LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO’s
OPHTHALMOLOGY LOOK BOOK

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OPHTHALMOLOGY LOOK BOOK

A Guide for Those interested in Matching into Ophthalmology

- with special contributions from:
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AREN'T THOSE GLASSES KIND OF A Nuisance, Linus?

NOT REALLY...

SOMETIMES THEY CAN ACTUALLY FREE MY HANDS FOR WHATEVER ELSE I MIGHT WANT TO DO...
Table of Contents

a. Introduction
b. Life of an Ophthalmologist
c. What Next?
d. Year By Year Guide
e. Conclusion
f. Resource List
**Introduction**

So you’re a Loyola student interested in ophthalmology...

Congratulations, you have decided to pursue an excellent field of practice. I remember when I was a second year medical student who first realized my interest in ophthalmology and had absolutely no idea what to do next. Hopefully this guide will help you navigate the steps you should take along the application and matching process.

A word of initial advice is to start now. It is never too early to explore this exciting field!
What is an Ophthalmologist?

General Knowledge

Ophthalmologists work in clinics and health facilities. They usually work independently or with a team of other ophthalmologists and eye health professionals. Since most procedures are outpatient procedures, few ophthalmologists work in hospitals. Some also work for universities (such as Loyola) by performing research or teaching.

They can work with patients of any age and can specialize in different procedures. While performing clinical services, an ophthalmologist can see upwards of 30 patients a day. (They often see up to five patients simultaneously since it can take up to 45 minutes for dilation to take effect.)

Ophthalmologists that perform surgeries will usually have one or two surgery days each week and have clinical hours throughout the remainder of the week. Though emergencies are infrequent, they can also occur. Some also have teaching duties, so they will perform rounds with residents in a teaching hospital.

Ophthalmology is a technology-heavy field, with many ophthalmologists working with diagnostic tools and measuring devices to assess the problem. Ophthalmologists do procedures with lasers as well as surgical procedures. Most laser procedures can be performed in the clinic to treat conditions such as diabetic retinopathy and glaucoma. The most common surgical procedure performed by general ophthalmologists is cataract surgery, which is done in an outpatient surgery center. Ophthalmologists try to create the smallest incisions and work with precision. Most of the procedures are performed relatively quickly without long recuperation periods. Patients can experience improvement within hours or days, so patient satisfaction is very high, a factor which increases the job satisfaction of ophthalmologists.

The Schedule for an Ophthalmologist

Most ophthalmologists work full-time Monday through Friday. Though they are on call for emergencies, emergencies are less common than other surgical specialties such as general surgery or orthopedic surgery. With fewer emergencies and most questions handled by a phone call, many ophthalmologists often rotate taking call from home on evenings and weekends with many problems being able to be taken care of over the phone, unlike other surgeons and physicians. Occasionally they will have to go to the emergency room to assess and treat the patient.

Ophthalmologist Salary
According to Salary.com, the average annual salary of ophthalmologists is approximately $245,000. Eye surgeons that perform LASIK surgery in a clinic will usually make $125,000 to $150,000 per year. According to Allied Physicians, the maximum salary for ophthalmologists is $511,000 per year and retina ophthalmologists, one specialty in this field, can receive a maximum of $716,000 per year. According to the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the highest-paying states are Wyoming, North Carolina and New Jersey.

**Sub-Specialties**

General ophthalmologists can treat a wide range of disorders, such as cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, and macular degeneration. Some may decide to do refractive surgery, such as LASIK. Ophthalmologists may choose to do additional fellowship training after residency so that they can perform more advanced techniques within a sub-specialty. The most common sub-specialties are cornea/anterior segment, glaucoma, retina, oculoplastics, and pediatric ophthalmology. Cornea/anterior segment specialists can do corneal transplants, refractive surgery, and anterior segment reconstruction. Glaucoma specialists can perform advanced glaucoma surgeries. Retina specialists perform laser procedures on the retina, inject medications in the eye to treat macular degeneration, and perform surgery to repair retinal detachments. Oculoplastics specialists can repair the tear drainage system, repair droopy eyelids, and remove tumors in the orbit. Pediatric ophthalmologists primarily treat strabismus, i.e. misalignment of the eyes. This is just a small sampling of the most common procedures that sub-specialists can do. ([Adapted from http://www.cvtips.com/career-choice/ophthalmologist-job-facts.html](http://www.cvtips.com/career-choice/ophthalmologist-job-facts.html))

