

# Graduate Diploma in Orientation and Mobility

## School of Optometry and Vision Science

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### 1. Orientation and Mobility (O&M)

**Q: What is Orientation and Mobility (O&M)**

A. Orientation and Mobility (O&M) is the practice of enabling people with low vision or blindness to know where they are, so they can get where they want to go safely. O&M specialists work with people of all ages, tailoring interventions to suit the needs of the individual client, including people with additional complexities such as health conditions.

**Q: What is the Graduate Diploma in Orientation and Mobility**

A. The Graduate Diploma is the only program of its kind in Australia. The program prepares graduates for enriching careers in the provision Orientation & Mobility (O&M) services. Graduates will be equipped with the specialised knowledge, critical and analytical skills, and industry experiences to gain employment as an O&M Specialist and impact the lives of people who are blind or have low vision.

#### 2. Entry Requirements

**Q: What are the Entry Requirements?**

A: A 3-year bachelor's degree (AQF level 7) is the entry level into this program. Applicants with equivalent undergraduate qualifications or other experience are welcome to apply to determine if they might meet the requirements through alternate pathways.

**Please note:** A requirement of the US certifying body ACVREP (Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals) is that candidates have qualification of AQF 7 or higher. The program provides practical experience as part of the process for graduates to apply for industry certification i.e., the US ACVREP certification exam to become a COMS (Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist).

**Q. What are the preferred pathways into the Graduate Diploma of O&M?**

A: Relevant undergraduate degrees in health sciences, psychology, rehabilitation or education are preferable, however other degrees are also considered.

**Q: What student attributes are essential for student success in this program:**

**A:** Graduate attributes: Students require a minimum physical dexterity and fitness for the program (including the ability to train under blindfold, walk backwards on stairs, and be able to walk at least 5km); and have the educational and emotional intelligence to accept feedback and the duty of care for the physical safety of individuals with multi-disability. Flexibility for extensive travel to clients, both as a student and a graduate, is required.

**Q: I have a postgraduate degree, will this be accepted?**

**A:** Yes, we accept bachelors and higher degrees. (AQF level 7).

**Q: Can postgraduate qualifications be assessed for credit transfer?**

**A:** Yes, please state when applying if you wish to be considered for credit transfer.

**Q: I have a bachelor's degree from health sciences or education, can I receive credit for this? A:**

Students with a prior qualification in health science, education or a related area may receive credit for prior learning. Please state when applying if you wish to be considered for credit transfer.

**Q: Can work experience be considered for credit eligibility?**

**A:** Work experience can be considered for credit eligibility. Please provide CV, lived and occupational experience, work references and statement of service and specify on your application if you wish to be considered for credit eligibility. Please provide all information including whether you were supervised by a certified Orientation and Mobility specialist with ACVREP COMS certification. You will still be required to complete assessable components.

### **3. Program Length and Offering**

**Q: How long does it take to complete this program.**

**A:** This program is 1 year Full Time, it is made up of 8 x 6 UoC courses. Students need to complete 48 UoC over the three terms that the course runs. Half load options are available for students who wish to complete the theory (mostly online) part of the program in year 1, and practical (face to face) part in year 2. Only in exceptional circumstances will students be allowed to enrol in a reduced program. Students should take all courses in sequential order.

**Q: When is this program offered?**

**A:** The program will accept new students in Term 1 (January-February) of each year. Check with Future Student Advisors [[unsw.edu.au/study/help/contact-us](https://unsw.edu.au/study/help/contact-us)] as to when program enrolments open/close in the preceding year. For 2025, applications open Monday 1st August 2024 and close Sunday 15th October 2024.

**Q. What is the application process?**

A. Applications must be submitted through our [Apply Online](#) portal.

**Q. When does enrolment open and close?**

A. 2025 Applications open Thursday 1st August 2024 and close Sunday 15th October 2024. Candidates will be notified of the outcome shortly after application close. Accepted students will be invited to register to attend individually scheduled online Information sessions to discuss program requirements.

**Q. Are all suitable applicants accepted automatically into the program?**

A. Program places are limited by WIL placement availability. UNSW may be able to source a WIL placement for students or with direction from UNSW students may be required to source your own WIL placement.

**Q. Why are there scheduled individual Information sessions, and is it essential to attend?**

A. Once students confirm their program acceptance, they will be invited to register for individual 15minute online Information sessions with Program faculty. These will be held on scheduled days towards the end of October/early November.

Information sessions assist students in understanding the requirements of the program. It is crucial to understand your work integrated learning commitment before you commence the program to determine if there is a WIL placement available for you for 2024/2025.

