

THE MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY NEW GRADUATE JOB SEARCH

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

Doctor of Optometry

Ferris State University
Michigan College of Optometry

May 2013

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Has been approved

April 30, 2012

Ferris State University
Doctor of Optometry Senior Paper
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ABSTRACT

Background: This research project investigated the process involved in finding employment in the optometric profession after graduation. The survey compiled, compared and analyzed a variety of methods utilized, including newer online social networking, and how worthwhile each method was. *Methods:* An online survey sent to ten years of MCO graduates took a broad look at their first job search experiences. Graduate demographics, methods used to find their first position and their effectiveness, whether the graduate was open to practicing anywhere or self-limited to a specific location, and satisfaction ratings were analyzed. *Results:* From the responses received, the most utilized methods were networking connections, the AOA website, and other internet websites. The highest rated methods based on relative effectiveness were networking connections, connections through friends, and other internet websites; on the other hand, the LinkedIn© and Facebook© websites were the lowest rated methods. *Conclusions:* Despite the individuality of each search, social networking is not currently an effective way to acquire optometric positions, but professional networking is a more effective method. The free text responses collected contain plenty of advice and experiences with a wealth of wisdom to reflect on that can benefit future optometry students.

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Introduction

Every optometry student welcomes graduation after the many years of tedious study and clinical preparation. After graduation and licensing, graduates are faced with landing a satisfying position. The ultimate goal is to work in a practice of the graduate's choice that is well-suited to their desired vocation, income, and location; however, what is the best process or method to find a suitable position in optometry after graduation? During review of past senior projects that surveyed optometry graduates, none had addressed the tangible process involved in finding employment, or creating a self-employed position.

There are several different resources available to find any type of job, the profession of optometry is no different. In a recent *Optometric Management* article, one optometrist shares how he narrowed down his search to a few practices out of state and then pursued them by marketing himself, making contacts, and networking.¹ Curious about the methods and steps taken by past graduates to secure their first optometric position, we investigated the job search experiences of Michigan College of Optometry (MCO) graduates via an online survey.

With the advent of social networking transforming the business world, we were also interested in exploring if social networking had affected the job search methods of optometry graduates. As this is a newer outlet, it could have a positive influence on the modern day search for one's career position. The job search methods incorporated in the study were internet websites (posted ads/monster/craigslist/etc.), LinkedIn website©, Facebook© website, the AOA website, family connections, connections through friends, networking connections, cold calling practices of interest, starting a new practice,

purchasing an established practice, and other methods.

Methods

A survey was created and distributed, via the Internet site QuestionPro.com, to 264 MCO graduates from the classes of 2000 through 2011. The survey consisted of 21 questions preceded by four general demographics questions for a total of 25 questions (see Appendix A). Email addresses were obtained from the Ferris State University Alumni Association and from MCO's recent graduate contact list. The survey was sent out on December 27th, 2012, and responses were collected for two weeks until January 9th, 2013. An email was sent out with a short introduction (see Appendix A) explaining the purpose of the study as well as a contact email address for any questions or concerns pertaining to the survey. A link was included in the email that allowed participants to access the survey. In order to ensure the survey was kept anonymous, the settings on QuestionPro.com were set so that no email addresses (or other identifying information) were displayed with the respondents' answers. The QuestionPro.com website tracks the CPU identification numbers that would indicate whether a participant accessed the survey more than once from the same computer. Through this feature, we know that no surveys were repeated from the same computer even though the email addresses were not linked to the respondents' answers. After the survey deadline, the data was organized and analyzed with the Microsoft Excel program, the QuestionPro.com statistical tools, and via descriptive data analysis.

Results

There were a total of 61 completed surveys, with 78 surveys started and 17 unfinished surveys. The analysis of responses and data only included the 61 fully completed surveys. There was at least one optometrist from each of the MCO classes of 2000 to 2011 that responded to the survey (see Table 1). Of the respondents, 18 out of 61 did a residency after graduation, which is about 30%. This amount was twice the optometry national average of 14% residency completion.² This may have artificially affected some of our data, depending on if the graduate considered the residency a first job, since instructions to only include post-residency positions were not given in the survey. Since residencies last up to a year, and we consider the matching

for a residency different than finding a post-residency position, our intention of “first job” could have been better explained as “first job- excluding residency.” Most of the respondents went to colleges and universities in Michigan prior to optometry school and somewhat less are still in Michigan now (see Table 1). All respondents became licensed optometrists within the same year they graduated except three, and all respondents except one started their first career position within 6 months after graduation. Four optometrists stayed in their first position for up to 6 months, each of these doctors were at a commercial chain setting. Seven out of nine respondents that worked at their first position between 6 months to one year were doing a residency program. Half of the

MCO Graduation Year:	Number
2011	6
2010	14
2009	6
2008	4
2007	8
2006	6
2005	2
2004	3
2003	2
2002	4
2001	5
2000	1
Total	61
Undergrad Location:	
In-State (Michigan)	90%
Out of State	10%
Current Location:	
In-State (Michigan)	70%
Out of State	30%
Residency:	
Yes	18 (30%)
No	43 (70%)