After getting a general training in ophthalmology there is a large number of specialties that one can pursue:

- Anterior Segment
- Cornea and External Disease & Refractive Surgery
- Glaucoma
- Neuro-Ophthalmology
- Oculo-Plastic Surgery
- Pediatric Ophthalmology
- Medical Retina
- Retina Vitreous
- Ophthalmic (Histo-) Pathology
- Uveitis
Getting to Know the Loyola Department

One of the best pieces of advice I received was to get to know the Loyola Ophthalmology department. They, more so than the medical school deans, will be the best source of information for the ophthalmology match. Get to know them early and try to really involve yourself.
These statistics are not meant to scare you away from ophthalmology as your specialty of interest but to show you that yes it is a very competitive specialty to match into. This should serve as a motivation for you to work as hard as you possibly can to reach this goal. That being said, as in every specialty and in life, your grades aren’t the whole picture.
The Well-Rounded Student

Volunteer, Volunteer, Volunteer!

Volunteering in ophthalmology is very helpful to create contacts, learn about the field, and show your interest. It also helps you to gain real-world experience in ophthalmology that helps you determine whether or not ophthalmology really is for you. SSOM is very service-oriented and there are many opportunities through the ophthalmology interest group to volunteer year-round. To get connected and serve, check the ophthalmology departmental website periodically for ways to get involved!

Research

Research in ophthalmology is not the be-all, end-all to getting an interview, but it certainly helps. It helps you to get more experience in a field you are passionate about and it helps to align yourself with someone in the department. If you are looking for research opportunities, be sure to check the ophthalmology department website. Do not wait for these opportunities to come to you. Instead, be proactive and find them. The department is incredibly helpful as well. Good contacts for research will be listed in the contacts section of the appendix. Be sure to ask to see the spreadsheet that contains all the on-going projects at Loyola which contains which projects have medical students assigned to them and which ones need a project.

Finally-To Thyself be True!

Make sure to do what interests you and be sure to include this in your CV. This not only makes for great conversation topics during your interviews, but it also serves to make you feel better as a whole person. Trust me; it is alright to be interested in things other than medical school. In fact it is encouraged!
Year by Year Guide

MSI + MSII

Get your feet wet! Explore all the fields that you have an interest in and join the ophthalmology interest group. Go to as many vision screening volunteering opportunities that are available.

If you know for certain that you are interested in ophthalmology then approach the department and try to get some general research in ophthalmology.

Do well in all of your basic classes. Your Step I will be at the end of your 4th year and this is a very important score in ophthalmology because it is a score that many schools will use to screen applicants for interviewing.

MSIII

This year you will have your core clerkship rotations. Make sure to do your absolute best in all the rotations because these will be the people who will be giving you your letters of recommendation for the match. Of particular interest to the field of ophthalmology is how well you do in Medicine, Surgery, and Pediatrics.

Make sure to continue or start a research project with the ophthalmology department at your school.

MSIV

This is a great year but tends to be very front-loaded because the match in ophthalmology is an early one. The first thing you will encounter is away electives.

Things to Look for when doing Away Electives:

When approaching an away elective in your 4th year, first look at your primary institution. Try to plan for this rotation to be your first ophthalmology month. Having your first month at Loyola not only allows you to get to know the attendings and residents, but also lets you get a sense of the environment of your home institution. This experience lets you learn crucial skills to impress at your away rotations. Loyola has a VA which is a great resource for learning and getting hands-on experience as well.

The second idea when applying for aways is to look at where you think you may want to end up.

Thirdly, as a SSOM student, you are only allowed to do 12 weeks in any one specialty, including ophthalmology. This usually means a month at Loyola and 2
months at other institutions or a month in the Loyola clinics, a research month at Loyola, and one away rotation. Any combination of the above should work well.

That being said, most institutions do not like to see students do more than 2-3 away rotations. Departments like students who are excellent, well-rounded physicians and who took advantage of a broad scope of learning opportunities in their 4th year, not limited to ophthalmology.

**How to Impress during Electives**

Be attentive. When you go off into dream mode, you’re never the only one who notices.

Ask questions: Unlike most of my other rotations, it was actually alright to ask questions, so DO IT.

Be a good person: For example, if a patient needs help with his wheel chair, help him. These things should be intuitive, but sometimes people lose their innate impulse to act kindly when they think others are watching them (for whatever reason).

Have a personality: Seriously, the programs are looking for someone they would like to work with for 3 years. You should be that person.

