

MCO ADMISSIONS: IN-STATE VS. OUT-OF-STATE APPLICANTS

by

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## ABSTRACT

*Background:* This article examines trends in the reasons students apply to the Michigan College of Optometry (MCO). There is currently no research in optometry that examines influential factors for graduate school selection. This retrospective study compared in-state applicants to out-of-state applicants when it comes to influential factors. This information will be used to determine areas of focus for prospective students. *Methods:* The following study collected information on the MCO 2016-2017 application cycle. Only students who were offered an interview were studied. Data was collected on a total of 87 students. Trends regarding which factors influenced students to select the MCO as their graduate school was then analyzed. *Results:* Approximately two-thirds of the applicants who were interviewed were from Michigan. Over 50% of out-of-state applicants who were offered a seat declined. Both in-state and out-of-state students ranked small class size and faculty to student ratio as two of the most common reasons for applying to MCO. *Conclusion:* Going forward the MCO Admissions Committee and faculty should continue to highlight the small class size and faculty to student ratio to set themselves apart from other optometry schools.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
CHAPTER	
1    INTRODUCTION.....	1
2    METHODS .....	3
3    RESULTS .....	4
4    DISCUSSION .....	8
REFERENCES .....	11

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1	Top Reported Reasons for Applying to MCO.....	7
2	Least Common Reasons for Applying to MCO .....	7

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
1 In-State Applicants.....	5
2 Out-of-State Applicants.....	5



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Several factors are taken into consideration when it comes to choosing a graduate program. Regarding the optometric profession, there are currently twenty-three accredited institutions according to the American Optometric Association.<sup>1</sup> The Michigan College of Optometry (MCO) is the only optometry school located in Michigan. Started in 1974, it is the second smallest program in the United States. A class size of thirty-eight students is just one quality that sets it apart from other institutions.

There are few studies that analyze reasons for choosing optometry as a career, while there are no studies that explore the factors that influence choice of institution within the United States for optometry. Statistically, MCO has a higher percentage of in-state students versus out-of-state students. A study regarding the factors that influence students to pursue MCO as their institution of choice for graduate school will benefit faculty by allowing them to focus on areas that will draw in more students from around the country, with hopes of creating a more diverse student body.

Studies have been performed regarding the influential factors for choosing graduate schools in other professions. A study that researched dental school applicants found that clinical training and the philosophy of training were important to prospective

students.<sup>2</sup> Many students also found geographic location to be important.<sup>3</sup> Additional research found knowledgeable advisors, cost, scholarships and accreditations to also be important in their selection.<sup>4</sup>

The goal of this study was to establish which factors prospective students reported were most influential when it came to selecting the Michigan College of Optometry as their graduate school. This study focuses on the differences in influential factors between both in-state students and out-of-state students. The results can be used to help focus on specific areas within the program that will market the school for a wider array of applicants.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODS

This study was approved by an advisor at the Michigan College of Optometry. Information was collected retrospectively, and therefore it did not need approval through the Institutional Review Board on campus. Data was collected by the administrative assistant of the Admissions Committee. Applications from the 2016-2017 admissions cycle were used. Of the total applicants for that cycle, data was only collected on students who received an interview. A total of 87 students were used for this study, which included both in-state and out-of-state applicants.

Investigators in this study had no access to protected information throughout this study. Each interviewee was assigned a randomized number. Data collection involved recording whether the student was in-state or out-of-state, their reasons for applying to the Michigan College of Optometry, whether they were offered a seat in the upcoming class, and if they accepted the offer. An excel spreadsheet using a numbering system of 1= yes, 0= no was used to collect the data. Statistical significance was then applied to analyze the results.

