

SURVEY OF RECENT MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY GRADUATES

by

**Gary Stolicker
Heidi Weglarz**

**This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of**

Doctorate of Optometry

**Ferris State University
Michigan College of Optometry**

April 2007

SURVEY OF RECENT MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY GRADUATES

by

Gary Stolicker
Heidi Weglarz

Has been approved

April, 2007

ACCEPTED:



Faculty Course Supervisor

Ferris State University
Doctor of Optometry Senior Paper
Library Approval and Release

SURVEY OF RECENT MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY GRADUATES

We, Gary Stolicker and Heidi Weglarz, hereby release this paper as described above to Ferris State University with the understanding that it will be accessible to the general public. This release is required under the provisions of the Federal Privacy Act.

Date

ABSTRACT

Background: This survey provides information on the overall satisfaction, quality of living, and general information for the upcoming graduates and aspiring graduates of the Michigan College of Optometry. It is designed to assist upcoming and future graduates of Optometry on the modes of practice, income, debt, and types of employment opportunities that are available to new graduates. *Methods:* The following survey was issued to the graduating classes of the Michigan College of Optometry from 2003 through 2006. A total of 124 surveys were sent out with 74 graduates responding back. (For a copy of the Michigan College of Optometry Survey, refer to Appendix A). The surveys compared each class year by: modes of practice, demographics of where they are practicing, income level, level of satisfaction with current position and the type of practice currently specializing in. *Conclusion:* Michigan College of Optometry graduates are satisfied with their career decisions. The earlier graduates from 2003-2004 are more implanted in their mode of practice in which they aspired to post graduation. The more recent graduates, are still working their way towards their ultimate mode of practice. More and more graduates are showing satisfactory levels in leasing and owning their own business. As the rate of tuition increases, the rate of student debt also increases. A significant increase from the 2003 class to the 2006 class was noted. Despite the large debt increase, recent graduates report an overall satisfaction with their career choice and have been able to meet their overall goals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
METHODS.....	2
RESULTS.....	3
DISCUSSION.....	5
REFERENCES.....	11
APPENDIX	
A. MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY SURVEY.....	A

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1-1	Gender, Decision of Practice, Current Mode, Vision in 10 years.....	7
1-2	Ultimate Factor in Current Mode, Amount of Student Debt, Current..... Practice Type, Area Practicing In	8
1-3	Estimated Net Income After 1 st Year, Estimated Net Income Last Year, Satisfaction of Current Mode, Anticipated Time in Current Mode	9
1-4	Ultimate Employment Status Desired, Description of Ultimate Practice.... Desired, Time to Reach Ultimate Practice, Hours Work, Speciality	10

Introduction:

Optometry has been a rapidly growing health profession in Michigan, especially in Southeast Michigan. Many students entering Optometry school have been inspired by other doctors, friends, relatives or colleagues to pursue a career in the field of Optometry. The field of Optometry begins with selecting a school, pursuing the educational requirements, experiencing the various modes of practice through intern or externship, choosing to further your education via a residency position and choosing a position of Optometry to meet your interests and/or lifestyle. There are many aspects for Optometry students to consider in their ultimate decision of employment as an Optometrist. These factors include population of Optometrists in a specific area, modes of practice, income requirements, student loan debt, hours of availability, and lifestyle choices. To better assist future graduating students in Optometry, a survey has been conducted from the Michigan College of Optometry to evaluate the students who graduated from Michigan College of Optometry during the years of 2003 to 2006. The survey was designed to assist future graduates in the profession of Optometry with choosing the mode of practice suitable for them, income levels to consider, population of the current practicing Optometrists, employment status, current hours per week working as an Optometrist, trends in the areas of specialties, and level of satisfaction with their chosen mode of practice.

Methods:

A survey was conducted from Optometrists who graduated from the Michigan College of Optometry during the years of 2003 to 2006. The survey consisted of: the last 4 years of graduation, from 2003 through 2006; gender, time of consideration for current mode of practice, what is their current mode of practice, what mode they see themselves practicing in 10 years, what factor was involved in their decision to practice their current mode, their total amount of student loan debt after graduation, a description of their practice, the area they are currently practicing in Michigan or out of state, their estimated income after one year of practicing Optometry, their estimated income last year, current level of satisfaction in the mode of practice each graduate is now in, their anticipated length of time practicing in their chosen mode of practice, ultimate employment goals, the length of time anticipated to reach their ultimate choice of mode of practice, number of hours currently working per week, and what type of practice do each of the graduates currently specialize in. Each year was calculated based on the number of responses and the percentage of responses to the questions answered in the survey.