Use every opportunity to hone/learn skills: Slit lamp exams, direct and indirect ophthalmoscopy, etc... Darlene Dement in the Loyola Ophthalmology Department provides you with an excellent syllabus during orientation to go through. Endeavour to take this seriously.

**What Questions are a MUST when evaluating a Program**

Ask the residents:

- What is call like?
- How often is it?
- Do you sleep?
- Is there back-up?
- Can you take call from home?
- How well do you get along with the nursing staff?
- What is a typical day like?
- What annoys you about this place?
- What do you like about it?
- What are the benefits?
- Do you have time to read?
- Is the curriculum structured?
- How often do you have to present?
- Is there funding to go to conferences?
- Is there funding for instruments? Books?
- How much vacation time?
- How well do you get along with attendings?
- Do you interact outside the office?
- Is there time to do research?
- Are there any research requirements?
- How is the orientation period?
- How many patients are you expected to see?
- When do you get to start doing surgery?
- Are there tests? How often?
- How is your social life?
- Do you see your significant other?
- How is it living in this city?
- What do you do for fun?
- Has anyone ever been kicked out?
- How is the support system here? What is it?
Are there committees that include representation from the residents?
Do they ever make changes based on resident demands? What was the last one?
Are you happy?
What programs were you choosing between?
Why is this one best for you?
What would you have asked knowing what you know now?
What do the residents tend to do after graduation?
Where do your grads go for fellowship?
What qualities are you looking for in a resident that would make a good fit in your program?
How well do you and the house staff get along?
Are there opportunities to do electives in underdeveloped countries?
How financially stable is the institution?
What directions are you taking in advancing the program?

Ask the director:

Applications: CAS (San Francisco Match) and ERAS

As a future ophthalmologist you will be entering 2 matches: the early match for ophthalmology done by the San Francisco Match through the CAS system and the general match for an internship year through the ERAS system. The ERAS system sets you up for a preliminary or transitional year as your internship years. As this time gets closer look at online sources and talk to residents about which one they chose and why. Most people apply to both as transitional positions tend to be more competitive to receive.

I will not belabor you by going through the CAS or the ERAS applications. The ERAS application is well covered by SSOM deans (by several lectures and power point presentations). The CAS application on the other hand is NOT. I would look up information about this in January of the application year. Even though this seems early as the registration to apply is usually in June, it helps you plan out your year. See website section of the appendix.

Words of Wisdom: The CAS system is complicated and not user-friendly, but it is manageable. Your letters of recommendation and transcripts get mailed in one envelope. The other general part gets submitted online. After it reaches the processing center, it takes about 2-3 weeks to process and actually send it out to programs. Check individual program deadlines on CAS. The suggested target is September 1st to get the forms to CAS, but the deadline for some schools is September 1st, meaning that you need to get the application in well before then to have your application processed in time. So for all the procrastinators out there: as the Nike slogan clearly states, “Just Do It.”

There is no magic number for programs to apply to. I have heard of people who applied to 30 and people who applied to 95. Factors to consider in choosing numbers

Questions adapted from: http://www.medfools.com/match/opthalmology.php
are how strong of a candidate you are, whether you are couples matching (note: early matchers cannot couples match but you can target bigger cities to increase chances of matching in the same state/hospital), and most importantly where you want to be.

**Application Timeline for CAS (Taken from the SF Match Website)**

**2011-2012 Timetable**

**Wednesday, June 1, 2011**
- Applicant registration begins for the Ophthalmology Residency Match (OMP). Although we do not have any registration deadlines, it is in your best interest to register early so that you may have access to match materials as soon as they become available. Applicants will gain access to view the Program Directory after registration is concluded. This directory is updated by programs year-around. It is recommended that you check this directory on a regular basis. Please note the individual deadline dates of each program to which you will apply.

**Thurs., September 1, 2011 CAS Target Date**
- This is the Target Date to have your application submitted for Central Distribution. This is NOT a deadline. Remember, some programs accept applications at any time; others may set a deadline. It is the applicant's responsibility to contact training programs for individual deadline dates.

**November 1, 2011**
- Release of Dean's letters for all current U.S. Seniors and Graduates.

**December 2011**
- Programs and applicants begin submitting their rank-ordered preference lists.

**Thurs., January 5, 2012 Rank List Submission Deadline**
- ALL rank lists must be in our office by 12:00 PM (PST). After the deadline your rank lists choices will be locked and no changes can be made.

