FERRIS OPTOMETRY GRADUATES' CRITIQUE OF CAREER CHOICE AND QUALITY OF THEIR EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

A survey was conducted of Ferris State University College of Optometry graduates from 1979 to 1989. The purpose of this survey was to gather information about their optometric career as well as obtain insight into the adequacy and relevance of their education. The conclusions gleaned from this study will be utilized to make curriculum revisions in an effort to better prepare the graduates of the future.

INTRODUCTION

In an effort to enhance the education and clinical training of the students of Ferris State University College of Optometry, we found it necessary to poll its graduates from the classes of 1979 to 1989. The information we obtained was used to (1) determine trends in their practice choices and accomplishments, (2) gain some insight into satisfaction of optometric graduates, (3) help determine whether there are unmet needs of young optometrists in practice, (4) assess the need for specific changes in the curriculum of the college.

METHODS

A total of 310 graduates of Ferris State University College of Optometry from the years 1979 to 1989 were surveyed. The vehicle we utilized was a five page enclosure consisting of an explanatory cover letter, a three page survey, and an identification page which was to be returned separately to aid us in determining the non-responders. The survey had a format of multiple choice and fill-in-the-blank questions. It was fashioned after the 1988 survey of Houston graduates and the 1987 survey of Ferris graduates. January 9, 1990, was the first mailing date. A follow-up letter was sent to the non-responders on February 15, 1990. The cut-off date for responses was March 21, 1990, at which time we had received 145 returns (49% return).

The survey consisted of two parts. The first investigated their professional career. The areas covered included (1) factors important in deciding where to practice, (2) when location was decided upon, (3) number of days per week spent in specific practice settings during the first year following graduation and in the year 1989, (4) the states in which they were licensed to practice, (5) the state in which they are currently practicing and whether they are allowed to prescribe therapeutic agents, (6) population base of area, (7) percentage of practice devoted to individual specialties, (8) annual net income in 1989 for optometric earnings only, whereby, the class of 1989 was requested to project an income for a 12 month period, (9) satisfaction with income and mode of practice. The second portion required the

respondents to rate the adequacy and relevance of each course and clinical area of training. We also asked them to rate the training equipment, list the most positive aspect of their training, and state the changes and/or additions they would like to see in this program.

RESULTS

Many factors are considered when deciding upon practice location. When asked to rank the three most important factors in making their decision, job opportunity ranked the highest, followed by financial considerations, and recreational/social opportunities. For 59% of the graduates, this decision came after graduation from optometry school.

In the first year following graduation, one-fourth of the respondants were self-employed for three or more days per week. Fifty percent of these started their own practice or purchased an existing one. The leading employer of first year graduates (29%) was the private optometrist (Figure 1a). There appears to be a trend toward self-employment as evidenced by the data for the year 1989. These statistics showed that 45% were self-employed for three or more days per week in 1989 (up 20% from the first year after graduation). Private practice accounts for 50% of this group (Figure 1b).

Of the 145 respondants, 134 are licensed to practice in Michigan; however, only 105 have chosen Michigan for their practice location. The remainder practice within the continental United States. Fifteen percent are currently practicing in states or military installations where the use of therapeutic agents is permitted by law. Figure 2 demonstrates the demographics of the practice sites. Only 10% are practicing in rural and urban areas.

We asked our graduates to quantify the percentage of their practice devoted to certain specialty areas. The average practitioner utilizes 57% of his time for primary care and 23.5% for contact lenses. The other specialty areas such as visual training, pediatrics, diagnosis and treatment of ocular disease, low vision, and sports vision account for the remaining 19.5% (Figure 3).

In 1989, the overall average annual net income for optometrists who were self-employed was $52,000 as compared to $50,000 for the optometrists in employed situations (Figures 4a and 4b). The general consensus of those polled was that present income met their expectations (Figures 5 and 6). There was no significant difference in satisfaction with income between the self-employed and the employed groups. There was, however, a striking difference in satisfaction with mode of practice between optometrists in self-employed versus employed situations. Eighty-eight percent of the self-employed optometrists were reasonably to very satisfied with their current mode of practice; whereas, only 57% of the optometrists in employed situations rated their satisfaction at this level (Figures 7 and 8).

The second half of the survey which dealt with a curriculum critique revealed that graduates rated their overall clinical training a 1.5 on a scale of 1 to 3 with one being exceptional and three being inadequate. Using the same scale, the training equipment was rated at 1.75. Overall, those polled, felt that

their education in primary care was exceptional and highly relevant. The clinical areas (including course work) that fell in the adequate training/highly relevant category were ocular disease and treatment, contact lenses, and pediatrics. Visual training and low vision fell in the adequate training/mid relevancy category. Only those who devote a portion of their practice to the specific specialty were considered for rating that specialty. All responses were considered when rating classroom training. Geometric optics fell within the exceptional training/mid relevance area. General pathology was rated as adequate training/high relevancy. Included in the adequate training/mid relevance category were dispensing, geriatric care, environmental optics, pharmocology, and physiological optics. Practice management was the only course area to fall in the inadequate training/high relevancy category (Figure 9).

When asked what the most positive aspect of their training, the four most common responses were as follows: small class size, individual attention in clinic, student/teacher rapport, and senior off-campus clinical rotations.

