Resources

Adequate multimedia and audiovisual materials must be available for instruction.

Faculty and students must have access to computers and to the Internet.

F. Safety and Environmental Management

Program must operate in accordance with federal and state occupational safety, health, environmental regulation, and accepted universal precautions. It is recommended that the Safety and Environmental Checklist as supplied by the Commission be adhered to.

G. Advisory Committee

An Advisory Committee (or equivalent for DOD institutions) must be formed with a clearly defined role and function, and a detailed description of that role and function must be distributed to all members. Members must be appointed in accordance with institutional policy.

1. Qualifications

It is recommended that the Advisory Committee (or equivalent for DOD institutions) members be certified by the American Board of Opticianry and/or state licensed, if required by the state, or could have other appropriate ophthalmic qualifications (required by the DOD). No more than two of the committee members may represent the other non-ophthalmic allied health professions or the public. Student representation on the committee is required.

It is recommended that the Advisory Committee (or equivalent for DOD institutions) consist of at least nine members and consist of Opticians, Optometrists, Ophthalmologists, and laboratory manufacturing representatives. Full-time faculty and institution administration are ex-officio members.

2. Responsibilities

The committee must meet at a minimum annually. For each meeting an agenda must be distributed in advance and the minutes recorded and maintained. Minutes must include list of attendees and absentees and their affiliations.

## V. STUDENTS

### A. Program Description

An accurate description of the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program, course content, and course objectives must be provided to the students.

The program must make information available to each entering student regarding the criteria for successful completion of the program. The institution and / or program must also make available accurate information which includes:

- descriptions of Opticianry;
- a brief description of the required and elective courses;
- number of credit hours;
- names and rank of faculty;
- entrance requirements;
- tuition and fees; \*
- scholarships; \*
- financial aid; \*
- cancellation and refund policies; \*
- standards of performance and conduct;
- disciplinary procedures and policies;
- availability of student health services;
- state licensing requirements; national certification requirements;
- exam pass rates where available;
- laboratory safety procedures;
- grading policies;
- job placement rates; \*
- information about clinical education; and
- listing of available periodicals.

\* DOD programs are exempt from these items

If the program is accredited by the Commission, any references to the accreditation classification in official publications must be accurate. The institution or program must provide an academic calendar that outlines schedules for academic terms, school years, and projected student completion timelines.

Grading policies and completion requirements must be published. The admission of students, including advanced placement, must be made in accordance with the accepted practices and policies of the institution.

It is recommended that a recruitment policy be in place (DOD programs are exempt from this). Cancellation and refund policies must be available to the incoming student, and must be in compliance with state and federal laws. Enrollment procedures must be clearly defined and comply with prevailing law. These practices must be clearly defined, published by the institution, and readily available.

All institution and program publications and advertising must be truthful and not mislead students or the public. The institution should address Affirmative Action, Equal Opportunity, The Americans with Disabilities Act, Title IV (DOD programs exempt), HEA eligibility, and any other state or federal regulations that protect the rights of students.

B. Admission

1. The Program Director and/or a member of the instructional staff must cooperate with the institution's admissions officer in establishing admission requirements for students and participate in the final student selection. The program must adhere to ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act). DOD programs must meet the need of the armed services.
2. A Candidate for admission must be high school graduates or the equivalent, or have passed pre-admission testing standard sufficient to confirm the candidate's ability to benefit from the program. The institution must admit only those students who meet institutional admission requirements and only those who are prepared by background, knowledge, and technical skills to succeed. All enrolled students must have reasonable and adequate access to the range of student services appropriate to support their learning.

It is recommended that, once admitted, students from other accredited programs in Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Programs and other allied health professions be given appropriate transfer credits in accordance with the policies of the institution. There may be a system of challenge by examination.

The faculty and educational facilities must be adequate for the size of enrollment. A pre-entrance counseling visit is recommended.

C. Health Services

It is recommended that the institution inform the students of its health care services, and that students have access to those services if available. A plan for emergency medical care must be available.

D. Guidance and Counseling

It is recommended that information concerning counseling available for students be published.

E. Student Records

Satisfactory records must be maintained for student admission, attendance, and evaluation. Grades and credit for courses must be recorded on the student transcript and permanently maintained by the institution in a safe and accessible location. The student must be informed of the right to access his/her own records. Access must be limited to authorized persons.

