



**VOLUNTEERISM IN OPTOMETRY**

**By**


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**ACCEPTED:**

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VOLUNTEERISM IN OPTOMETRY

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## ABSTRACT

*Background:* The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible correlation of volunteering in school to becoming a lifelong volunteer. Former studies have shown that volunteering in undergraduate programs can have a positive effect for years afterwards.<sup>1</sup> Therefore graduate program volunteer experiences should also cultivate professionals to develop lifelong habits of volunteerism.

*Methods:* A survey was written and distributed to Michigan optometrists to explore the participant's experience in volunteer work in high school, college, and during their professional career. The completed surveys were anonymous and collected by mail.

*Results:* The results of this study are included, separated into groups dependent on volunteer activities and/or organizations during each facet of these professionals' careers.

*Conclusions:* Analyzing these results positively demonstrates that volunteer involvement throughout a student's educational years does result in continued service related activities throughout his or her professional life.

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## **Introduction**

Volunteer experience is a desirable trait for employers and graduate schools alike. An individual that chooses to volunteer has proven to be considerate enough to sacrifice personal time with little to gain other than a feeling of personal satisfaction. Many students volunteer to improve their resume, get into graduate school or become more employable, but does their volunteer experience end there? This project involved designing a survey and analyzing the results to determine if working optometrists felt any benefit from volunteer opportunities in graduate school and throughout their education.

The survey for this cross-sectional study was designed to include enough detail to be worthwhile, but also to be succinct enough for busy optometrists to quickly participate. The submission process was designed to be anonymous and a short description of the survey's purpose was designed to encourage participation. Permission was granted by the Human Subjects Review Committee of Ferris State University to conduct the study. Also prior to distribution the survey was given to a small sample of optometrists and optometry students to gain feedback and alter questions to make the questionnaire more amenable to the sample population. All of these concepts are listed as desirable in an article written on good survey design.<sup>2</sup>

A study titled "Long-Term Effects of Volunteerism During the Undergraduate Years" drew information from previous surveys to determine that volunteering in college produced both direct and indirect benefits. Spending six or more hours per week volunteering during their senior year of undergraduate studies, in comparison to no volunteer work during the senior year more than doubled their chances of volunteering at least one hour a week post-graduation.

The students were more likely to feel prepared for the work force and even to become more interested in continuing education. The study also supported a hypothesis that volunteer work during school can increase the students' propensity to donate to their alma mater.<sup>1</sup>

From the data gathered in that study it stands to reason that volunteer experience in graduate school would also be directly beneficial to participants. One study goes so far as to hypothesize a mandatory service activity requirement throughout schooling could increase volunteer participation over the course of life.<sup>3</sup> However, it is unclear how this type of requirement might inspire the development of altruistic values. Therefore, including incentives for voluntary participation in community service by graduate level students could lead to lifelong participation in the professional's career.

To truly volunteer, someone must have a desire to do it, not be forced to do it. The root of volunteerism is a voluntary act. According to Miriam-Webster's Dictionary, voluntary is; "proceeding from the will or from one's own choice or consent".<sup>4</sup> Thus volunteerism cannot be forced upon anyone, but must be chosen. This is what essentially defines whether or not a person is a "lifelong" volunteer. The desire to volunteer can be nurtured through positive experiences, but essentially it is by the will of the volunteer that quality service-related activities are completed.

Service-related activities are meant to improve the quality of life for others. In fact the dictionary also states service as; "useful labor". Student participation in these activities, especially those students who have had limited exposure to such an experience, can be fulfilling and enlightening as to how much they can or have taken for granted.

Reflection on such experiences will promote personal growth and the development or enhancement of values and ethics. Exposure to these activities also allows the student to recognize how much of a difference he or she can make in the lives of others.