Many suggestions were given for changes in and/or additions to the program. An overwhelming number felt that more time should be devoted to practice management. Several felt that the condensing of courses would be beneficial in providing more time for areas of higher relevancy. Suggestions included reducing the classroom hours (without omitting pertinent information) in

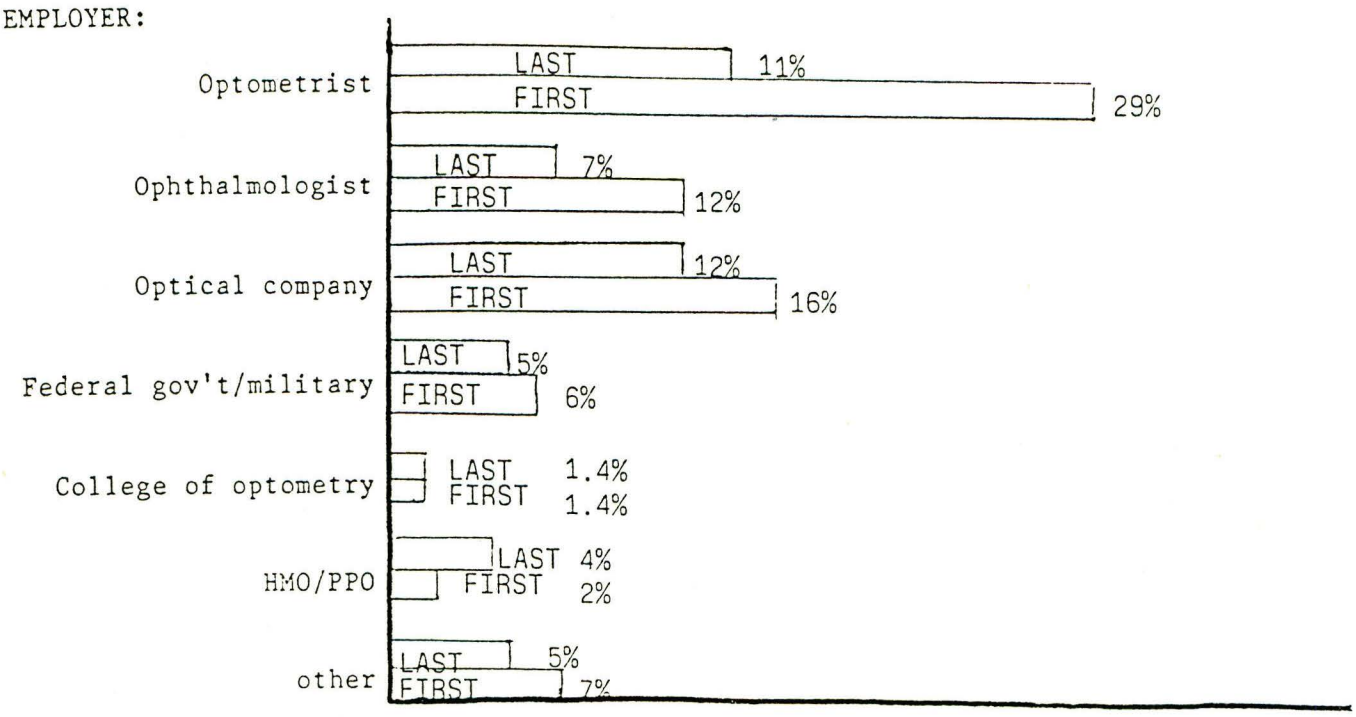
environmental optometry, visual training, low vision, and pediatric optometry. More "hands-on" experience in diagnosis and treatment of ocular disease and contact lens fitting was also a popular response.

DISCUSSION

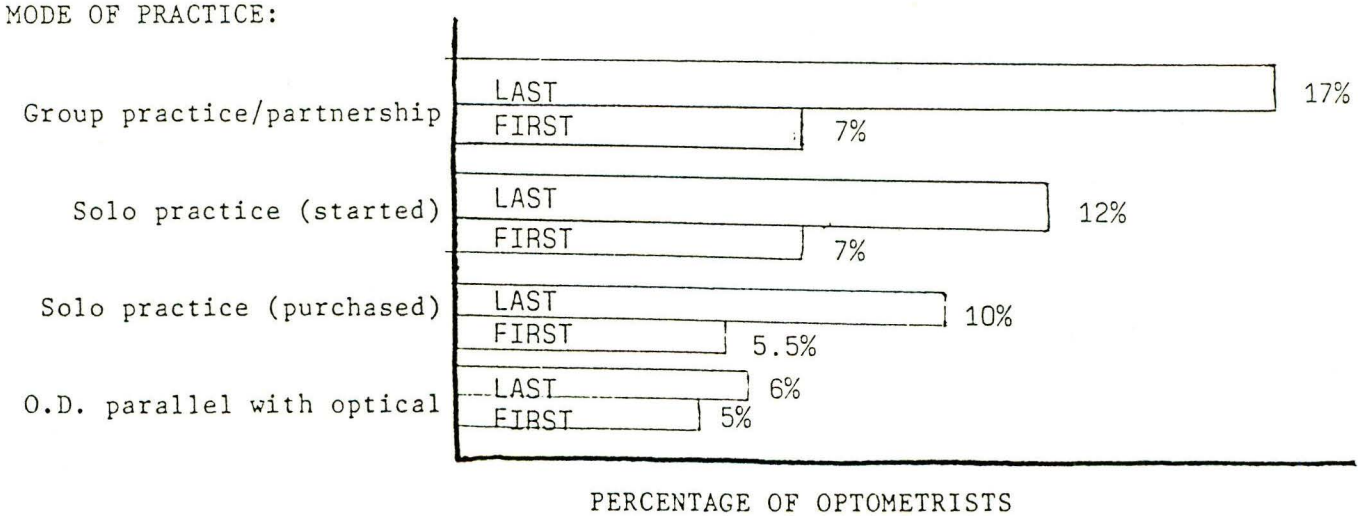
Through this study, we have attained valuable information from the graduates of FSCO concerning location and mode of practice, income, satisfaction level, and a curriculum critique. Comparing our data to that found in the 1987 FSCO Survey there is a strong correlation in the fact that most Ferris graduates practice in large and small cities and suburban areas. The 1987 study revealed that 30% of respondants were in self-employed situations. In 1989, this increased to 45%. There was also a strong correlation in that there was a trend for more recent graduates to seek employed situations and earlier graduates to practice in a self-employed mode. The average income level has remained consistent since the 1987 study. It is encouraging to note that satisfaction levels have remained high for self-employed optometrists.