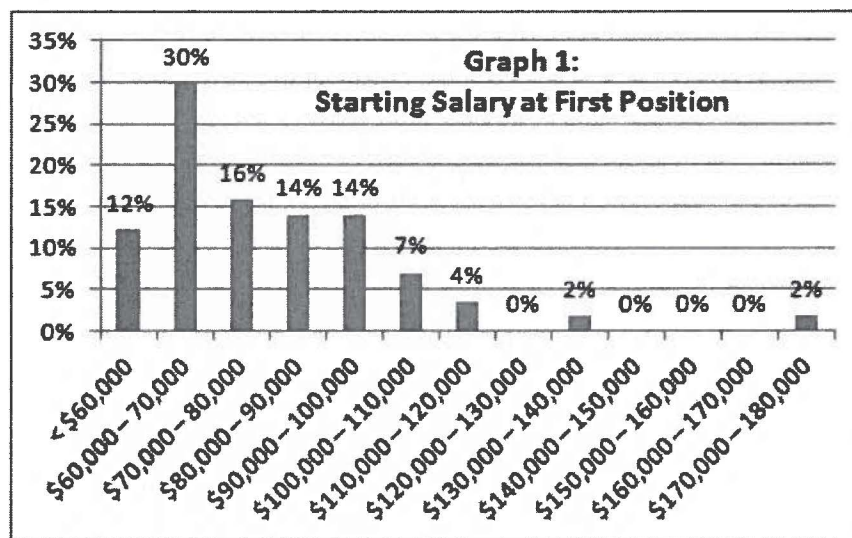
fourteen doctors that worked at their first position for one to three years were at a private practice setting. Nine optometrists stayed at their first position for three to five years; four were at private practices and five were in a commercial setting. There are twenty-five optometrists that are currently still working at the first position they started after graduation: thirteen (52%) of these doctors graduated in year 2011 or 2010; three (12%) graduated in 2009 or 2008; five (20%) graduated in year 2007 or 2006; two (8%) graduated in year 2005 or 2003; two (8%) graduated in year 2002 or 2001.

Optometrists can work in many different settings. The least common modes of practice were working at a VA or starting their own practice, with none of the respondents choosing either of these two modes. The new graduating optometrists worked in commercial settings, private practices, other settings such as academia or residency programs, community health centers, or military hospitals (see Table 2). The percentages of optometrists affiliated with an optical company, considered as “commercial setting” in our study, is about 41%, or about triple that of the national percentage of 11.7-18% (an exact percentage is difficult to gauge because 6.3% fall into categories of either “other self employed” or “independent contractor” which can fall into more than one category).² Furthermore, only 38% of our graduate sample indicated that they started in a private practice setting; however, about double that amount, or specifically 75.5%-81.8%, of optometrists are currently working in private practice according to the national data.² Other modes of practice were difficult to compare due to disparities in how the categories were subdivided in the survey versus the national data.

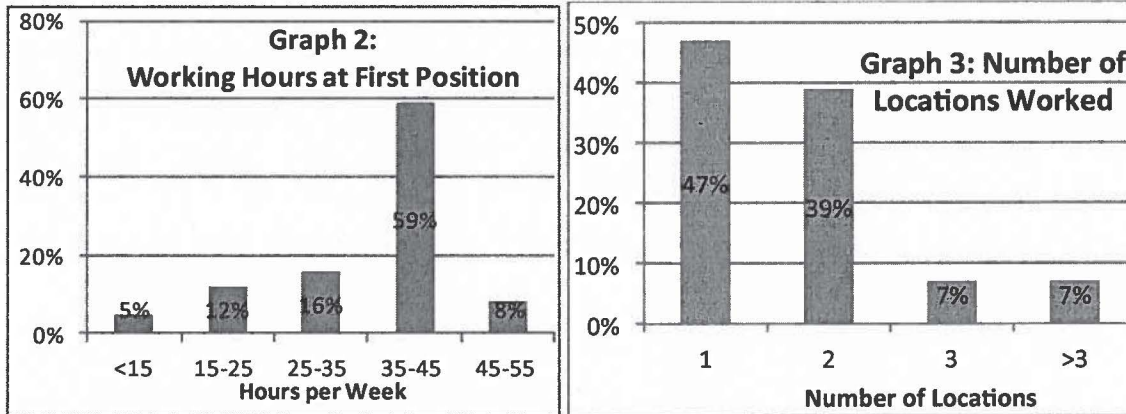
Type of Position	Number
Commercial Setting	25(41%)
Private Practice	23(38%)
Other	5(8%)
Community Health Center	4(7%)
Military	4(7%)
Started new practice	0(0%)
VA	0(0%)
TOTAL:	61

However, a rough overview of our survey data shows *higher percentages in commercial settings* by about threefold (41% vs. 11.7-18%), and *lower percentages in private practice settings* by about twofold (38% vs. 75.5%-81.1%) when compared to the national data.²

For all these different settings of optometry, there are different amounts of compensation. Starting salaries ranged from being paid per patient up to \$180,000 (see Graph 1). Only two optometrists were between \$130,000 and \$180,000, but 86% of the 56 responders were below \$100,000. More than two thirds of the respondents received \$90,000 or less.