F. Grievance and Appeal Procedures

Appropriate appeal procedures must be clearly defined and available to the student. The student must be informed of due process with regard to unfavorable evaluation, disciplinary action, dismissal, and suspension.

The institution must provide and implement an appropriate policy for handling formal complaints from students, graduates and former students, and mandate that this policy is published.

**VI. OPERATIONAL POLICIES**

- A. Institution and program announcements and advertising must reflect accurately the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program offered.
- B. Student costs and the awarding of academic credit and degree information must be accurately stated and published. (Not applicable for DOD programs).
- C. Policies and processes for student withdrawal, refunds of tuition, and refunds of fees must be consistent with the institution's general policy, published, and publicly available. (Not applicable for DOD programs).
- D. Policies and practices regarding student clinical practice must be published and made available to the students. This must include a policy on infectious disease control and all-applicable state and federal requirements.
- E. Student and faculty recruitment and student matriculation practices must be nondiscriminatory.
- F. If a program elects to make a public disclosure of its accreditation status granted by the Commission on Opticianry Accreditation, the program must disclose that status accurately and include the specific academic and/or instructional program(s) covered by that status. Additionally, the name and current address and telephone number of the COA must be included in the disclosure.

## **VII. CONTINUING PROGRAM EVALUATION**

- A. A process for periodic self-evaluation of the program's effectiveness must be reflected in program policy and be documented. The institution must evaluate the program's educational effectiveness. The evaluation should include assessment of student learning outcomes, student retention, and student and faculty satisfaction. This information should be applied to future admission decisions.
- B. The results of the self-evaluation must be appropriately reflected in program development.

The continuing program self-evaluation must include a system for internal and external curriculum validation, evaluation by current students, follow-up studies of alumni, and a dedicated employer survey of graduates. The program must secure sufficient qualitative information to demonstrate an ongoing system of evaluation consistent with the goals of the program.

The Advisory Committee (or DOD equivalent) may facilitate program development, evaluation, support, planning, and coordination by periodic evaluation of the program's functions and of its success in achieving its stated learning objectives.

A list of program graduates must be maintained. The maintenance and documentation of the employment records of recent graduates of the program must be one aspect of program evaluation.

## VIII. MAINTAINING ACCREDITATION

- A. The annual report form or progress report provided by the Commission on Opticianry Accreditation must be completed under the supervision of and signed by the Program Director and either the division chairperson, department head, or institution Chief Executive Officer, and returned by the established deadline. Programs submitting reports later than the established deadline will be charged a \$500 late fee per report.
- B. The institution is reminded of the requirements regarding a change in Program Director in Section IV. Resources, end of Section A.1., page 10.
- C. Accreditation of the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program may be withdrawn only after notice has been given to the Chief Executive Officer of the institution and the Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program Director that such action is contemplated. The program is entitled to explanations of the reasons for withdrawal, sufficient time to permit a considered response, and the use of established procedures for appeal.
- D. The Commission on Opticianry Accreditation may withdraw accreditation if:
  - 1. The Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology Program is not maintained in substantial compliance with the *Essentials*.
  - 2. The program does not permit reevaluation after due notice.
  - 3. The institution's Chief Executive Officer requests withdrawal of an accreditation by submitting a written request to the Commission.
  - 4. There are no students in the program for two consecutive years.

## ACCREDITATION ADMINISTRATION

- Application for accreditation of a program in Ophthalmic Laboratory Technology must be made to:

Director of Accreditation  
Commission on Opticianry Accreditation  
229 East 85th Street #194  
New York, NY, 10028  
director@COAccreditation.com  
315-742-8066

- The institution may withdraw its request for accreditation at any time prior to the final action by the Commission.
- The institution/program being evaluated is given the opportunity to review and comment on the content accuracy of the Evaluation Report before final action is taken in deciding the accreditation classification.
- The Chief Executive Officer of the institution may request a return on-site evaluation.
- Accreditation decisions may be appealed in writing to the Commission on Opticianry Accreditation in accordance with the appeal procedures Stated in the Accreditation Guide, available online at <http://COAccreditation.com>.
- The Commission on Opticianry Accreditation will periodically survey educational programs for continued accreditation.