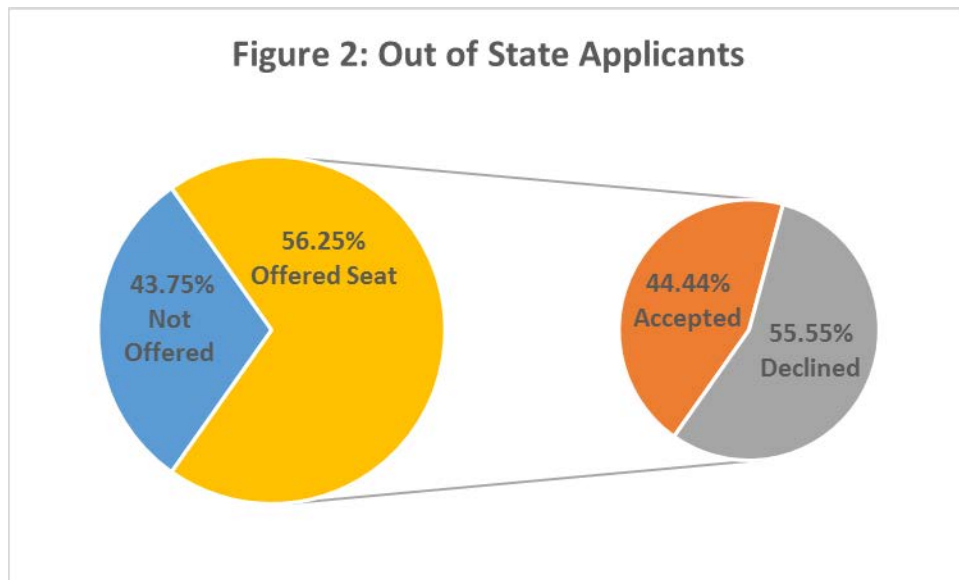
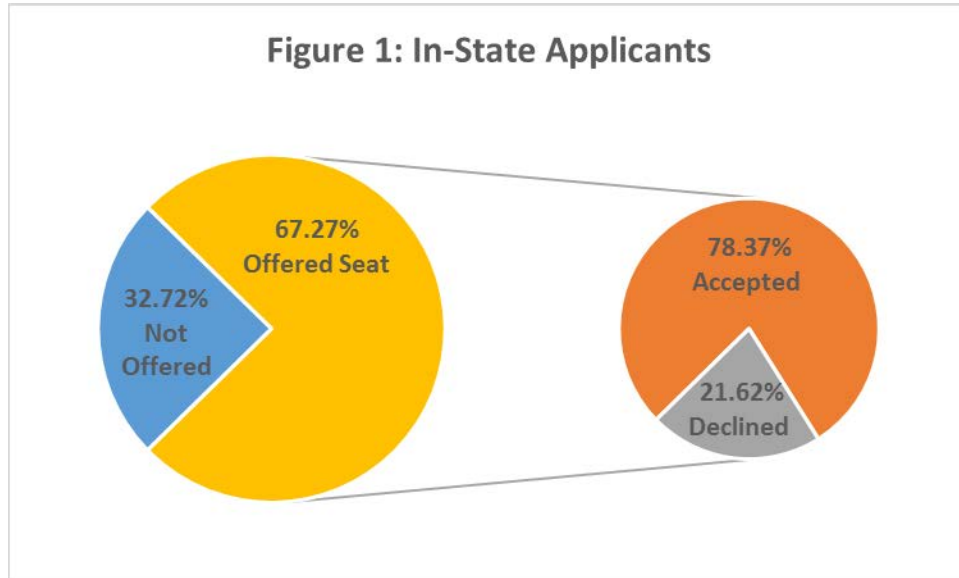
## CHAPTER 3

### RESULTS

After the de-identified data was compiled into an Excel spreadsheet, the investigators analyzed the information for trends. A total of 87 applicants were offered an interview for the 2016-2017 admissions cycle. In-state applicants amounted to 55 interviewees, or 63.22%, of the total applications. Of those, 67.27%, or 37 students, were offered a seat to the Michigan College of Optometry; whereas 18 applicants were denied a seat. Of the 37 seats offered, 29 students accepted (78.37%) and 8 declined (21.62%). In total, in-state students who were offered a seat and accepted accounted for 52.72% of the total in-state sample. There were 32 out-of-state applicants, or 36.78%, of the total applications. Of the 32, 18 (56.25%) were offered a seat and 14 (43.75%) were denied a seat. Of those offered a seat, eight (44.4%) accepted and ten (55.5%) declined. Out-of-state students who were offered a seat and accepted accounted for 25% of the total out-of-state sample. See Figures 1 and 2 for reference.

During the application process, applicants reported reasons why they applied to the Michigan College of Optometry. From the data, a list was compiled of the most common reasons. Some of the most common reasons reported by both in-state and out-of-state applicants included class size, faculty to student ration, comfort/safety, and the

facilities/technology. Refer to Table 1 for a summary. The least commonly reported reasons are listed in Table 2.



