

**Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program
(Doctor of Optometry)**



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This version of the policy supersedes all prior versions.

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

Grading System

All School of Optometry courses (didactic and clinical) will use the following letter grades and corresponding percentages:

A 90-100%

B 80-89%

C 70-79%

F below 70%¹

P Pass

I **Incomplete.** The temporary notation of I may be reported at the discretion of the instructor to indicate that the student has performed satisfactorily in the course but, due to unforeseen circumstances, has been unable to finish all course requirements. An incomplete is given when the student, for nonacademic reasons beyond his/her control, is unable to complete course requirements. This notation should not be used unless there is reasonable certainty that the requirements will be completed during the following regular term, since at the end of that term the I automatically changes to an F. In highly unusual circumstances the student may request an extension of the time to complete the requirements. This request must be submitted in writing to the Director of Student Affairs in advance of the time when the grade automatically changes to an F since the approval of the instructor, the Professional Program Academic and Honor Council (PPAHC), the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and Dean are all required.

W Withdraw

WP Withdraw Passing

WF Withdraw Failing

AU Audit

P/F grading policy will be determined by the instructor

The grade point average is calculated by dividing the total number of quality points attained by the total number of semester hours attempted. The number of quality points attained for each course is determined by multiplying the earned quality points by the semester hour value of the course.

¹ In addition to other course criteria as set by the coursemaster/instructor

Academic Term

The academic year consists of the following terms: Fall A, Fall B, Fall, Spring A, Spring B, Spring, and Summer. The academic year begins in the fall and ends after summer term at which time, promotion to the next sequential year occurs.

Program Length

Students are expected to complete the professional optometry program in four academic years. Due to extenuating circumstances, including repeating a year, and other ramifications of nonacademic and academic probation, students may require more than four academic years to

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

complete the program. The maximum time allowed to complete the professional program is six years (72 months) from the date of a student's beginning of classes. In highly unusual circumstances the student may request an extension of the time to complete the professional program. This request must be submitted in writing to the Associate Dean for Student Success and Professional Relations and the Director of Student Affairs. Approval by Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, the UABSO Executive Committee (EC), and Dean are all required.

Promotion/Graduation

Students who have an annual and cumulative grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or greater, without rounding, who have successfully completed all courses within an academic year, and who have a satisfactory record of professional conduct will be promoted to the succeeding year, or will be eligible to graduate from the professional program if in the final year. In order to progress from the spring semester to the summer semester, prerequisites require that each student has successfully completed all courses in the professional program curriculum up to and including the spring semester, unless otherwise required by the PPAHC. Each course in the program must be successfully completed in order for a student to receive the O.D. degree. Passing scores in Parts I and II of the National Board Examination in Optometry are required for graduation, as are demonstration of acceptable professional standards and ethical values, as defined by the UABSO Code of Ethics and the document entitled Basic Competency for Entry-Level Optometrists.

Student-Initiated Withdrawals

A student-initiated withdrawal from the program means that the student is voluntarily severing his/her connection with the School of Optometry, prior to completion of requirements for the OD degree. The student's request for withdrawal shall be made in writing to the Director of Student Affairs. Consistent with overall University policy, the Associate Dean for Student Success and Professional Relations or Director of Student Affairs may approve the student's request for withdrawal, but such approval carries no stated or implied commitments concerning future readmission to the School of Optometry.

At the point in which a student withdraws from the School of Optometry program, the coursemaster of each course in which the student is enrolled will be responsible for assigning a grade reflective of the student's performance up to that point in the course, and should issue either a *Withdraw Passing* (WP) or *Withdraw Failing* (WF). If the student withdraws at a point during the term in which the coursemaster feels that he/she cannot appropriately assign a grade because performance has not been evaluated, a *Withdraw (W)* can be issued.

Student-initiated withdrawals from a single course are not permitted.

Professional Program Academic and Honor Council

The Professional Program Academic and Honor Council (PPAHC) is charged with monitoring the academic status of students enrolled in the UABSO and enforcing the Academic, Honor and

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

Ethics Policies of the program. The PPAHC will meet on a regular basis, as needed, primarily at the end of each academic term. The PPAHC will review grades, performance of students on academic probation, material from coursemasters regarding failures in their courses and student documentation pertaining to a failure of a course (only after the student has discussed the failure with the coursemaster). The coursemaster should communicate the failure of his/her course to the student by the date on which grades are due for that term. The coursemaster will advise students of the method by which a course failure will be communicated. The coursemaster shall also provide written notice of a course failure, to the PPAHC chairperson, the Director of Student Affairs, and copied to the Student Affairs Program Manager, by the date on which grades are due for that term, absent extenuating circumstances.