This was the first comprehensive curriculum critique of its kind presented to Ferris graduates. Although the students are requested to critique their education upon graduation, our intentions were to receive insight into how well Ferris prepared our graduates to practice "real world" optometry as they reflected back on their education. The overall level of clinical and classroom training fell exactly between the exceptional and adequate ratings. We hope that this information will prove valuable in making future curriculum revisions.

OPTOMETRISTS IN EMPLOYED SITUATIONS
(FIGURE 1a)

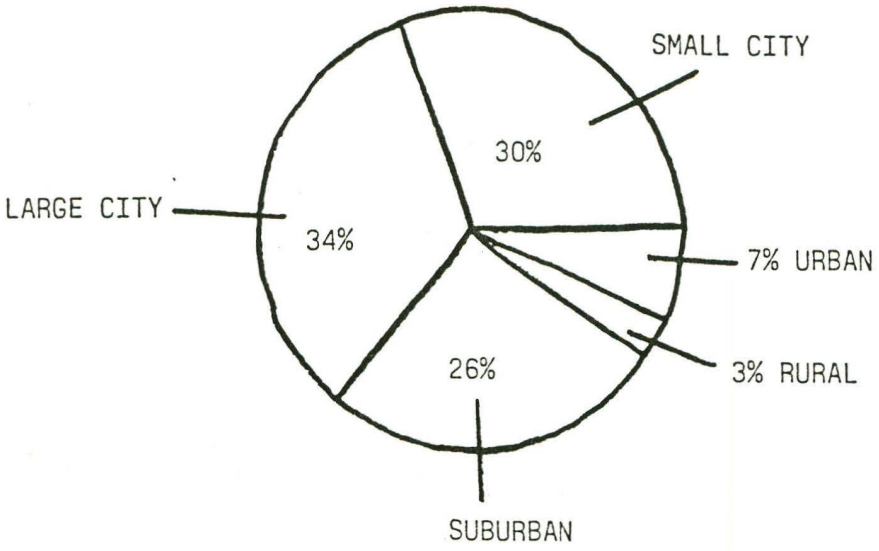


OPTOMETRISTS IN SELF-EMPLOYED SITUATIONS
(FIGURE 1b)