Results:

The results received from the Michigan College of Optometry (MCO) Graduate Survey, shows each year the graduates gradually increased in number of females to males from 2003 through 2006. Most of the graduates decided on their current mode of practice during their clinical rotations of their 4th year of Optometry school. A range of 27% to 47% of those graduates which responded to the survey, recorded they began their Optometric career as a employee of a corporate retailer. However, all 4 graduating classes surveyed, had corporate optometry as the least likely practice that they envision being in 10 years later, although, 32% to 53% reported being satisfied with their current mode of practice. All 4 classes were in the majority, envisioning themselves in a self-employed partnership as their preferred mode of practice. The area in which graduates are practicing in, tend to vary from graduating class to graduating class. In 3 of the years surveyed, the majority of students are practicing in southeast Michigan. In 2005, there was an increase of students preferring to practice out of state at 33% of those who responded. In 2003, 10% of those who responded to the questions, reported being in a solo practice while no one from the 2006 graduating class reported being in a solo practice. The trend in self employed corporate leasing seems to be on the rise with 27% from class of 2005 and 18% from class of 2006 responded to the question. The amount of student loan debt is gradually increasing over the past 4 years with student debt as high as \$175,000.

The majority of students graduating from MCO however, leave school with a debt load of \$75,000 to \$100,000. The estimated income after the first year of graduation varied from each class. A majority of students had an income of under \$50,000 in their first year for all 4 classes. However, the 2003 and 2004 classes, majority of the graduates showed a yearly salary during their previous year working between \$90,000 and \$100,000 respectively. By a large majority, the mode of practice that most MCO graduates migrate toward is primary care Optometry. This is consistent among all four years reported, with contact lens specialties being a distant second. The average amount of hours worked was between 35-40 hours, and was again consistent with all 4 graduating classes, with most graduates being satisfied to very satisfied with their current mode of practice. See Tables 1-1 through 1-4 for the complete results to the Michigan College of Optometry Graduate Survey.

Discussion:

Optometry is one of the most rapidly progressing professions in the health care system. Among professional careers, Optometry is the third largest healthcare professions in America.¹ Today's optometry school graduates receive an unparalleled and rewarding education in the visual sciences. As evidenced in *The Michigan College of Optometry Graduate Survey*, many different modes of practice opportunities are available to MCO graduates. Most graduates prefer to wait until their fourth year externship or internship and have become more familiar and experienced in the various modes of practice available, before they make the decision on the mode of practice which suits their needs and lifestyle choices. Although there are many different specialties and advancements in the field of optometry, new graduates still migrate towards practicing primary care optometry. Most graduates work a 35-40 hour work-week, with an average salary of \$85,000 per year and ranging from \$60,000 to \$120,000 within one to four years after graduation.¹ According to current research in demographics and results from the Michigan College of Optometry Graduate Survey, southeast Michigan has been one of the highest populated areas in the field of optometry with 37% of the 1,006 Optometrists practicing in Michigan in 2002 and 24% of MCO's new graduates from 2003 to 2006.² The results of the Michigan College of Optometry Graduate Survey has shown, most graduates begin practicing optometry in a mode of practice different from what they ultimately desired. Majority of the graduates responded to the length of time reaching their ultimate mode of practice taking at least 5 years post graduation.

This is often attributed to debt upon graduation and lack of other opportunities.

Aspiring graduates should carefully evaluate what they want as an Optometrist. As one graduate to another, each graduate should evaluate what motivates them, what makes them happy, their lifestyle choices, demographics and current employment opportunities available to them, is it feasible to specialize in a specific area of Optometry depending on location and capabilities, what is a reasonable yearly income as an Optometrist for the various locations throughout Michigan and other areas, and most importantly is there potential for future growth as an Optometrist in the location of interest.