For any F grade issued, the coursemaster will provide the PPAHC a written summary of the student's performance, with a recommendation to the PPAHC. If an F grade is received in a clinical course, the coursemaster may ask the instructor(s) assigned to the student for input when drafting the summary and recommendation. Factors used to determine the appropriate course of action for the management of an F grade include, but are not limited to, the following: overall course performance, current and past academic performance, attendance, demonstrated efforts toward self-help and documented special circumstances that may have contributed to poor performance, such as personal or family illness. If a student believes that extenuating circumstances contributed to a failing grade, a letter documenting such factors should be submitted to the Chairperson of the PPAHC, prior to the committee meeting. In addition, all students with their academic status under review by the PPAHC will be invited to present their case in person at the PPAHC meeting where it is discussed.

In the event that a member of the PPAHC is the course instructor who issued a failing grade, the member will recuse himself/herself from participation in the discussion of the student to whom s/he assigned the failing grade and will refrain from voting on the committee recommendation for that student.

The PPAHC will make a ruling regarding the promotion, probationary status, course repetition, remediation and/or dismissal of the student. The course instructor who assigned the F grade will not move forward with his/her recommendation or re-examine the student, until after the PPAHC has evaluated the student's overall performance and determined the appropriate action, absent extenuating circumstances.

Any decisions involving academic actions will be conveyed to the student by the Office of Student Affairs. An attempt will be made to notify the student, in person, but if this cannot be accomplished in a timely manner, the student may be notified by telephone, UAB e-mail or certified mail. The contact information for the student will be taken from Banner, the university's student database.

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

Repeating a Failed Course

All didactic and clinical courses for which an F grade is assigned must be repeated successfully in order for a student to progress in the professional program or to receive the O.D. degree.

Based on the coursemaster's written summary and ruling of the PPAHC, a failed course may be repeated, at the discretion of the coursemaster, by either:

- 1) enrolling in the course when it is next offered

Students required to enroll in the course when it is next offered may be given the option to take an adjusted schedule of courses during the year before the failed course is repeated. Courses allowed will be those that do not require the failed course as a prerequisite, and that are deemed by the PPAHC to be in the best interest of the student. Adjusted schedules are not always allowed. When a student is away from the program for a semester or more, additional customized requirements may be recommended by the PPAHC, including but not limited to repeating courses, auditing courses, remediation and examination.

or

- 2) completing a repeat course in place of the original course, which will be completed before the end of the next academic term. A repeat course has a unique course name and number and will have its own course syllabus.

Didactic Courses: The requirements of the course may include, but are not limited to: self-study, written assignments, periodic meetings, re-testing, and/or assignments designed to improve understanding of course content.

Clinic Courses: In some cases, the coursemaster may recommend a repeat course in place of a failed clinic course. If this is offered, the repeat course may include, but is not limited to: patient care assignments with faculty observation/supervision of specific techniques or conditions, care reviews, written assignments, periodic meetings and/or other activities designed to improve clinical performance.

If the coursemaster offers a repeat course, he/she will usually serve as the coursemaster (or will suggest an appropriate coursemaster to the PPAHC) and will determine the course requirements, grading and scheduling of the course. Additional provisions may be suggested by the PPAHC in consultation with the coursemaster who assigned the original F grade. The grading scale used for the repeat course should be identical to that of the course failed. A course syllabus, specific to this course will be provided to the student by the coursemaster. Special courses that are created for these purposes for a specific student will have a unique course number, will be given a new course grade, and extra tuition may be applied. The assigned coursemaster/instructor(s) of repeat courses will provide the course syllabus and regular feedback regarding the student's performance in the course to the PPAHC, which will review the performance and make further

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

recommendations, as appropriate. Due to the complexity of an adjusted schedule, a student who has failed a course will not always be eligible to enroll in the next sequential academic term.

When a student successfully repeats a failed course, he or she will receive a grade and course credit for the repeated course, based on the repeat course requirements. The F grade from the course failed will remain on the student's transcript, and both grades will be used in all grade point average calculations. Repeat courses could significantly delay progression in the program and the graduation date. When a repeat course is failed, the student will receive an F grade while on academic probation and will be subject to dismissal from the program. In case of extenuating circumstances, the PPAHC may allow a student to remediate a repeat course F grade when on probation.

Remediation

Internal Remediation

Remediation may occur in a course when an instructor has recognized deficiencies that can be corrected within the term. The coursemaster may design a program, in addition to the original course, in order to address deficiencies.

External Remediation

Based on course failure and/or specifically identified weaknesses, the PPAHC may recommend that the student be required to enroll in a special course in order to improve in the area(s) of weakness. Special courses that are created for these purposes will have a unique course number, will be given a new course grade, and extra tuition may be applied. Remedial courses will last at least one term. Due to the complexity of such special programs and schedules, students will not always be eligible to enroll in the next sequential academic term. The need for remedial programs may prevent the student from attending an externship program. If a student who is on academic probation fails a remedial course, he/she will be subject to dismissal from the program.

