



SCHOOL OF OPTOMETRY

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

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
University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry

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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 subsequent academic term, since at the end of that term the Incomplete 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 Associate Dean for Student Affairs prior to when the grade automatically changes to an F. The approval of the instructor, the Professional Program Academic and Honor Council (PPAHC), the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and Dean of the School of Optometry may be 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.

Academic Term

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

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

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 restrictions of academic probation, students may require more than four academic years to 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 Affairs followed by approval by the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and Dean of the School of Optometry 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 Professional Program Academic and Honor Council (PPAHC). Each course in the program must be successfully completed in order for a student to receive the O.D. degree. 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](#), are required for graduation.

Enrollment Status

A student's enrollment status may change after the failure of a course or clinic. Academic leave may be necessary in order to repeat the course when it is next offered. The PPAHC may recommend a clinical technician position in the interim to prevent the loss of clinical skills during leave period. Please see the School of Optometry Leave of Absence Policy in the Student Handbook for more information regarding enrollment status and withdrawals.

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 School of Optometry's Academic Integrity Code. 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 course directors regarding failures in their courses and student documentation pertaining to a failure of a course (only after the student has been informed of the failure by the course director). The course director should communicate the failure of his/her course to the student by the date on

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which grades are due for that term. The course director will advise students of the method by which a course failure will be communicated. The course director shall also provide written notice of a course failure to the PPAHC chairperson, the Associate Dean for Student Affairs, and the Director of Student Affairs, by the date on which grades are due for that term, absent extenuating circumstances.

For any F grade issued, the course director will provide the PPAHC with 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 course director 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, an appeal letter documenting such factors should be submitted to the Chairperson of the PPAHC, prior to the committee meeting. All students with their academic status under review by the PPAHC will be invited to present their case in person or via Zoom at the PPAHC meeting when the case 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 and will refrain from voting on the committee recommendation for that student.

The PPAHC will make a ruling by vote regarding the promotion, probationary status, course repetition, course 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.

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

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- 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 may be 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 an alternate repeat course in place of the original course

Didactic Courses

The requirements of the alternate repeat 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 course director may recommend an alternate repeat clinical course in place of a failed clinic course. If this is offered, the alternate repeat course may include, but is not limited to: patient care assignments with faculty observation/supervision of specific techniques or conditions, case reviews, written assignments, periodic meetings and/or other activities designed to improve clinical performance.

If the course director offers an alternate repeat course, he/she will usually serve as the course director and will determine the course requirements, grading and scheduling of the course. The course director may also suggest an alternate appropriate course outside of the school to the PPAHC chair or Associate Dean for Student Affairs. Additional provisions may be suggested by the PPAHC in consultation with the course director who assigned the original F grade. The grading scale used for the alternate 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 course director. Special courses that are created for these purposes for a specific student will be given a new course grade and extra tuition may be applied. The assigned course director/instructor(s) for alternate 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 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.

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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/alternate 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 and will be subject to dismissal from the program. In cases of extenuating circumstances, the PPAHC may allow a student to remediate a repeat course F grade while on academic performance probation.

Remediation

Mid-Semester Remediation

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

Post-Semester Remediation

Students failing a course at the end of the academic term may be allowed to complete a remediation course as outlined in the course syllabus and consistent with the academic policy and at the recommendation of the PPAHC. Students enrolling in a remediation course will be issued an "incomplete" until the requirements of the remediation are finished. The remediation course will be designed by the course director/instructor with guidance from the PPAHC to retest the student's deficient skills and/or allow the student to demonstrate mastery or proficiency of the course content. The remediation course should be limited in scope and not intended to retest the entire course content. Requirements for passage of the remediation course must be clearly outlined by the course director and shared with the student and 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.

The duration of the remediation course cannot extend beyond the first two weeks of the subsequent semester. Students successfully completing the remediation course before the end of the second week of the subsequent semester will be issued a passing grade for the previously incomplete course. Students failing the remediation will be issued a

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failing grade for the original course and subject to the consequences of course failure outlined in the Academic Policy. Student failure or passage of the remediation course will be communicated to the PPAHC within 5 days. Due to the complexity of such special programs and schedules, students may not always be eligible to enroll in the next sequential academic term, and remediation could delay progression in the program and/or a student's graduation date. The need for remediation may prevent the student from attending an externship program. If a student who is on academic performance probation fails a remediation course, he/she may be subject to dismissal from the program.

Repeating an Academic Year

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 performance probation, regardless of GPA.
- Annual GPA below 2.0 at the end of the summer term.

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. 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.

Academic Probation

Academic Performance Probation

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

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

Academic performance 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 performance 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, 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 school-sponsored mission trips. Fourth year students may not be permitted to participate in externship rotations while on academic performance 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 the student's graduation date. The PPAHC will recommend the length of academic performance probation based on individual circumstances.