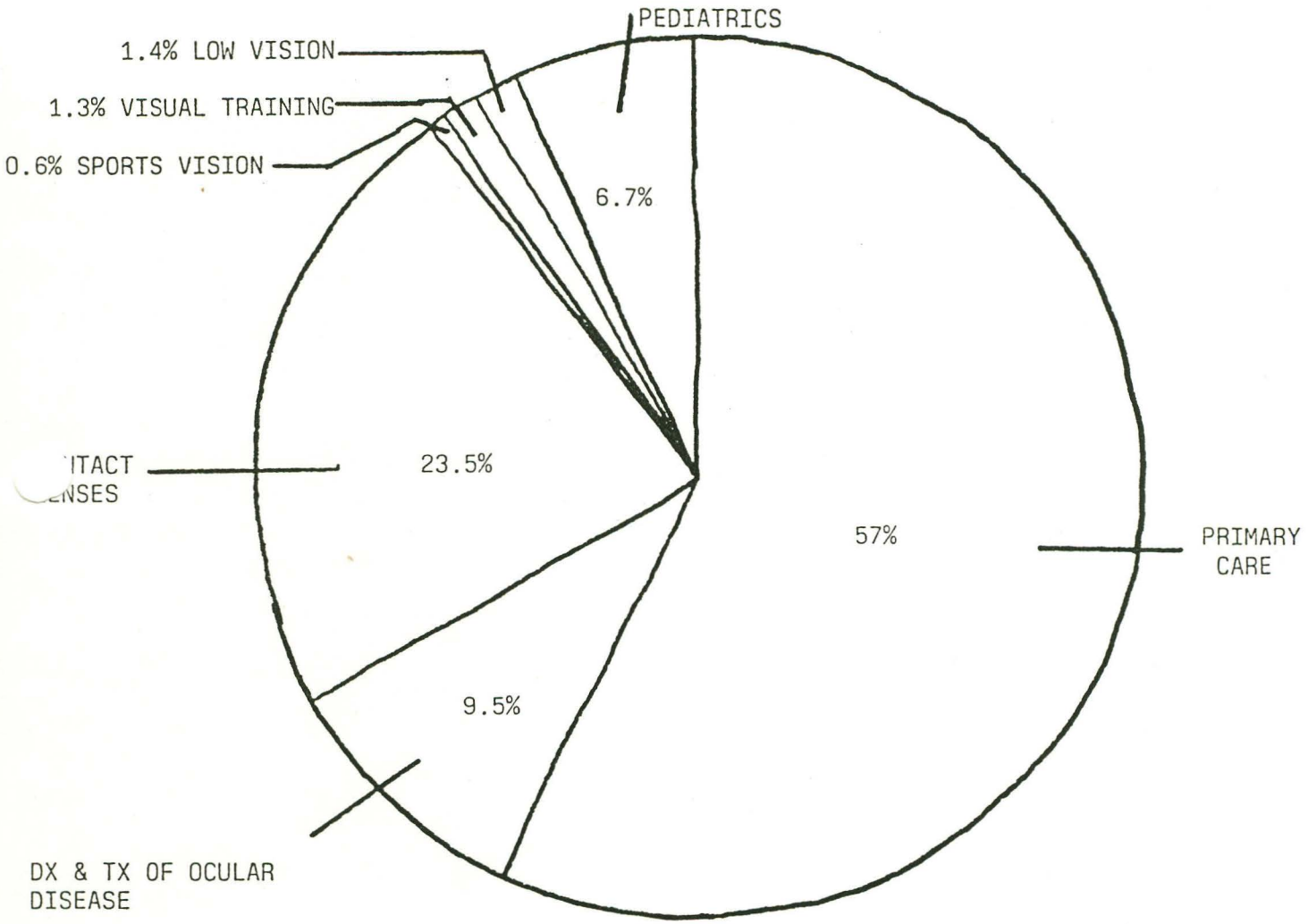
PRACTICE DEMOGRAPHICS

(Figure 2)