Table 1-1	2003 Graduates		2004 Graduates		2005 Graduates		2006 Graduates	
Gender								
Male	10	50%	4	18%	2	13%	4	23.5%
Female	10	50%	18	82%	13	87%	13	76.5%
Decision Made of Current Mode of Practice								
During The First 3 Years of Optometry School	5	25%	1	4.5%	2	13%	4	23.5%
During Clinical Rotations/Externship	6	30%	7	32%	10	67%	8	47%
During First Two Years of Optometry Career	9	45%	9	41%	3	20%	5	29%
After First Two Years of Optometry Career			1	4.5%				
Current Mode of Practice								
Self-Employed Solo Practice	2	10%	3	14%				
Self-Employed Corporate Lease	2	10%	2	9%	4	27%	3	18%
Employed by Ophthalmologist	4	20%	2	9%	3	20%	2	12%
Employed by Corporate Retailer	6	30%	6	27%	7	47%	6	35%
Employed by HMO								
Self-Employed Partnership	2	10%	2	9%				
Employed by Optometrist	3	15%	3	14%	1	7%	2	12%
Employed by Government	2	10%	1	4.5%			2	12%
Employed by University			1	4.5%	1	7%		
Other			1	4.5%			2	12%
Vision of Mode of Practice 10 Years								
Self-Employed Solo Practice	8	40%	2	9%	2	13%		
Self-Employed Corporate Lease	2	10%	2	9%	1	7%		
Employed by Ophthalmologist	2	10%	2	9%	2	13%	2	12%
Employed by Corporate Retailer			2	9%	1	7%	1	6%
Employed by HMO								
Self-Employed Partnership	6	30%	5	23%	5	33%	11	65%
Employed by Optometrist	1	5%	1	4.5%	2	13%	2	12%
Employed by Government	1	5%	2	9%			2	12%
Other			2	9%	2	13%		

Table 1-2	2003 Graduates		2004 Graduates		2005 Graduates		2006 Graduates	
Ultimate Factor in Current Mode of Practice								
Debt Following Graduation	4	20%	2	9%	3	20%	5	29%
Influence by Fellow Optometrist	3	15%	3	14%	3	20%	3	18%
Influence by MCO Faculty	1	5%	2	9%			2	12%
National Recruiter Influence			1	4.5%				
Parents/Relative Influence	2	10%	2	9%			1	6%
Influence by Fellow Classmate			1	4.5%	1	7%		
Lack of Other Opportunities	3	15%	5	23%	5	33%	3	18%
Other	7	35%	6	27%	3	20%	2	12%
Total Amount of Student Loan Debt								
Under \$25,000	1	5%						
\$25,000 - \$50,000	3	15%	2	9%	3	20%	2	12%
\$50,000 - \$75,000	6	30%	6	27%	5	33%	4	23.5%
\$75,000 - \$100,000	8	40%	11	50%	4	27%	5	29%
\$100,000 - \$125,000	2	10%	1	4.5%	1	7%	3	18%
\$125,000 - \$150,000			2	9%	1	7%	1	6%
Over \$150,000					1	7%	2	12%
Current Practice Type								
Leasing	4	20%	2	9%	3	20%	3	18%
Next to Retail Chain			3	14%			2	12%
In School or College			1	4.5%				
Owner of Office Building	3	15%	3	14%			2	12%
Owner of Local Dispensary								
In Government Setting	3	15%	1	4.5%	1	7%	3	18%
Owner of Franchise					2	13%	1	6%
In Retail Store	6	30%	6	27%	7	47%	5	29%
Other	6	30%	5	23%	2	13%	1	6%
Area Currently Practicing In								
Southeast Michigan	6	30%	6	27%	2	13%	4	23.5%
Mid-Michigan	4	20%	4	18%	2	13%	6	35%
Northwestern Michigan	3	15%					1	6%
Thumb Area	2	10%	1	4.5%	1	7%		
Southwest Michigan	1	5%	2	9%	3	20%	1	6%
Upper Peninsula	1	5%			1	7%		
Northeastern Michigan								
Out of State	3	15%	4	18%	5	33%	5	29%