When a student is placed on academic performance probation, they will meet periodically with a faculty mentor during the probation period. 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 all requirements are met for the successful completion of the professional program.

Academic Conduct Probation

Academic conduct probation can be applied as a result of violations of the [UABSO Academic Integrity Code](#). Academic conduct probation is a warning to the student that he/she must maintain an acceptable level of conduct in UABSO and the university community in order to avoid repetition of a course or a year or dismissal from the professional program. While on academic conduct 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 school-sponsored 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

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be treated equally in importance with other academic standards in that they reflect the developing capacity to deliver a high standard of health service.

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 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 while on academic performance probation
- A failing grade and subsequent failure of an alternate repeat course

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

Auditing

The PPAHC may recommend that a student audit one or more courses previously taken 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 Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Director of Student Affairs, the PPAHC Chair, and the course director/instructor at least 45 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 course director; however, he/she will not receive an official grade for the course. Tuition will be applied for audits.

In special cases, course directors 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

A student not on academic probation with a grade point average of at least 2.0 is in good academic standing at UAB School of Optometry.

Grade Appeal/Review

Students may appeal a grade in a course if they feel 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.

The student should seek resolution using the following steps:

1. Clarification should be sought from the course director/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 course director 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 course director, the student may submit a written appeal to the PPAHC. This must be accomplished as soon as possible, but no later than 5 days after meeting with the course director. The written appeal must state the basis for the grade appeal. The PPAHC will consult with the student and course director/instructor and review relevant evidence as needed. The PPAHC will decide for or against the appeal.
3. If the PPAHC's decision is to deny the appeal, the student may make a written appeal to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. 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. This appeal must be received by the Associate Dean as soon as possible but no later than 5 days from the date of notice of the decision from the PPAHC. The Associate Dean will review the matter with the PPAHC Chair, the course director/instructor, and the student, in addition to any other relevant evidence, as necessary, and will decide whether to grant or deny the appeal. The appellant is reminded that an appeal to the Associate 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 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 Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, stating the basis for the appeal as soon as possible, but no later than 5 days from the date of the notification of the academic actions. The Associate Dean will review the matter with the PPAHC Chair, the course director/instructor and the student, in addition to any other relevant evidence, as necessary, and will decide whether or not to uphold the decision of the PPAHC. The objective of the Associate Dean in the case of an appeal will be to ensure that the applicable process was followed, and the decision reached is supported by the facts. The appellant is reminded that an appeal to the Associate 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. The final appeal will be to the Dean of the School 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.

Appendix A: Professional Program Academic Policy Flow Chart

The following flowchart summarizes the potential outcomes for course failure: The course director will provide the PPAHC with 1) a written summary of the student's performance and 2) a recommendation consistent with the SOO academic policies and the course syllabus.

Students believing extenuating circumstances contributed to the failing grade should submit an appeal letter to the PPAHC Chair prior to the PPAHC meeting. These students will be invited to present their case in person or via Zoom during the PPAHC proceedings.

After evaluating the information related to the course failure, the PPAHC will make a ruling regarding the promotion to the next semester, probationary status, course repetition, course remediation, and/or dismissal of the student.

Recommendations of the PPAHC should be consistent with policies contained in the course syllabus and may include one of the following:

Repeat Course

An F grade is issued for the course.

The course is repeated when it's next offered

The student will receive a grade and course credit for the repeat course. The original F will remain on the transcript.

Complete an alternate repeat course, as determined by the course instructor and the PPAHC in place of the original course.

The alternate repeat course must be completed before the end of the next academic term.

The student will receive a grade and course credit for the alternate repeat course. The original F will remain on the transcript.

*Circumstances resulting in academic probation include (but not limited to):

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

Duration of academic probation is at the recommendation of the PPAHC

Remediation

Mid-Semester Remediation

Deficiencies identified by an instructor within the semester may be remediated within the academic term.

Post-Semester Remediation

The student may be offered an opportunity to remediate deficient skills and/or demonstrate concept mastery. An "incomplete" will be issued for the course until the end of remediation.

Course remediation must be complete before the second week of the subsequent semester.

Successful remediation will result in the removal of the incomplete and the student will be issued a passing grade for the original course.

An F grade is issued for students failing remediation.

Repeat the academic year

The student must repeat all courses in the 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.

Circumstances subjecting students to repeat all or part of an academic year include (but not limited to):

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

The ruling of the PPAHC is final. Students may seek to appeal the committee's decision to the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs under the following conditions:

- 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

If the PPAHC rules for dismissal, the student may appeal this decision to the Dean of School of Optometry.

Dismissal from the program

Academic circumstances that subject a student to dismissal from the professional program include (but not limited to):

- Two or more F grades in the same term regardless of GPA or academic status
- One or more F grades while repeating all or part of an academic year
- A failing grade while on academic probation
- A failing grade and subsequent failure of the remediation or alternate repeat course