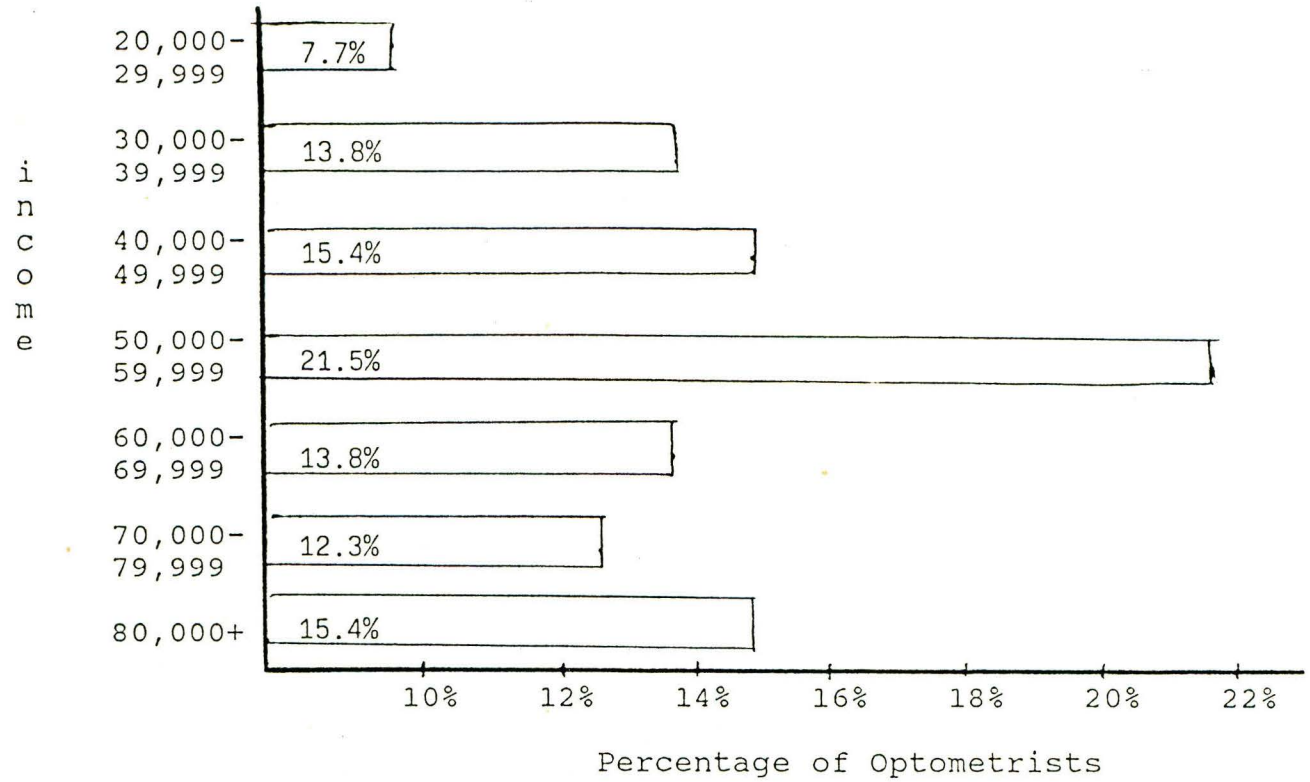


AREAS OF SPECIALTY

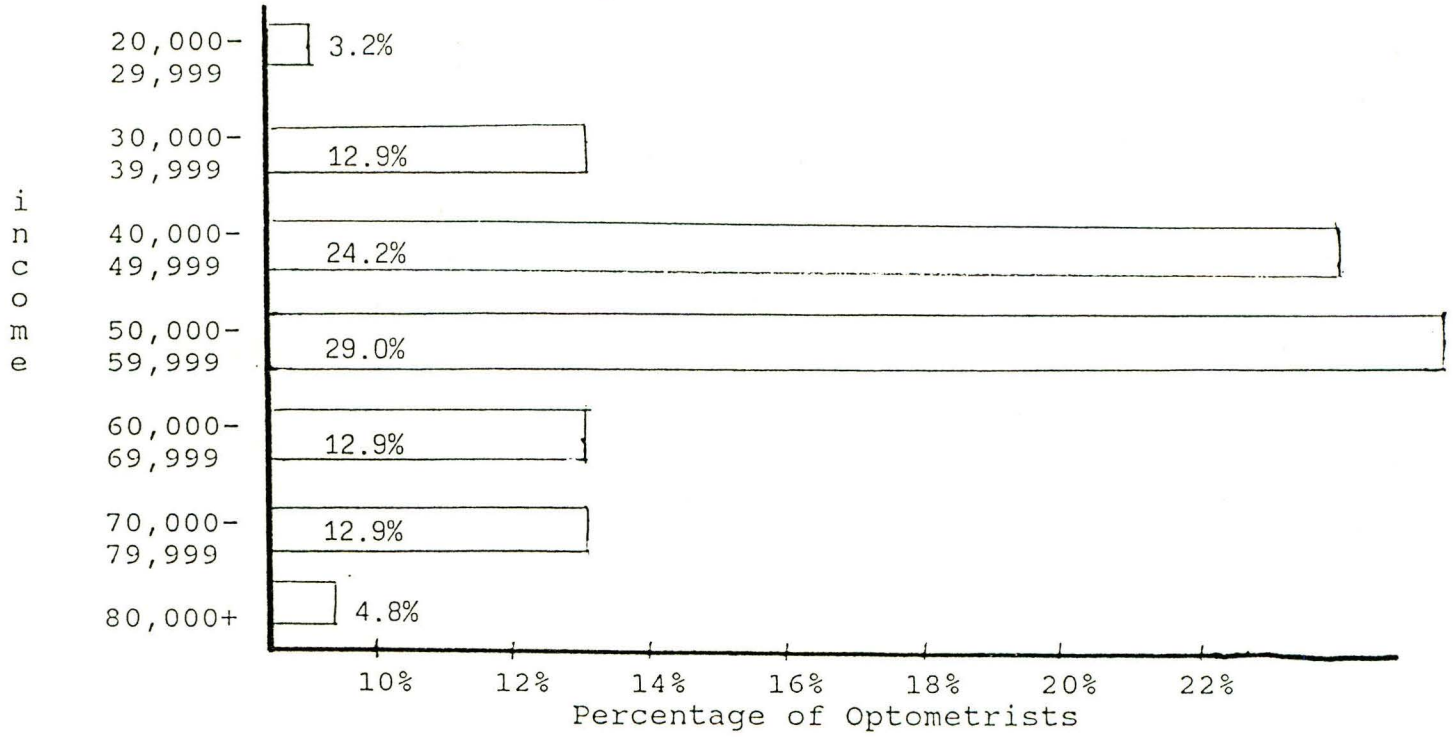
(Figure 3)



ANNUAL NET INCOME: SELF-EMPLOYED
(Figure 4a)