This might impact whether a student commits to a full-load or half load program. Refer to 'what courses should I take each Term' (Learning and Teaching) for further information on Full and Half Load options.

The Information Session supports the success of both the student and the program and in mapping out study pathways (in particularly the practical components) for each student.

#### **4. Learning and Teaching**

**Q. Can this program be taken part time?**

A. This is an intensive full-time program. Half load options are available for students who wish to complete the theory part of the program in year 1 (mostly online), and practical part (mostly face-toface) in year 2. The program is not referred to as part time by UNSW as the practical components of the program are required to be completed on a full-time basis.

## Q. What courses should I take each Term?

A. Full Load Option		
Term One	Term Two	Term Three
1. VISN5511 The Visual System, Impairments & Implications 6UoC	4. VISN5521 Orientation and Mobility Techniques 6UoC	7. VISN5523 Orientation and Mobility in Practice B 6 UoC (4,5)*
2. VISN5512 Sensory Processes and Movement 6UoC	5. VISN5522 Vision Rehabilitation 6UoC (2,3)*	8. VISN5531 Development and Ageing: Implications for Orientation and Mobility 6UoC (2,3)*
3. VISN5513 Orientation and Mobility Foundations: Disability and Inclusion in Vision Rehabilitation 6UoC	6. VISN5523 Orientation and Mobility in Practice A 6 UoC (2)*	
A. Half Load Option		
Year 1 – Term One	Year 1 – Term Two	Year 1 – Term Three
1. VISN5511 The Visual System, Impairments & Implications 6UoC	3. VISN5522 Vision Rehabilitation 6UoC (1,2)*	4. VISN5531 Development and Ageing: Implications for Orientation and Mobility 6UoC (2,3)*
2. VISN5513 Orientation and Mobility Foundations: Disability, Diversity and Inclusion 6UoC		
Year 2 - Term One	Year 2 - Term Two	Year 2 - Term Three
5. VISN5512 Sensory Processes and Movement 6UoC	6. VISN5521 Orientation and Mobility Techniques 6UoC (1,2,3)*	8. VISN5523 Orientation and Mobility in Practice B 6 UoC (4,5)*
	7. VISN5523 Orientation and Mobility in Practice A 6 UoC (2)*	

\* = (x) prerequisites

## Q. Is this program taught face-to-face or online?

**A.** Lectures and tutorials are on-line, with most content covered in your own time. There is a 1- hour interactive tutorial per course per week conducted in real time.

Face-to-face training includes a work integrated learning (WIL) component and real-world simulation training (O&M techniques training). Students will need to travel to Sydney for 5 weeks of techniques teaching. WIL placements are conducted in person with partner organisations.

## Q. What is O&M Techniques Training?

**A.** Prior to engaging in WIL, students will complete the practical components of the O&M Techniques course (VISN5521) to prepare for the work integrated learning (WIL) placement. Techniques Training (TT) equips the student to be 'WIL ready' and involves over five weeks of face-to-face techniques training at UNSW in Sydney. This training will involve students both being under blindfold for significant periods of time and learning to teach O&M techniques to other blindfolded students.

Whilst the exact dates are yet to be confirmed, the planned compulsory **2025 dates** are:

Block 1: Term 1 2025, Weeks 3 & 4

Block 2: Term 2 2025, O-Week and Weeks 1 & 2.

Students will need to travel to Sydney at their own cost to attend two face-to-face, compulsory technique training teaching blocks.

Please refer to Grad Dip In Orientation and Mobility (5420) at: [Postgraduate resources | School of Optometry and Vision Science - UNSW Sydney](#) to download a copy of the 2025 O&M program calendar for the techniques training dates.

### **Q. What is Work Integrated Learning?**

**A.** Work integrated learning (WIL) placements form a significant portion of the program commencing over Terms 2 and 3 as part VISN5523: O&M in Practice. WIL provides opportunities for supervised work integrated learning through external placements at partner organisations providing O&M services. Through WIL, students are exposed to a wide breath of experience and opportunity to be able to demonstrate clinical competence with various populations of individuals with blindness and low vision, including children, adults, and individuals with multiple disabilities.

The UNSW O&M program is designed in accordance with [ACVREP](#) guidelines, providing practical experience - through WIL, as part of the process for graduates to apply for industry certification i.e., the US ACVREP certification exam to become a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS).