**Thurs., January 12, 2012 Match Results**
- Match results available to programs. Programs must login to SF Match account to view Match results. Match applicants are generally contacted the same day by their matched programs.
- Applicants match results available to US Dean's offices.

**Fri., January 13, 2012**
- Match results are released to applicants. Login to SF Match account to view Match results.

**Mon., January 16, 2012**
- Any post-match vacancies which remain after the match will be announced on this website. Select your specialty from the SF Match home page and click on the "Vacancies" button on the left-hand side menu. We only list vacancies of programs which have indicated that they will accept applications for their unfilled positions.
- Applicants who did not match may begin applying to these positions by negotiating directly with the programs regarding
any documentation that they require. If the programs ask you to forward your CAS file, use the post-match distribution form to request your application to be forwarded to the program. There is a fee for this service.

July 2013

- Ophthalmology PGY-2 training begins.

Letters of Recommendation (LoRs)

These should be from people who know you well. Ophthalmology is particularly interested in IM, Pediatrics, and Surgery letters. Letters from research mentors are also advisable if possible. Keep in mind that you can only have 3 LoRs. (Try to ask for 4 just in case a letter falls through.) Usually shoot for 2 general/1 ophtho, or 1 general/2 ophtho. Do not get only 3 ophtho letters. Programs like to see that their residents can actually excel in general practice as well as ophthalmology.

Also, many people have asked about choosing between getting a letter from a famous ophthalmologist who they don’t really know, versus a lesser known IM doctor who worked with them for several weeks and can write them a strong letter. Every ophthalmologist and general medicine doctors who I have asked have said that they respect the quality of the letter over the name of the letter writer. Quality is key!

Personal Statement

It goes without saying that this should be personal. It should show the department why they want you. Programs are looking for unique statements that distinguish you as an applicant but do not venture into the realm of the strange. A very wise ophthalmologist told me not to write the following: “I was sitting in the back of class one day and noticed that I couldn’t see the board as clearly as I had 3 years ago. Suddenly it hit me: ophthalmology was the specialty for me.” That statement identifies you as one of the millions of people with poor eyesight, but it does nothing to make you stand out as an excellent candidate for residency.

CV

This should highlight your achievements. Also include special skills, hobbies, honors, awards, job experience, and volunteering. An ophthalmology residency director stressed the point of including job experience if you have any, because they like to see that you are able to follow directions and succeed under pressure. Real-life work experience is a plus.
Conclusion

At Loyola, the mission statement includes the following, “We also treat the human spirit”. Through the journey into the exciting field of ophthalmology I encourage you to take care of your own spirit. It is a grueling, taxing, exciting, yet ultimately rewarding mission. I encourage you to be firm in your pursuits and keep your eye on the prize. Most people remember that St. Ignatius of Loyola said, “Go forth and set the world on fire,” but they forget that he also said, “Laugh and grow strong!” Be encouraged in your journey and best of luck!
Resources:

A. Loyola Ophthalmology Department:
   - General: http://www.stritch.luc.edu/depts/ophtha/index.htm
   - Contacts: http://www.stritch.luc.edu/depts/ophtha/faculty_and_staff/index.htm
   - Research: http://www.stritch.luc.edu/depts/ophtha/research/index.htm

B. Applications:

C. Interviewing:
   - First Aid for the Match: Insider Advice From Students and Residency Directors - This book got OK reviews. I’d advise you to talk to residents and deans for more detailed advice.
     - http://www.stritch.luc.edu/lumen/meded/softchalkhdht/residency_interview_final_07_2011/index.html - great site from Loyola that give you a tutorial about interviewing, EXTREMELY helpful.
   - Student Doctor Network usually has a thread about which schools have sent out their interviews/rejections. Use AT YOUR OWN RISK. This site has great advice at times, but don’t settle for others experiences to determine where you want to apply or interview, make the choice on your own. http://studentdoctor.net/

D. ERAS and CAS programs
   - Scutwork.com, awful website name aside, gives decent reviews about ophthalmology, prelim, and transitional year programs. Again use at your own risk and there are many programs not evaluated.

E. General advice about Ophthalmology
   - http://www.medfools.com/match/ophthalmology.php - gives decent advice about deciding on your specialty, LoRs, questions did programs tend to ask, rank lists, etc...all related specifically to ophthalmology
F. And just in case you were curious...

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G. Ophthalmology Comics:

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