This year's incoming students for the four-year program arrived from 25 states, Canada and Ghana, bringing to NECO their dedication and commitment to the field of optometry. Their average GPA score of 3.30 and OAT score of 323 are both on par with those of recent years, according to Kristen Harrington, Director of Admissions. Many of the students received their undergraduate degrees from highly regarded institutions including Boston University, Carnegie Mellon University, College of William and Mary, Dickinson College, McMaster University, University of Michigan, New York University, Tufts University, UC-Berkeley, University of Rochester, Virginia Tech, and Waterloo University. The 135 members of the Class of 2018 were selected from 840 applicants.

MEET SOME OF OUR STUDENTS:

**Ashley Szalkowski**  
Fredonia, New York  
Biology, SUNY Fredonia

“My first impression of NECO made me feel like I was at home. The faculty, staff, and students were so welcoming and approachable; I knew it was a place I could flourish and establish a foundation for lifelong learning.”

- Studied abroad in Florence, Italy as an undergraduate
- Attended college in the same town in which she grew up, moving away from home for the first time when she came to Boston
- Intends to pursue a career in the field of pediatric optometry

**Benjamin Strake**  
Scituate, Massachusetts  
Financial Economics, University of Rochester

“NECO’s clinical opportunities seemed unrivaled and made it an easy decision for me. Conducting screenings after just a few weeks of school was an amazing experience.”

- Lived in Berlin, Germany for five years
- Worked in a community health center as an AmeriCorps navigator and a patient navigator for two years
- Boston Bruins Fan

**Chelsea Crowson**  
Houston, Texas  
Mass Communication and Psychology, Texas State University

“I chose optometry at a very early age because I grew up in a family of artists. So much of art is in the details, and if someone with poor vision is unable to see those details that I love so much, and I can help them get those details back, that’s an amazing thing.”

- Lives on a houseboat built in the 1970s with her fiancée, dog, and cat
- Studied abroad in Costa Rica
- Moved to Massachusetts immediately prior to her NECO interview

**Shreya Jayasimha**  
Toronto, ON (Canada)  
Biology and Psychology, McMaster University

“Within the first week of school, it was announced that I was no longer a student, but rather, a doctor-in-training. I adapted quickly to this new reality and now strive everyday to gain as much knowledge and clinical experience as I can during my time at NECO. I intend to eventually become the reliable and giving optometrist that I, the faculty, and my family expects and hopes for me to be.”

- OD1 Class President
- Enjoys fitness and long distance running, is a self-proclaimed gym junkie
- Worked as a professional Bollywood (Indian) dancer in Canada

**Vicky Yiannoulis**  
Bridgeport, Connecticut  
Biology, Fordham University

“I chose NECO because of its dedication to helping the Boston community, especially through its clinical education. As a student, it is very important to me that I understand the issues facing the community I am living in.”

- Greek cultural dancer from kindergarten through college
- Growing up, her favorite doctor was her optometrist
- Spent a year as a Jesuit Volunteer/AmeriCorps Volunteer in Hood River, OR

**Afua Opoku-Debrah**  
Dover, Delaware, originally from Ghana  
Nursing, Delaware State University

“My grandmother did not realize that her cataracts had rendered her blind for years until successful surgery. My goal is to see that look of utter joy on my patients’ faces when their vision is restored.”

- Worked as a nurse for 4 years
- Born in Zimbabwe, but mostly raised in Ghana and the US
- Enjoys learning about different cultures through their music, dance and especially their food