Volunteerism in service-related activities requires a certain set of ethics on the part of those involved. Philosophers have often struggled to define “ethics” with words like morals, justice, right, and good. These great minds including Thomas Hobbes, Niccolo Machiavelli, Jean-Jaques Rousseau, and Henry David Thoreau have written publications arguing over whether man is essentially good or evil, but essentially fall short in defining what makes something or someone good. In G.E. Moore’s book *Principia Ethica*, he argues that you cannot define the “goodness” in people. Instead he argues that people have a natural intuition for what is right and wrong, and trying to describe it is like trying to describe the color yellow to someone who is blind.<sup>5</sup>

For a health professional, it is this intuitive responsibility to do what is best for the patient. The optometry community takes that responsibility one step further. The optometric oath, recited by each graduating optometrist, states in the last sentence before it’s closing; “*I will do my utmost to serve my community, my country and humankind as a citizen as well as an optometrist*”.<sup>6</sup> Community involvement including service related volunteer activities exemplify the service of community, country, and humankind as a citizen. To be a health care professional does indeed imply a higher ethical standard to care for others.



Volunteerism leads to service-related activities that tend to make the world a better place, but where does the will to volunteer begin? Are we born with it, or can we develop it at a certain stage of schooling? This study aims to better understand the answers to these questions by polling optometrists who have been exposed to volunteerism at several points in their schooling and throughout their career.

### **Methods**

Surveys (see Appendix A) were distributed to 1001 optometrists through the Michigan Optometrist periodical magazine. The survey included an addressed pre-paid envelope for submission to encourage participation. A statement at the beginning of the survey informed optometrists of the purpose of the survey and that by sending in their responses they implied consent to use the data collected in this study. The survey was one page front and back that asked participants to circle and/or write in organizations that they participated in high school, undergraduate college, graduate school, and career. There were also five follow-up questions asking for feedback on the impact volunteering has had on their career and whether state and national organizations have provided ample support for volunteer efforts. Responses were then collected and the following data was compiled.

### **Results**

A copy of the survey (see Appendix B) with percentage breakdown (rounded to the nearest percent) of positive responses for each item is attached.

Of the 1001 surveys sent, 172 responses (17%) were received. The age demographics included 16 respondents less than 30 years of age, 87 respondents between the ages of 30 and 50, and 69 respondents over 50. Fifty-two (52) participants claimed to be in a solo private practice modality, while 99 participants were in a group practice modality, and 20 were in a <sup>1</sup>commercial setting. Eighty-eight (88) respondents claimed to practice in a city or metropolitan area, 76 from a rural community setting, and 8 primarily practiced in a hospital or institutional setting.

Ninety-nine percent (169 of 172) of participants reported to have volunteered at some point in their post-graduate career. While 166 claimed to participate in volunteer activities in high school, 148 volunteered during undergraduate studies, and 152 volunteered during graduate school studies. It also turns out that 94 of those surveyed had participated in service mission trips, and 78 had not.

Most participants (137) claim to be currently engaged in volunteer or service-related activities, 140 felt that volunteering had positively impacted their practice of optometry. Meanwhile, 22 respondents did not feel that volunteering had any impact on their practice, and 10 were unsure/didn't respond. Over half of participants (89) felt that MCO or their local optometric society does/did provide sufficient resources/initiative for volunteer work, but 57 feel they do/did not. Twenty-six (26) respondents were unsure or did not respond. Finally, 98 of those surveyed felt that the MOA/AOA provide sufficient resources/initiative for volunteer work while 57 feel they do/did not. Seventeen were unsure or did not respond.

## **Discussion**

From these results it can be determined that while 98 percent of optometrists volunteer as professionals, only 86 percent of them volunteered as undergraduate students. Since 88 percent of participants volunteered in grad school it could be inferred that grad school volunteer participation is somewhat more indicative of future volunteerism than undergraduate volunteer participation. However, since 97 percent of respondents volunteered in high school it could also be said that high school participation is even more indicative than either college levels.

As a high school student most optometrists were involved in a sports team or club (73%) and an honor society (67%), while over half of them were involved with a religious organization (53%). Interestingly enough these numbers drop off dramatically to 25%, 26% and 33% respectively in undergraduate studies. They decline even further for athletes/coaches (9%) and religious organizations (22%) in graduate school.

