

Professional Student Exchange Program in Optometry

General Information

What is PSEP?

The state of Colorado is a member of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) and is one of 12 member states that participate in the Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP). That enables students in those member states to enroll in designated out-of-state professional programs not generally available at public institutions in their home state.

How is Funding Appropriated?

As part of this state's participation in PSEP, the Colorado Legislature typically appropriates funds to assist Colorado residents in the pursuit of professional degrees in **optometry** only. The legislature typically has appropriated sufficient funds for all continuing PSEP students and additional new students each year. The Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) is the state agency that oversees PSEP in Colorado.

Who is Eligible to Participate?

To be eligible for participation in PSEP, students must be certified by CDHE as a Colorado resident for tuition purposes. Colorado residency for tuition purposes must be maintained throughout participation in PSEP.

How do I Establish Colorado Residency?

Criteria for Colorado residency for tuition purposes may include but is not limited to the following:

- Continuous physical presence for a minimum of 12 consecutive months;
- Payment of Colorado state income tax as a resident;
- Permanent, full-time, off-campus employment;
- Acquisition of a Colorado Motor Vehicle Operator's License or a valid Colorado ID for identification purposes;
- Voter registration in Colorado;
- Ownership of residential real property in Colorado;
- Any other factors, which help establish intent to make Colorado one's permanent home.

Note: Under C.R.S. 24-76.5-103(4), it is necessary that proof of lawful presence in the U.S. be supplied.

Must I Attend Certain Designated Schools?

Students must be admitted to one of the four in-region optometry schools listed. Please contact the WICHE certifying officer for details. If you choose to attend an out-of-region school, you will be placed on the alternate funding list and ***will most likely not receive funding***. This is due to the fact that in-region institutions receive priority when funding.

How Do I apply for the PSEP Program?

PSEP applications can be obtained from the CDHE website and must be returned to CDHE by October 15 of the same year for first consideration for the subsequent academic year. For example, students who wish to be given first consideration for the academic year 2024-2025,

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must return PSEP applications to CDHE no later than October 15, 2023. PSEP candidates who fail to submit their application to CDHE prior to the October 15 deadline will be regarded as alternates for support consideration.

What is the Selection Process for New Applicants?

Students who have been admitted to at least one of the designated institutions by June 1 are considered for PSEP selection before those with later admission dates. Only if funds remain available, are students with late admission dates considered for selection.

What are the Funding Priorities?

Guidelines have been established to aid in the distribution of funds allocated in the support of PSEP, as follows:

- *Continuing Students* receive first consideration for support
- *Entering Students* receive second consideration (chronological receipt of acceptance letter by CDHE)
- *Currently enrolled*, continuing students receive third consideration
- *Alternates* with applications submitted after the deadline receive fourth consideration

Are there Special Circumstances Regarding the Funding Priorities?

- Students required to repeat an academic year will be ineligible for support during that repeat year. Eligibility for support consideration is re-acquired by the successful completion of the repeat year, at which time; the student will be reclassified as a *Continuing Student*.
- Students who take an institution-approved leave of absence will be eligible for support as a *Continuing Student* if they re-enroll within one academic year of the first day of absence. Students who do not recommence their academic studies within that year must reapply for CDHE certification for renewed support consideration, and will normally be reclassified as a *Continuing Student*.
- Students who have failed academically or are not permitted by the institution to continue academic study may reapply for CDHE certification if they can gain readmission to one of the designated institutions. If successful, they would be reclassified as a *Continuing Student*.

What are My Obligations for receiving the Award?

Each participating PSEP student must practice optometry for one full year in the state of Colorado for each academic year support was received. Immediately following graduation, graduating PSEP students are automatically granted a one-year grace period from CDHE to allow the student time in which to begin practice in optometry in Colorado. All PSEP graduates must notify CDHE when they have begun practice. Continuous practice must be maintained in Colorado until the obligation has been met.

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Are there Exceptions to the Practice Obligation?

Deferments to the practice obligation may be up to the discretion of CDHE and may be granted by CDHE on a yearly basis for one or more of the following reasons:

- A health condition which prohibits practice
- A documented inability to obtain employment in optometry
- Advanced training in optometry
- Military service or other service deemed appropriate for deferment

What are the Consequences if I do not fulfill my Practice Obligation?

Students who do not fulfill the obligation through practice in the state of Colorado, including those who do not graduate with a professional degree in optometry, are required to repay, with interest¹, the support the state of Colorado provided. Repayment schedules will be sent by CDHE to those individuals. In the case of default, collections fees will be determined by CDHE.

Definition of Terms

Continuing Student:	One who previously participated in PSEP, and is eligible to begin the second, third, fourth, or fifth academic year of study.
Entering Student:	One who has been accepted into PSEP, and is eligible to begin the first year of study.
Non-PSEP Continuing Student:	One who did not previously participate but has subsequently been accepted into PSEP, and is eligible to begin the second, third or fourth academic year of study.
Deferment:	An approved period of time during which the practice obligation or payment is suspended.

¹ The interest rate is equal to the PLUS loan rate which is calculated by adding 3.25 to the bond equivalent of the 52-week treasury bills auctioned at the final auction held prior to June 1, preceding the first award year for which the interest rate is calculated.