Remediation programs, including the course requirements and grading scale, will be designed by the PPAHC, based on the recommendation of the original coursemaster. Additional provisions to the remediation design may be suggested by the PPAHC with consultation of the original coursemaster. Any combination of curricular requirements can be used, based on what is in the best interest of the student's academic progress. The faculty member who is assigned as the coursemaster of the remediation program will determine the scheduling of this activity and will provide a course syllabus specific to this course, based on the recommendations from the PPAHC.

Didactic Remediation: Remediation may include, but is not limited to: self-study, written assignments, periodic meetings, re-testing, and/or assignments designed to improve understanding of course content.

Clinic Remediation: Remediation may include, but is not limited to patient care assignments, with faculty observation/supervision of specific techniques or conditions, care reviews, written assignments, periodic meetings, and/or other activities designed to improve clinical performance.

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

The assigned coursemaster/instructor(s) will provide to the PPAHC the course syllabus and feedback regarding the student's performance during and/or at the end of the remediation. The PPAHC will review the performance and make further recommendations as appropriate. Students remediating will remain on academic probation one term longer than when both the remediation plan is successfully completed and the originally failed course is successfully repeated, if applicable. External remediation could significantly delay progression in the program and the graduation date.

Repeating an Academic Year

Students repeating an academic year may be required to repeat all courses in that academic year in which a C grade or less was originally earned, as well as any other courses which the PPAHC feels are in the best interest of the student. When a student is away from the program for a semester or more, additional customized requirements may be recommended by the PPAHC, including but not limited to repeating courses, auditing courses, remediation and examination. In the event that a curricular change has created a relocation of a course to a different academic year, efforts will be made to allow the student to take the course at an alternate time. Other curricular recommendations may be made by the PPAHC. Students required to repeat an academic year will not be enrolled until the beginning of the repeat academic year. The length of academic probation for students repeating an academic year will be determined by the PPAHC. Repeating an academic year will delay progression in the program and the graduation date.

Circumstances that can subject a student to repeating all or part of an academic year include but are not limited to:

- One F grade while on academic probation, regardless of GPA.
- Annual GPA below 2.0 at the end of the summer term.

Note that if the PPAHC stated in writing, in a previous term review, that any additional F, even on a non-repeat course, will bring dismissal from the program, the recommendation of the PPAHC will automatically be for dismissal.

Dismissal from the Program

A recommendation for dismissal from the program may be made by the PPAHC if sufficient evidence exists to indicate that a student will not be able to correct past academic deficiencies or to meet the standards described in the document entitled Basic Competency for Entry-Level Optometrist within the time period allowed to complete the professional optometry program. Once a student has been dismissed from the program, future requests for readmission to the UAB School of Optometry will not be considered.

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

Other academic circumstances that can subject a student to dismissal from the professional program include, but are not limited to:

- Two or more F grades in the same term, regardless of GPA or academic probationary status
- One or more F grades received while repeating all or part of an academic year
- A failing grade and subsequent failure of the remediation plan and/or repeated course

Auditing

A student may be recommended for or required to audit one or more courses in addition to repeating a failed course or academic year. Audit Approval Forms, obtained from the Office of Student Affairs, must be completed for each course which was recommended to be audited. A student who is permitted by an instructor to audit a course must officially register for that course through the Banner system and must notify the Director of Student Affairs, the PPAHC Chair, and the coursemaster/instructor at least 30 days before the course begins. Students who are auditing a course will participate in the same activities and will have the same course requirements as students officially enrolled in the course, unless otherwise specified by the coursemaster; however, he/she will not receive an official grade for the course. Tuition will be applied for official audits.

Students are not allowed to audit courses they have not taken previously. Auditing previously taken courses is allowed if recommended or mandated by the PPAHC. In special cases, coursemasters have the discretion to allow UAB students or faculty to attend, but not officially audit, portions of a course, provided it does not lead to a diminished academic experience for those who are enrolled and provided that all other students and faculty interested in attending are given equal consideration.

Academic Status

Good Academic Standing: For a student to be considered in good academic standing at the UAB School of Optometry, he/she must not be on academic probation and must maintain a grade point average of at least 2.0.

Academic Probation: Academic probation is a warning to the student that he/she must show substantial improvement to avoid repetition of the year or dismissal from the professional program. While on academic probation, a student will not be allowed to hold leadership positions in his/her class, the school, university or other organizations supported by, or in association with, the UABSO. Participation in extracurricular activities associated with the UABSO may be limited. This may include, but is not limited to, participation in class, school and university activities, state, regional and national organization meetings, conferences and missions trips. Fourth year students are not permitted to participate in externship rotations while on academic probation, unless they are repeating the fourth year and the PPAHC feel that externships are within the best interest of academic development of the student. This may delay

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

the student's graduation date. The PPAHC will recommend the length of the academic probation, based on individual circumstances.