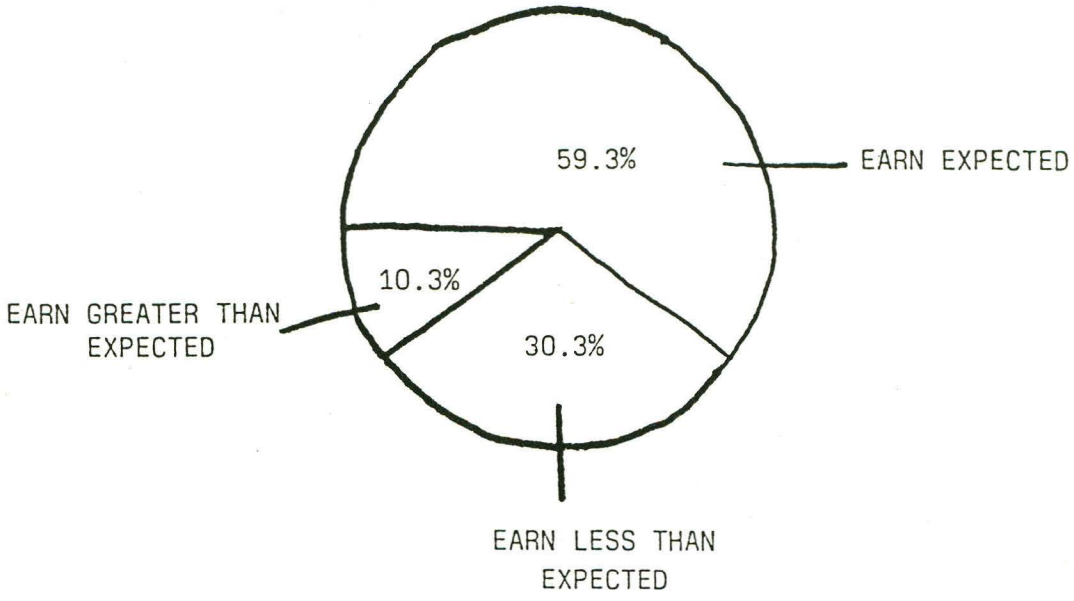


ANNUAL NET INCOME: EMPLOYED
(Figure 4b)



SATISFACTION WITH INCOME

(Figure 5)



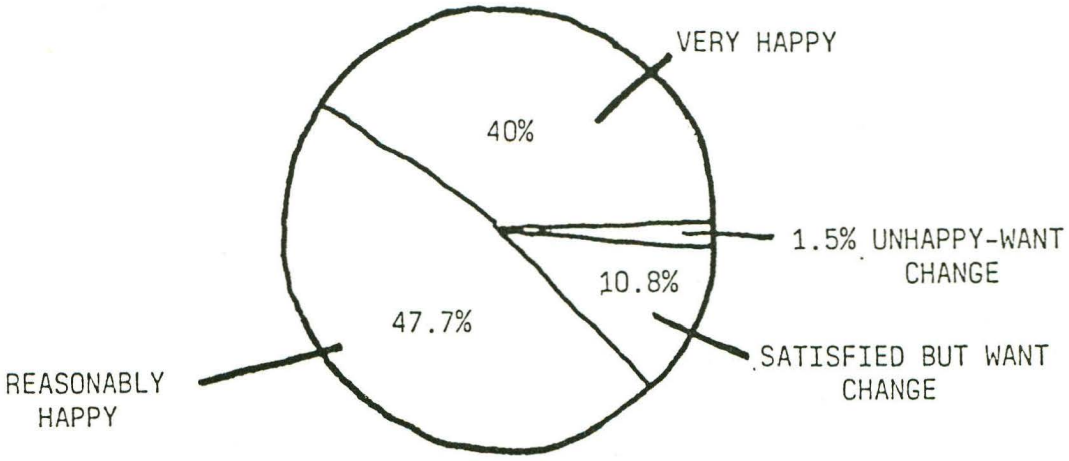
SATISFACTION WITH INCOME

annual net income	Earn > expected	Earn expected	Earn < expected	
$$20,000	0%	0%	100%	n=1
20,000-29,999	0%	50%	50%	n=8
30,000-39,999	0%	40%	60%	n=20
40,000-49,999	0%	56.7%	43.3%	n=30
50,000-59,999	2.9%	73.3%	22.9%	n=35
60,000-69,999	23.8%	61.9%	14.3%	n=21
70,000-79,999	37.5%	62.5%	0%	n=16
80,000+	21.4%	57.1%	21.4%	n=14
	n=15 10.3%	n=86 59.3%	n=44 30.3%	n=145 100%

(Figure 6)

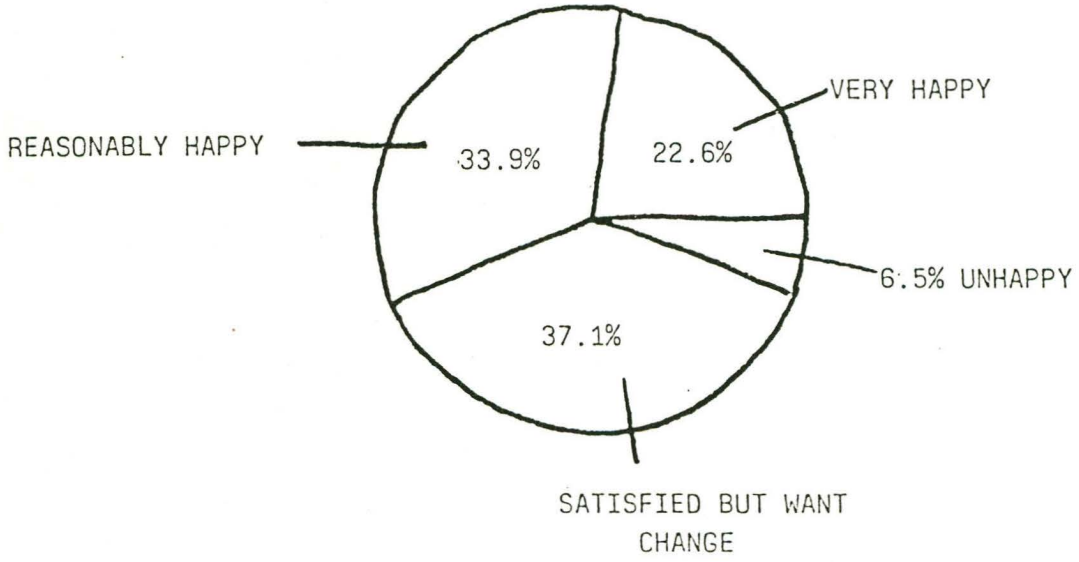
SATISFACTION WITH MODE: SELF-EMPLOYED

(Figure 7)