Table 1-3	2003 Graduates		2004 Graduates		2005 Graduates		2006 Graduates	
Estimated Income After First Year of Working								
Under \$50,000	3	15%	2	9%	3	20%	6	35%
\$50,000 - \$60,000	5	25%	1	4.5%	1	7%	1	6%
\$60,000 - \$70,000	2	10%	1	4.5%	2	13%	3	18%
\$70,000 - \$80,000	4	20%	4	18%	1	7%	1	6%
\$80,000 - \$90,000	5	25%	3	14%	3	20%	2	12%
\$90,000 - \$100,000	1	5%	7	32%	2	13%	2	12%
\$100,000 - \$110,000			3	14%	1	7%	2	12%
\$110,000 - \$120,000			1	4.5%				
\$120,000 - \$130,000								
\$130,000 - \$140,000								
Over \$140,000								
Estimated Income Last Year								
Under \$50,000	2	10%	1	4.5%	3	20%	12	100%
\$50,000 - \$60,000	2	10%	2	9%	1	7%		
\$60,000 - \$70,000	3	15%	3	14%	2	13%		
\$70,000 - \$80,000	3	15%	3	14%				
\$80,000 - \$90,000	3	15%	3	14%	3	20%		
\$90,000 - \$100,000	4	20%	2	9%	5	33%		
\$100,000 - \$110,000	2	10%	7	32%	1	7%		
\$110,000 - \$120,000	1	5%	1	4.5%				
\$120,000 - \$130,000								
\$130,000 - \$140,000								
Over \$140,000								
Satisfaction in Current Mode of Practice								
Very Satisfied	2	10%	9	41%	1	7%	6	35%
Satisfied	8	40%	7	32%	9	6%	9	53%
Neutral	2	10%	4	18%	4	27%	1	6%
Unhappy	2	10%	2	9%	1	7%	1	6%
Anticipated Time in Current Mode of Practice								
1 Year	1	5%	1	4.5%	1	7%	2	12%
2 Years	2	10%	3	14%	1	7%	4	23.5%
3 Years	1	5%	1	4.5%	3	20%	3	18%
4 Years	1	5%					1	6%
5 Years	3	15%	2	9%	2	13%	1	6%
Over 5 Years	4	20%			4	27%	1	6%
Remainder of Career	5	25%	9	41%	1	7%	2	12%
Unsure	3	15%	6	27%	3	20%	3	18%

Table 1-4	2003 Graduates		2004 Graduates		2005 Graduates		2006 Graduates	
Ultimate Employment Status Desired								
Self-Employed Solo Practice	6	30%	2	9%	2	13%	1	6%
Self-Employed Corporate Lease	1	5%					1	6%
Employed by Ophthalmologist			2	9%	1	7%		
Employed by Corporate Retailer			1	4.5%	1	7%		
Employed by HMO								
Self-Employed Partnership	11	55%	7	32%	10	67%	11	65%
Employed by Optometrist			3	14%	1	7%	1	6%
Employed by Government	2	10%	2	9%			2	12%
Employed by University			1	4.5%				
Other			1	4.5%				
Description of Ultimate Practice Desired								
Leasing	1	5%	2	9%				
Next to Retail Chain								
In School or College			1	4.5%				
Owner of Office Building	17	85%	9	41%	11	73%	11	65%
Owner of Local Dispensary							2	12%
In Government Setting	2	10%	2	9%			1	6%
Owner of Franchise					1	7%	2	12%
In Retail Store								
Other			1	4.5%	3	20%	1	6%
Time Anticipated to Reach Ultimate Mode of Practice								
1 Year	1	5%	1	4.5%				
2 Years	1	5%	2	9%	2	13%	1	6%
3 Years	1	5%	1	4.5%	1	7%	3	18%
4 Years								
5 Years	2	10%	1	4.5%	2	17%	4	23.5%
Over 5 Years	10	50%	5	23%	6	40%	7	41%
Unsure	5	25%	4	18%	3	20%	2	12%
Hours Worked Per Week								
Less Than 20 Hours			3	14%			1	6%
20 – 30 Hours	2	10%			1	7%	1	6%
30 – 35 Hours	3	15%	3	14%	3	20%	1	6%
35 – 40 Hours	9	45%	9	41%	8	53%	8	47%
40 – 45 Hours	5	25%	1	4.5%	2	13%	6	35%
45 – 50 Hours			1	4.5%	1	7%		
Over 50 Hours	1	5%	1	4.5%				
Type of Practice Specializing In								
Pediatrics	4	20%	3	14%	1	7%	1	6%
Ocular Disease	4	20%	5	23%	1	7%	3	18%
Contact Lenses	7	35%	1	4.5%	2	13%	3	18%
Primary Care	17	85%	12	54.5%	13	87%	13	76%
Academia/Research			1	4.5%				

REFERENCES

The Institute for Research Chicago. Careers Research Monographs Copyright 2006.