When a student is placed on academic probation, he/she will meet periodically with a faculty mentor for the duration of the academic probation. The role of the mentor is to provide encouragement and guidance to the student. The mentor will not be held accountable for the success or failure of the student. It is the responsibility of the student to ensure that s/he is meeting all requirements for the successful completion of the professional program.

Circumstances resulting in academic probation include, but are not limited to:

- One F grade, regardless of GPA
- GPA below 2.0

Non-Academic Probation: Based on university policy, probation can be applied as a result of violations of the UABSO Honor Code and Code of Ethics. Non-Academic Probation is a warning to the student that he/she must maintain an acceptable level of conduct in the UABSO and the university community in order to avoid repetition of a course or a year or dismissal from the professional program. The PPAHC may recommend probation, remediation, repetition of a course or year or dismissal from the professional program if the student does not, in their judgment, show sufficient promise to justify allowing the student to continue the study of optometry, regardless of the student's grades. While on non-academic probation, a student will not be allowed to hold leadership positions, or participate in any extracurricular activities supported by, or in association with, the UABSO. This may include, but is not limited to, participation in class, school and university leadership positions, state, regional and national organization meetings, conferences and mission trips. A student may be judged unacceptable for promotion or be dismissed when the student has displayed repeated lack of professionalism with respect to the management of patients or in interactions with other students, staff, or the faculty. These factors, among others, may be treated equally in importance with other academic standards in that they reflect the developing capacity to deliver a high standard of health service.

Grade Appeal/Review

A student may appeal a grade in a course if he/she feels one of the following applies:

- The grading was not in accordance with published course grading policy
- Inconsistencies were made in application of evaluation standards among students
- An error occurred in determining or assigning the grade
- The grading was arbitrary or capricious
- The grading was affected by illegal discrimination.

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

The student should seek resolution using the following steps:

1. Clarification should be sought from the coursemaster/instructor in an attempt to resolve the disagreement without further appeal. This step must be completed as soon as possible but no later than 5 days from the date of notice from the coursemaster or the release of the course grade in the BlazerNET/Banner system, whichever is earlier.
2. If the matter is not resolved by consultation with the coursemaster, the student may submit a written appeal to the PPAHC. This must be accomplished as soon as possible, but no later than 5 days from the date of notice, for consideration. The written appeal must state the basis for the grade appeal. The PPAHC will consult with the student and coursemaster/instructor as needed. The PPAHC will make a decision for or against the appeal.
3. If the PPAHC's decision is to deny the appeal, the student may make a final, written appeal to the Dean. The appeal to the Dean is an opportunity to present either a challenge to the procedures followed or to offer newly discovered evidence that could affect the outcome. This appeal must be received by the Dean as soon as possible but no later than 7 days from the date of notice of the decision from the PPAHC. The Dean will review the matter with the PPAHC Chair, the coursemaster/instructor, and the student as necessary and will make a decision whether to grant or deny the appeal. The appellant is reminded that an appeal to the Dean is not intended to provide a forum in which to reiterate the same facts or arguments previously considered by the PPAHC.

In the event that a grade appeal is not settled before the beginning of the next academic term, the student should register for the next term and attend all classes until otherwise notified by the Office of Student Affairs.

Academic Status Appeal

If a student believes there is reasonable cause to request an appeal of a decision by the PPAHC, regarding the status of probation or other required actions, such as remediation, repetition of a course or year, or dismissal from the program, the student must address a written appeal to the Dean, stating the basis for the appeal as soon as possible, but no later than 7 days of the date of the notification of the academic actions. The Dean will review the matter with the PPAHC Chair, the coursemaster/instructor and the student, as necessary, and will make a decision whether or not to consider the appeal. The objective of the Dean in the case of an appeal will be to ensure that applicable process was followed and the decision reached is supported by the facts. The appellant is reminded that an appeal to the Dean is not intended to provide a forum in which to reiterate the same facts or arguments previously considered by the PPAHC. The appeal is an opportunity to present either a challenge to the procedures followed or to offer newly discovered evidence that could affect the outcome.

Academic Policy for the Professional Degree Program (Doctor of Optometry)

In the event that an academic status appeal is not settled before the beginning of the next academic term, the student should register for the next term and attend all classes until otherwise notified by the Office of Student Affairs.

These guidelines may be revised periodically. In the event that a policy change has occurred during a term within which a grade was issued, or during a year in which an academic status was determined, the academic decisions will be governed by the version of the Academic Policy that is most favorable to the student.