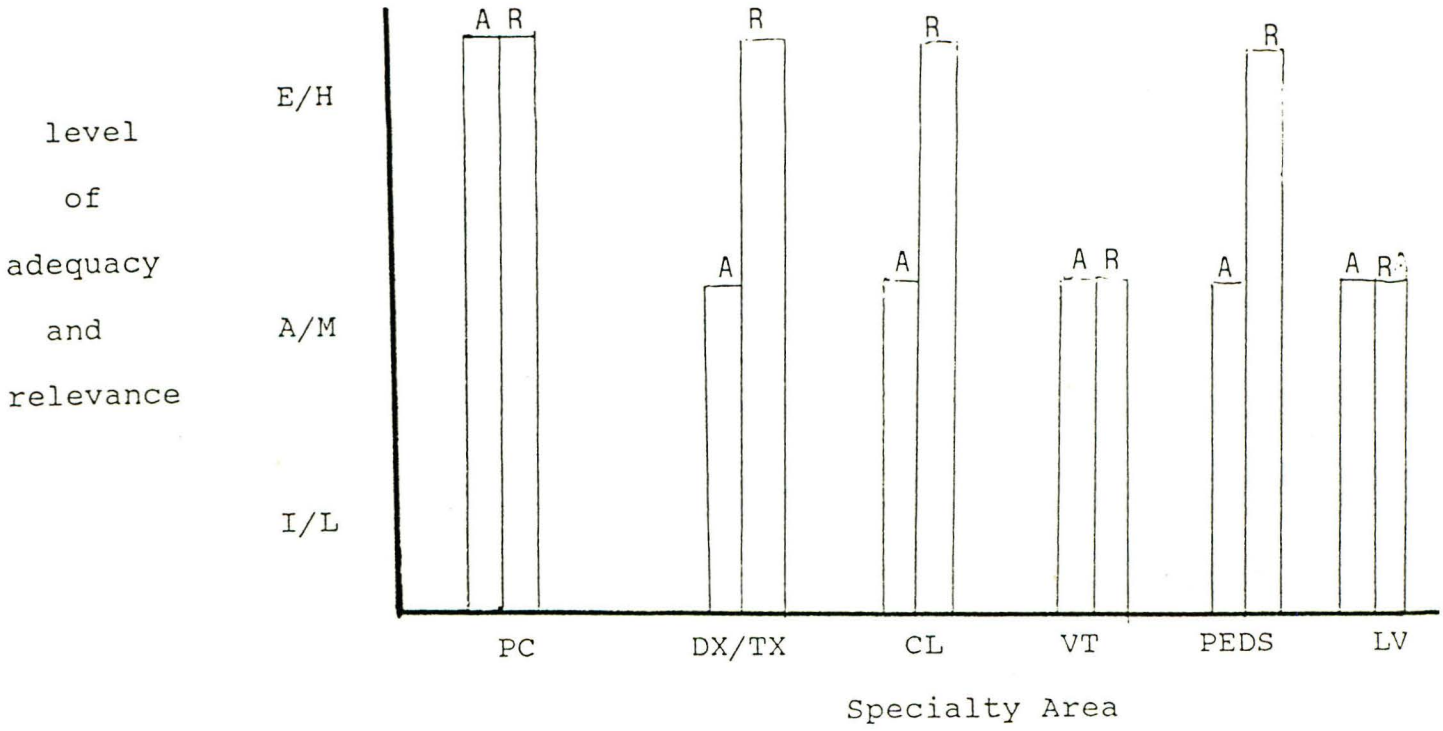


SATISFACTION WITH MODE: EMPLOYED

(Figure 8)



CURRICULUM CRITIQUE
(Figure 9)



Ferris State University
College of Optometry

January 9, 1989

Dear Alumnus,

I invite you to participate in the Alumni Survey of the Ferris State University College of Optometry which two of our senior students have prepared for their Senior Project. We are interested in the experiences you have had following graduation, i.e., in seeking a location and practice setting, in what factors contributed to your selection of place and type of practice, and in your degree of satisfaction with your professional life. We seek also your evaluation of the various aspects of your training in our College now that you have had opportunities to use your education in optometry.

Information you provide will be maintained in confidential files by Donald Lakin, O.D., Coordinator of Alumni Affairs, and will be used only for the purposes of this project. Complete confidentiality of your individual responses is assured.

The findings of this survey will enable us to: (1) assess the effectiveness of specific changes made in the curriculum of the College, (2) help determine whether there are unmet needs of young optometrists in practice, (3) determine trends in our students' practice choices and accomplishments, and (4) gain some insight into the satisfaction of optometry graduates.

We and the optometry students of the future greatly appreciate your participation in our survey of alumni. To assist us in the recovery of the data and to insure your complete confidentiality, please complete the back page and mail it separately.

