Requirements for Licensure as a NC Dispensing Optician

Residents

As a **resident**, there are three ways to qualify for the Exam for opticianry licensure in the state of North Carolina:

(1) graduation from an accredited school of opticianry (such as Durham Technical Community College (DTCC) https://www.durhamtech.edu/programs-pathways/opticianry) or Southwestern Community College (SCC) https://www.southwesterncc.edu/health-sciences/opticianry with a two-year Associate in Applied Science degree in Opticianry, then passing the Licensure Examination and serving a six-month Internship while registered with the Board in an approved Training Establishment (TE);

(2) possession of a four-year degree in a health-related field, inclusive of the optics-specific courses required as a part of the AAS-Opticianry degree. (The Board will review the curriculum from these applications for acceptance.) Passing the Licensure Examination, and completion of the six-month Internship described above is also required;

-OR-

(3) completion of a 2 ½ year Apprenticeship (or 3 ½ years, if registered prior to Nov 1, 2016) at an approved TE under a registered trainer. 'Completion' means having completed the on-the-job training *and* having finished a Board-approved certificate program (DTCC's Optical Apprentice Certificate Program, the National Academy of Opticianry (NAO) Career Progression Program) or Optical Training Institute (OTI) (Conditionally-Approved) Optician Development Program. Once a candidate has completed Apprenticeship, passed the Licensure Examination and served a six-month Internship while registered with the Board in an approved TE, a license can be issued.

NOTE: The DoD/MOS optical training made available to military personnel is deemed comparable to the Board Apprenticeship program; personnel providing documentation of successful completion of a MOS in opticianry are Exam- and Internship-eligible.

Non-Residents

Opticianry law also outlines requirements for those licensure applicants coming from other states that license opticians.

NCGS 90-241(a) states that **non-resident applicants coming from a state that has an optician's license may become licensed in NC (without having to pass the Licensure Exam) if they meet the following qualifications**:

(1) minimum 18 years of age;
(2) possess good moral character (the Board runs background checks on its applicants);
(3) in good standing with an optician's license in another state;
(4) having been engaged in the practice of opticianry in their (licensed) credit state for 4 years *immediately preceding the application* to the Board;
(5) holds a contact lens license in their (licensed) credit state; and,
(6) has not violated any opticianry law or rules in NC.

Failure to have all these statutorily-required items shown will preclude 'automatic' licensure by waiver of the Exam; these applicants may be required to take some, or all, of the Exam components.

NCGS 90-241(b) addresses **applicants coming from a state that does NOT have an optician's license**. Individuals with these qualifications can apply to sit for the Licensure Examination:

(1) items 1, 2, and 6 shown above;
(2) having been engaged in the practice of opticianry in the other state for 4 years *immediately preceding the application* to the Board;
(3) proof of any formalized apprenticeship participation **and** education – a training/education equivalency to the NAO's Career Progression Program. (The individual must provide documentation of their time in training and experience in all phases of the optical business – to include eyeglass dispensing, lab work, contact lens fitting/dispensing, etc.)

Applicants from unlicensed states who don't possess the above requirements would not qualify for Exam participation; they would be required to complete the Board's Apprenticeship program or obtain an AAS degree in Opticianry, like in-state residents must do to qualify to sit for the Exam.

ABO/NCLE Certifications are Important

All licensure and Exam applicants must provide proof of their certifications with ABO-NCLE; this proof can be in the form of certificate copies, or verification correspondence from ABO-NCLE. These are important in the Board's review of applications and determination of which (if any) Exam components an applicant may be required to take.

> If an applicant has taken and passed the ABO's National Opticianry Competency Examination (NOCE) (ABO Basic) Examination during the three (3) years immediately preceding their application for participation in the NC State Board of Opticians' Licensure Examination, they will not be required to take the ABO Basic component of the Exam.
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> Likewise, if he/she has taken and passed the NCLE's Contact Lens Registry Exam (NCLE Basic) during the three (3) years immediately preceding their application for participation in the NC State Board of Opticians' Licensure Examination, they will not be required to take the NCLE Basic component of the Exam.

Exam Information

The NC State Board of Opticians has transitioned to use of the ABO-NCLE National Opticians' Exam as this state's Licensure Exam https://www.abo-ncle.org/. The Board accepts Exam applications and vets applicants – including random background checks -- for participation eligibility.

> Applicants should note that their Exam eligibility application and the $300 fee (payable by certified check or money order) are due into the State Board office 30 days before the registration deadline established by ABO-NCLE.

The Board notifies applicants when they've been approved as Exam-eligible and refers them to ABO-NCLE for their registration completion. This completes the Board's processes; ABO-NCLE directly administers the Exam components and handles notifying participants of their Exam results.

Internship Required

State statute (NCGS 90-237) requires that ALL licensure candidates (whether in- or out-of-state applicants (by waiver of Examination, or by Examination completion), serve a six-month Internship while registered with the Board in an approved Training Establishment before an optician's license is issued.
https://www.ncleg.gov/EnactedLegislation/Statutes/HTML/ByChapter/Chapter_90.html

> The only exceptions allowed to this requirement are for those who have been previously licensed as opticians in NC (thereby having already served an Internship), and for military personnel and spouse applicants.

Military Personnel and Spouses

Statewide statutory revisions in 2016 allow for a faster track to licensure for military personnel with an opticianry MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), and their spouses *who possess a current optician's license from another state*. These applicants are allowed credit for less lengthy time-in-practice than is required of other applicants -- they must have been in active practice for only 2 of the previous 5 years.

And to further aid these military personnel and qualifying spouses into quicker employment as they relocate during active service, grants them a temporary license (without additional licensing while the Board reviews and issues its decision regarding their application.
http://ncopticiansboard.org/library/pdf/Military%206.2020.pdf

After a License is Issued

Once a North Carolina optician's license is issued, licensees are required to obtain 8 hours' continuing education credit (CEC) per year, in specific numbers and categories.

Annual renewals can be done online through the Licensee Portal of the Board website, or by mail. The license renewal fee is $150, and any applicable late fees.

Licensees who are not actively practicing opticianry, or have retired from the profession, but still desire to keep the license may apply to have the license placed in INACTIVE STATUS. Licenses approved for this status are not required to obtain annual CECs but do have to continue paying the annual renewal fee. Disciplinary action will be applied to those found practicing with an Inactive License.

Licensees can reverse the process if they decide to return to ACTIVE STATUS by first attending a full cadre of CECs and paying the $100 License Restoration Fee.

Whether in Active or Inactive status, licenses that go unrenewed for two years are deleted per G.S. 90-244.

Please feel free to call the Board office at (919) 420-1390 for clarification or further assistance.

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