Retrieved March 21, 2007 from <http://www.career-internet.org/optometrist.htm>

Labor Market Information. State of Michigan Copyright 2001-2007. Retrieved March

21, 2007 from <http://www.milmi.org/cgi/databrowsing>

APPENDIX A

MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY SURVEY

Michigan College of Optometry Graduate Survey

1) What year did you graduate?

- 2003 2005
 2004 2006

2) What is your gender?

- Male Female

3) When did you decide on your current mode of practice?

- During first 3 years of Optometry school
 During clinical rotations/externship
 During first two years of Optometry career
 After first two years of Optometry career

4) What is your current mode of practice?

- Self-employed solo practice Self-employed partnership
 Self-employed corporate lease Employed by Optometrist
 Employed by Ophthalmologist Employed by Government
 Employed by corporate retailer Employed by university
 Employed by HMO Other

5) What mode do you see yourself practicing in 10 years from now?

- Self-employed solo practice Self-employed partnership
 Self-employed corporate lease Employed by Optometrist
 Employed by Ophthalmologist Employed by Government
 Employed by corporate retailer Employed by university
 Employed by HMO Other_____

6) What was the ultimate factor in your decision to practice in your current mode?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Debt following graduation | <input type="checkbox"/> Parents/Relative influence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influence by fellow Optometrist | <input type="checkbox"/> Influence by fellow classmate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Influence by MCO faculty | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of other Opportunities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> National recruiter influence | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

7) What was the total amount of your student loan debt after graduation?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under \$25,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$25,000 - \$50,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 - \$75,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$75,000 - \$100,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 - \$125,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$125,000 - \$150,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$150,000 - \$175,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> Over \$175,000 |

8) Which of the following best describes your practice :

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Leasing | <input type="checkbox"/> Owner of Office building | <input type="checkbox"/> Owner of Franchise |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Next to retail chain | <input type="checkbox"/> Owner of local dispensary | <input type="checkbox"/> In retail store |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In school or college | <input type="checkbox"/> In Government setting | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

9) What area are you currently practicing in :

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Southeast Michigan | <input type="checkbox"/> Thumb area | <input type="checkbox"/> Upper Peninsula |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mid-Michigan | <input type="checkbox"/> Southwest Michigan | <input type="checkbox"/> Northeastern Mich. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northwestern Mich. | <input type="checkbox"/> Out of state | |

10) What was your estimated income in your first year out of school?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> under \$50,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 - \$60,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 - \$70,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000 - \$80,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000 - \$90,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000 - \$100,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 - \$110,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$110,000 - \$120,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$120,000 - \$130,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$130,000 - \$140,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> over \$140,000 | |

11) What was your estimated income last year?

- | | | |
|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> under \$50,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 - \$60,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 - \$70,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000 - \$80,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000 - \$90,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000 - \$100,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 - \$110,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$110,000 - \$120,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> \$120,000 - \$130,000 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> \$130,000 - \$140,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> over \$140,000 | |

12) What is your current level of satisfaction in the mode you are practicing in now?

- Very Satisfied Satisfied Neutral Unhappy

13) How long do you anticipate being in current mode of practice?

- 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
- over 5 years Remainder of career Unsure

14) What would be your ultimate employment status?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-employed solo practice | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-employed partnership |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-employed corporate lease | <input type="checkbox"/> Employed by Optometrist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employed by Ophthalmologist | <input type="checkbox"/> Employed by Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employed by corporate retailer | <input type="checkbox"/> Employed by university |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employed by HMO | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

15) What would be your description of your ultimate practice?

- Leasing Owner of Office building Owner of Franchise
- Next to retail chain Owner of local dispensary In retail store
- In school or college In Government setting Other _____

16) How long do you anticipate it taking you to reach your ultimate mode of practice?

- 1 year 2 years 3 years 4 years 5 years
- over 5 years Unsure

17) How many hours a week do you work?

- Less than 20 20-30 30-35 35-40 40-45
- 45-50 Over 50

18) What type of practice do you specialize in?

- Pediatrics Ocular Disease Contact Lenses Primary Care
- Academia/Research Other _____

19) Please list any additional comments you would like to share with the new graduates as they enter into the workforce.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. If you should have any comments in regards to the survey please feel free to contact:

**Connie Meinholdt, PhD. - HSRC Chair.
Associate Professor of Psychology
Ferris State University
Big Rapids, MI 49307**

phone: 231-591-2759