The number of responses between the in-state group and out-of-state group was also analyzed. For the in-state group, there were 22 possible options students could report as reasons why they applied to MCO. The out-of-state group had 26 possible options that could be selected. In-state students gave an average of 5.25 responses per applicant, while the out-of-state students gave an average of 4.63 responses. Each group, in-state vs. out-of-state, was further categorized into those who were offered and accepted a seat (OA), those who were offered a seat and declined (OD), and those who were not offered a seat (NO). The in-state students that were in the OA category gave 60.9% of the total in-state responses and an average of 6.07 responses. The in-state students that were in the OD category gave 13.2% of the total in-state responses and an average of 4.75 reasons. Those in the NO category in the in-state group gave 25.95% of the total in-state responses and an average of 4.17 reasons. The out-of-state students in the OA category gave 30.4% of the total out-of-state responses and an average of 5.63 reasons. The out-of-state students in the OD category gave 31.1% of out-of-state responses and an average of 4.6 reasons. Those in the NO category in the out-of-state group gave 38.5% of the total out-of-state responses and an average of 4.07 reasons.

Table 1: Top Reported Reasons for Applying to MCO

In-State Top Reasons	Out of State Top Reasons
<b>1. Class size</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>70.9% in-state reported</li> <li>79.3% of OA in-state reported</li> </ul>	<b>1. Class size</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>71.9% out of state reported</li> <li>87.5% of OA out of state reported</li> </ul>
<b>2. MI resident/close to home</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>63.6% in-state reported</li> <li>69% of OA in-state reported</li> </ul>	<b>2. Faculty to student ratio</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>59.4% out of state reported</li> <li>75% of OA out of state reported</li> </ul>
<b>3. Faculty to student ratio</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>50.9% in state reported</li> <li>55.2% of OA in-state reported</li> </ul>	<b>3. Comfort/Safety</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37.5% out of state reported</li> <li>42.9% of OA out of state reported</li> </ul>
<b>4. MCO facilities/technology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>49.1% in state reported</li> <li>65.5% of OA in-state reported</li> </ul>	<b>4. Clinical experience/exposure</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>31.3% out of state reported</li> <li>42.9% of OA out of state reported</li> </ul>
<b>5. Comfort/Safety</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>40% in state reported</li> <li>48.3% of OA in-state reported</li> </ul>	<b>5. MCO facilities/technology**</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25% out of state reported</li> <li>25% of OA out of state reported</li> <li>**Residency programs were also reported by 25% of out of state and 37.5% of OA out of state</li> </ul>

Table 2: Least Common Reasons for Applying to MCO

In-State Least Common	Out of State Least Common
1. First summer off	1. First summer off
2. 3+4 Program	2. Family MCO/Ferris Alumni
3. FSU affiliated	3. Explore other states

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION

Historically, MCO has had a much higher percentage of in-state students compared to out-of-state students. This trend was further demonstrated in this study of the 2016-2017 admissions cycle. Approximately two-thirds of the applicants who were interviewed were from the state. Of the 37 accepted seats, 29 students were in-state (78.38%) and only eight students were out-of-state (21.62%). Over 50% of out-of-state applicants who were offered a seat declined.

Table 1 and 2 provide a list of the most and least common reasons applicants applied to MCO, respectively. Overlapping reasons for applying to MCO between the in-state and out-of-state groups included class size, faculty to student ratio, comfort/safety and MCO facilities/technology. Just over 30% of out-of-state students also reported clinical experience/exposure as one of the most common reasons. To capture more out-of-state students, it may be prudent to highlight the reasons stated above to out-of-state applicants.

Data analysis revealed no statistical significance between the average number of reasons for applying to MCO for in-state versus out-of-state applicants; however, in-state



students provided an average of 5.25 reasons compared to 4.625 reasons from out-of-state students. In addition, for both in-state and out-of-state groups, those in the offered and accepted (OA) category gave more reasons for applying to MCO compared to the offered and declined (OD) and no offer (NO) categories. This may indicate to the Admissions Committee which applicants are more seriously interested in the program.

Similar to the research of factors influencing dental school and athletic training applicants, in-state MCO applicants reported that geographic location was an important factor.<sup>2,3</sup> Other research has found cost to be important in school selection.<sup>4</sup> Although the data analysis for this study did not find cost as one of the most common reasons to apply to MCO, there were two listed options, “Tuition” and “Reasonable cost of living”, that students could select. The two similar options may have split the general category of “cost” leading to inconclusive information. Future studies may consider condensing reasoning options or implementing a ranking system. No findings from this study may conclusively lead to more out-of-state applicants accepting a seat to MCO; however, the number one factor applicants reported as a reason to apply to MCO was class size for both in-state and out-of-state students. Furthermore, over 50% of in-state and out-of-state applicants reported faculty to student ratio an important factor. This has always been an important distinction for MCO compared

to other optometry schools. Going forward the MCO Admissions Committee and faculty should continue to highlight the small class size and faculty to student ratio to set themselves apart from other optometry schools.

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