During the UNSW Graduate program, students work towards meeting all UNSW competencies to graduate level having completed 250 hours which includes 150-200 instructional hours of disciplinespecific supervised practice within the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) placement. Students may be employed on graduation, and if required by the employer or desired by the student, will need to make their own arrangements for completing additional hours of supervised practice to meet ACVREP requirements prior to applying for COMS.

The duration of the UNSW WIL placement is dependent on meeting the required number of instructional hours and UNSW competencies. Whilst the achievement of the required hours will be different for each student due to placement variables, we estimate this will be approximately 20 weeks of full-time work integrated learning (WIL) placement.

Students ideally will undertake either one or two WIL placements. The duration and location of placements will vary according to individual partner organisation and student requirements. Start and end dates will also vary and are not necessarily confined to Term dates. WIL placements may be in a student's home state where possible, however students will need to travel within the state/and to see clients in different locations. If appropriate WIL supervision (with a Certified Orientation and Mobility

Specialist (COMS)) cannot be arranged in your state or region, students might need to undertake WIL placement away from their area or interstate. The cost associated with attending this work experience (in particularly travel, accommodation and meeting away-from-home costs) will be met by the student.

To comply with WIL partner organisational requirements, students will need to have a Working With Children Check (WWCC), criminal history check, National Disability Insurance Scheme Workers Check (NDISWC) and abide by the immunisation, vaccination and safety protocols from the relevant health authorities for students in training. Requirements will be outlined specially to students when placements are secured.

**Q. I don't live in NSW, can I complete this program in another State?**

**A.** Yes you can. Most of the program content is delivered online, other than the five weeks of face-to-face **techniques training** (at UNSW in Sydney). We are hoping you will have the opportunity to complete your placements in your home state, however, this may not necessarily be possible and will be based on availability and demand. If a WIL placement cannot be arranged in your state, then you may need to undertake this requirement in another state.

**5. Program Fees**

**Q. How much does this program cost?**

**A.** Refer to Fees & Scholarships under [Graduate Diploma in Orientation and Mobility \(unsw.edu.au\)](https://www.unsw.edu.au/graduate-diploma-in-orientation-and-mobility) for updated information.

\*Fees are subject to annual review by the University and may increase annually, with the new fees effective from the start of each calendar year. The indicative fees listed here are based on an estimated average and are for tuition only other fees and charges are not included. The amount you pay will vary depending on the calendar year you enrol in, the courses you select and whether your study load is more or less than 1 Equivalent Full Time Student Load (8 courses per year). Indicative fees are a guide for comparison only based on current conditions and available data. You should not rely on indicative fees. More information on fees can be found at the [UNSW fees website](https://www.unsw.edu.au/fees).

**Q. Are there Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP)?**

**A.** Yes, there are CSP places:

<https://www.news.futurestudents.unsw.edu.au/understandcommonwealth-supported-places>.

The University releases these at the end of the year, at which time those who are successful for a CSP place will be contacted by the University.

**Q. Does this program qualify for HECS-HELP?**

**A.** Yes, please refer to: <https://student.unsw.edu.au/hecs>. to find out if you are eligible for HECS-HELP.

**Q. Are there other costs associated with this program?**

**A.** Students will be required to attend techniques training practicals and work integrated learning (WIL) placements. The cost associated with attending the practical components (in particularly travel, accommodation, and meeting away-from-home costs) will be met by the student. Students will also be required to purchase mobility cane sets (indicative cost as of February 2023: AUD\$120).

**6. Additional Information**

**Q. What is the pathway to ACVREP Accreditation?**

**A.** Students will graduate with the specialised knowledge and skills required to work in Australia as an O&M specialist. Accreditation is required by some employers through the US based ACVREP (Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals). The UNSW Graduate Diploma of Orientation and Mobility meets the core domain requirements for graduates to apply for certification through ACVREP however after graduation you will need to accumulate further supervised practice hours to apply for and sit the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) exam.

Following completion of the Graduate Diploma in O&M, graduates wishing to achieve certification (COMS) with ACVREP (Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals) will need to complete the remainder of required supervised practice hours, achieve ACVREP competencies areas (signed by supervising COMS), and will need to pass a certification exam.

**Q. What sort of job opportunities will be available once I have completed the Graduate Diploma in Orientation and Mobility?**

**A.** The UNSW Graduate Diploma in O&M is the only program of its kind in Australia. Currently there are a lack of orientation and mobility specialists in Australia, particularly in rural areas. There is the opportunity of working in non-for-profit rehabilitation organisations, the private sector, in research and overseas, i.e. Singapore, Africa and the Pacific Islands are in need of O&M specialists.