The majority of participants listed professional involvement in the AOA (90%) and the MOA (90%), but only about half of participants claimed previous involvement in the AOSA (53%) and their respective state optometric association (47%) as an optometry student. As a professional it seems that it is more obvious how the AOA and MOA can represent organized optometry and protect optometrists' rights. Also it is possible that incentives for reduced admission to sponsored events, such as continuing education may appeal to professionals.

It is also interesting to note that about half of respondents have belonged to a service organization (49%) or a religious organization (51%) as a professional.

These organizations are often the most active in service-related projects in the community and abroad. This correlates well with the statistic that over half the participants (55%) have been on at least one volunteer mission trip to another community/area.

**As a general trend it should be noted that the more active a volunteer has been throughout their schooling no matter the level, the more likely it was for that volunteer to be active as a professional.** While it is possible many of those who did not respond also do not volunteer. Only twenty percent (20%) of those who participated in our survey claimed they did not currently volunteer. Also, many of those respondents who do/did not currently volunteer do/did feel as though their past experiences had a positive impact on their practice. Finally, it should be noted that those who were less involved in volunteering throughout school were also less involved in volunteering as a professional, which is consistent with the original hypothesis.

## **Conclusion**

From the data collected it can be inferred that graduate school volunteer efforts are more indicative than undergraduate efforts of continued community service. However, some participants who did not volunteer in graduate school still went on to volunteer as a professional. These optometrists had volunteered during their high school or undergraduate schooling. The majority of Michigan optometrists have been actively involved in volunteer or service related activities at some point in their career and most of those that have participated feel as though it has positively impacted them personally and professionally.

The lack of volunteer participation at any single stage of a professionals' education does not negate the possibility of future volunteer participation. However, a lack of overall involvement tends to indicate the same for future endeavors. Engagement in service-related activities appears to be more related to personal desire for involvement than on participation during any one facet of education. While the vast majority of those that have participated in the past are more likely to participate in the future, the trend did not hold absolutely true for every individual in this study.

## References

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**APPENDIX A**  
**Original Survey**

# **MCO of Ferris State University/The MOA Volunteer Service Related Involvement Survey**

**By Eric L. Hooper (Senior Project)  
Liaison – Dr. Dan Wrubel**

*This is a research study for degree completion requirements and to provide useful information to the program.  
This study has been approved by FSU's review board.  
This study consists of a short survey, whose purpose is to identify patterns of engagement among OD's.  
Participation is voluntary: results will be tabulated & reported only in aggregate; no one will be individually identified.  
If you have any questions about the study, contact Dr. Wrubel @ 231-591-2193 or Dr. Meinholdt @ 231-591-2759*

Please circle the response most appropriate for your practice below. By participating in this survey you are giving consent to use the data obtained for student research and analysis.

## **A. Practice Information**

Which age range do you fall within?

< 30                      30-50                      Over 50

How would you describe your optometric practice?

Solo Private Practice                      Group Type Practice                      Commercial

How would you describe your practice location?

City/Metropolitan                      Rural Community                      Hospital/Institutional

Please circle all organizations that you have volunteered/served within for each phase of your education.

## **I. High School**

Student Government	Honor Society	Key Club
Boys/Girls Scouts	Sports Team/Club	Political Organization
Religious Organization	4-H	Drama/Music Club
Other (Specify) _____		

## **II. Undergraduate Studies**

Student Government	Honors Program	Pre-Professional Club
Student Volunteer Group	Political Organization	Student Athlete/Coaching
Religious Organization	Fraternity/Sorority	Big Brothers/Big Sisters
Other (Specify) _____		



**III. Graduate/Optomtry School**

Optometric Student Government                      AOSA                      State Optometric Student Association  
SVOSH FCO                      Student Athlete/Coaching                      Political Organization  
Religious Organization                      Fraternity/Sorority                      Big Brothers/Big Sisters  
Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**IV. Post Grad/Professional**

AOA                      MOA                      Service Club                      Town Society                      VOSH  
AAO                      FCO                      Sports Organization/Coaching                      Political Committee  
Religious Organization                      School/Hospital/Bank Board                      Big Brothers/Big Sisters  
Other (Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Please circle the appropriate response for the following questions.**

1. Do you currently volunteer/do service related activities?  

Yes                      No
2. Do you feel that volunteering/service related activities has/had a positive impact on your practice?  