Sincerely,

Kenneth J. Myers, Ph.D., O.D.
Dean

Optometry Clinic • 501 Pennock Hall • Big Rapids, Michigan 49307 • (616) 592-2222

Ferris State University College of Optometry Alumni Survey

PART I: PROFESSIONAL CAREER

A. Which of the following factors were important to you in deciding where to locate your optometry practice?
Check the letter of ALL factors which helped you decide where to locate.

___A. financial considerations
___B. climate/geographical features of area
___C. was brought up in such a community
___D. influence of wife or husband
___E. influence of family or friends
___F. high need for vision care in area
___G. distribution of other professionals in area
___H. perceived status of optometry in community
___I. ethnic &/or religious reasons
___J. recreational/social opportunity
___K. quality of school system for family
___L. cultural advantages
___M. growth potential of community
___N. age distribution of population
___O. job opportunity

Of all the factors circled (a through o), choose the THREE that were/are MOST IMPORTANT to the location. Rank them below.

RANK	LETTER OF THE FACTOR (a through o)
1. Most important	_____
2. Second most important	_____
3. Third most important	_____

When did you decide on your location?
1. high school
2. undergraduate school
3 optometry school
4. after graduation
5. other (please specify)_____

B. Record the number of days per week you spent in the following practice settings for both your first year following graduation and the last year.

	Days per Week	
Self Employed In:	First Year	Last Year
Group Practice/Partnership	_____	_____
Solo Practice-started cold	_____	_____
Solo Practice-purchased	_____	_____
OD parallel with optical	_____	_____
Employed By:		
Optometrist	_____	_____
Ophthalmologist	_____	_____
Optical Company	_____	_____
Federal Gov't/Military	_____	_____
College of Optometry	_____	_____
HMO/PPO	_____	_____
other_____	_____	_____

C. Where are you licensed to practice? (states)_____/_____/_____

D. In what state do you currently practice?_____

	Yes	No
E. Does the state in which you practice have therapeutic drug laws?	1	2
If yes, are you licensed to use them?	1	2

F. Please check which one of the following best describes the area in which you presently practice.

_____1. Rural (population less than 2,500)
_____2. Small City (2,500 to 10,000)
_____3. Large City (10,000 to 75,000)
_____4. Suburban
_____5. Urban

G. Please indicate the PERCENTAGE of your practice devoted to these areas: (should total 100%)

Primary Care	_____
Ocular Disease Dx & Tx	_____
Contact Lenses	_____
Pediatrics	_____
Visual Training	_____
Low Vision	_____
Sports Vision	_____
TOTAL	100%

H. What was your annual net income for 1989 based upon optometric earnings only. For recent graduates, please project your income for a full year period.

_____1. under $20,000
_____2. $20,000 to 29,999
_____3. $30,000 to 39,999
_____4. $40,000 to 49,999
_____5. $50,000 to 59,999
_____6. $60,000 to 69,999
_____7. $70,000 to 79,999
_____8. $80,000 plus

I. At this point in your career, how would you rate your satisfaction with your income?

_____1. earning more than expected
_____2. income meets expectations
_____3. earning less than expected

J. How would you rate your satisfaction with your current mode of practice?

_____1. very happy
_____2. reasonably happy
_____3. satisfied for now but plan to change mode
_____4. unhappy, desire a change in mode of practice

PART II: FERRIS CURRICULUM EVALUATION

A. Please rate the adequacy and relevance of your classroom training in these areas. On a scale of 1 to 3 (one high, three low) rate the relevance to your clinical practice.

	ADEQUACY			RELEVANCE		
	Exceptional	Adequate	Inadequate	High	Mid	Low
Geometric Optics	1	2	3	1	2	3
Physiological Optics	1	2	3	1	2	3
Pharmocology	1	2	3	1	2	3
General Pathology	1	2	3	1	2	3
Ocular disease diagnosis & treatment	1	2	3	1	2	3
Environmental Optometry	1	2	3	1	2	3
Practice Management	1	2	3	1	2	3
Primary Care	1	2	3	1	2	3
Pediatric Optometry	1	2	3	1	2	3
Contact Lenses	1	2	3	1	2	3
Low Vision	1	2	3	1	2	3
Geriatric Care	1	2	3	1	2	3
Visual training	1	2	3	1	2	3
Dispensing	1	2	3	1	2	3

(Using the same rating system as above)
How would you rate your overall clinical training?
1 2 3
How would you rate the training equipment?
1 2 3

What was the most positive aspect of your training?_____
_____
_____

What changes and/or additions would you like to see in this program?_____
_____
_____

PERSONAL DATA: gender:_____1. Female
_____2. Male
marital status:_____1. Married
_____2. Never Married
_____3. Divorced
_____4. Separated
_____5. Widowed

number of children:_____
year of graduation: 19_____
age:_____

Thank-you for participating in our Alumni Survey. To help us recover as much data as possible please complete this page and mail both items to:

Donald Lakin, O.D.
Pennock Hall rm 401
Ferris State University
Big Rapids, MI 49307

Please use separate envelopes for the mailing of your survey and this page to insure confidentiality. Thank-you again.

Please complete:

Yes, I have completed my Alumni Survey

name_____

address_____

_____