Yes                      No
3. Have you participated in a service mission trip to another community?  

Yes, within state      Yes, within country      Yes, International      No
4. Do you believe that MCO/Respective Local Society provides sufficient resources or initiatives volunteer/service related work?  

Yes                      No
5. Do you believe the MOA/AOA provides sufficient resources or initiatives to foster for volunteer/service related work?  

Yes                      No

**Thank you for participating in this survey!**

**Please send responses in the pre-paid envelope to us @ MCO**

If you would like to express your personal opinion regarding this survey, you can contact:

Dr. Daniel Wrubel  
(231) 591-2193  
[wrubeld@ferris.edu](mailto:wrubeld@ferris.edu)

and/or

Connie Meinholdt  
(231) 591-2759  
[connie\\_meinholdt@ferris.edu](mailto:connie_meinholdt@ferris.edu)

**APPENDIX B**

**Survey with Results**

# **MCO of Ferris State University/ The MOA** **Volunteer Service Related Involvement Survey Results**

By Eric L. Hooper (Senior Project)  
Liaison – Dr. Dan Wrubel

*This was a research study for degree completion requirements and to provide useful information to the program.  
This study was approved by FSU's review board.  
This study consisted of a short survey, whose purpose was to identify patterns of engagement among OD's.  
Participation was voluntary: results were tabulated & reported below.*

## **A. Practice Information**

Which age range do you fall within?

< 30	30-50	Over 50
9%	51%	40%

How would you describe your optometric practice?

Solo Private Practice	Group Type Practice	Commercial
30%	58%	12%

How would you describe your practice location?

City/Metropolitan	Rural Community	Hospital/Institution
51%	44%	5%

## **B. Volunteer Participation**

### **I. High School**

97% in at least one

Student Government	Honor Society	Key Club
40%	67%	5%
Boys/Girls Scouts	Sports Team/Club	Political Organization
28%	73%	9%
Religious Organization	4H	Drama Club
53%	10%	27%
Other		
8%		

### **II. Undergraduate Studies**

86% in at least one

Student Government	Honors Program	Pre-Professional Club
10%	26%	38%
Student Volunteer Group	Political Organization	Student Athlete/Coaching
23%	5%	25%
Religious Organization	Fraternity/Sorority	Big Brothers/Big Sisters
33%	24%	6%
Other		
9%		

**III. Graduate/Optomety School**

**88% in at least one**

Optometric Student Government	AOSA	State Optometric Student Association
23%	53%	47%
SVOSH/FCO	Student Athlete/Coaching	Political Organization
35%	9%	4%
Religious Organization	Fraternity/Sorority	Big Brothers/Big Sisters
22%	14%	2%
Other		
6%		

**IV. Post Grad/Professional**

**98% in at least one**

AOA	MOA	Service Club	Town Society	VOSH
90%	90%	48%	15%	17%
AAO	FCO	Sports Organization/Coaching		Political Committee
11%	4%	34%		16%
Religious Organization		School/Hospital/Bank Board		Big Brothers/Big Sisters
50%		14%		2%
Other				
15%				

**C. Follow-up**

1. Do you currently volunteer/do service related activities?

Yes	No
80%	20%

2. Do you feel that volunteering/service related activities has/had a positive impact on your practice?

Yes	No	NA/no response
81%	13%	6%

3. Have you participated in a service mission trip to another community?

	Yes, within state	Yes, within country	Yes, International	No
55% at least one	22%	28%	41%	45%

4. Do you believe that MCO/Respective Local Society provides sufficient resources or initiatives for volunteer/service related work?

Yes	No	NA/unsure
52%	33%	15%

5. Do you believe the MOA/AOA provides sufficient resources or initiatives to foster for volunteer/service related work?

Yes	No	NA/unsure
57%	33%	10%