Not all optometrists work full time or at one location, and the same trend occurs with new graduates. The average work amounted to 35-45 hours per week for 59% of the responding optometrists (see Graph 2). About one third work under 35 hours, which would be considered part-time. For those with limited work hours, the type of position varied from private practices to commercial stores. The majority of optometrists work at one or two locations (see Graph 3). Over half of optometrists worked in multiple locations after graduating from optometry school and 47% worked at only one location.



Multiple answers were allowed for the survey question about which methods were utilized during the job search process. There were no responses for starting a new practice, two responses for purchasing an established practice, and three responses each for the LinkedIn© and Facebook© websites. Networking connections were utilized the most and received 33 responses followed closely by the AOA website and other Internet websites (see Table 3). The “other” methods utilized included the following responses: four graduates mailed out letters/CVs out to practices, three graduates contacted recruiting agencies/recruiters, two graduates had a position lined up through the military scholarship program, one graduate connected with a personal eye doctor from before optometry school, one graduate used the MOA journal, one graduate was contacted by franchise owner after new graduate information was posted in the Michigan Optometrist magazine, one graduate took a job that a classmate recommended, one graduate appreciated the practice opportunity emails from MCO, and one graduate had a clinical rotation at that practice. Each of these methods, including the “other” methods, required initiative on the part of the graduate, whether it was before, during, or after optometry school to secure a position. However, each method is not necessarily equal in effectiveness for each individual.

Table 3: Tally of Methods Utilized (multiple responses allowed)			Table 4: Ranking of each Method		
Job Search Method	Number of Responses	Percent	Job Search Method	Mean Rating	RANK
		(=responses/61surveys)			
Networking connections	33	54%	Networking connections	4.093	1
AOA website	22	36%	Connections through friends	3.174	2
Internet websites,(posted ads/monster/craigslist/etc.)	19	31%	Internet websites (ads/monster/ craigslist/etc.)	3.000	3
Other	15	25%	AOA website	2.694	4
Through connections with friends	13	21%	Other	2.643	5
Cold calling practices of interest	13	21%	Family connections	2.500	6
Family connections	6	10%	Purchasing an established practice	2.333	7
LinkedIn	3	5%	Cold calling practices of interest	2.273	8
Facebook	3	5%	Starting a new practice	1.727	9
Purchasing an established practice	2	3%	Facebook	1.571	10
Starting a new practice	0	0%	LinkedIn	1.250	11
TOTAL RESPONSES	129				

The star rating of the effectiveness of each job search method varied widely (see Table 4) since not every person rated each method, but rather only the methods they actually utilized were to be rated. The top three most effective (highest rated) methods were networking connections, connections through friends, and other internet websites. Of the top three, networking connections had the lowest standard deviation (1.065) and lowest standard error (0.162), which indicates that more responders had consistent ratings (see Table 5). The other methods with low standard deviation and low standard error were the LinkedIn© website and Facebook© website because all star ratings were very poor. All respondents rated the LinkedIn© website with only one star (n=10) or two stars (n=2). All respondents rated the Facebook© website with only one star (n=11), three stars (n=1), or four stars (n=2). The other job search methods had more variance in rating responses. After the top three most effective methods, the relatively next best methods were the AOA website, other methods, and family connections (see Table 4). The

methods of purchasing an established practice, cold calling practices of interest, starting a new practice, Facebook© website and the LinkedIn© website were all below a mean star rating of 2.4, indicating an ineffective method for most graduates.

Table 5: The Top 3 Ranked Job Search Methods
(1 star= not helpful, 5 stars=most helpful or leave blank if not utilized)

Rating of method: Networking Connections		Rating of method: Connections through friends		Rating of Method: Internet websites (posted ads/monster/craigslist/ect.)	
Number of Stars	Percent of Responses	Number of Stars	Percent of Responses	Number of Stars	Percent of Responses
1	5%	1	22%	1	23%
2	0%	2	13%	2	10%
3	23%	3	22%	3	23%
4	26%	4	13%	4	30%
5	47%	5	30%	5	13%
Number of Responses	43 (70.5% responded)	Number of Responses	23 (38% responded)	Number of Responses	30 (49% responded)
Mean Rate	4.093	Mean Rate	3.174	Mean Rate	3.000
Confidence Interval @ 95%	3.775 to 4.411	Confidence Interval @ 95%	2.538 to 3.810	Confidence Interval @ 95%	2.503 to 3.497
Standard Deviation	1.065	Standard Deviation	1.557	Standard Deviation	1.39
Standard Error	0.162	Standard Error	0.325	Standard Error	0.254

In the top three methods utilized during the job search process, all three do not have the highest ratings (see Table 4). Networking connections was the number one utilized method as well as the number one ranked method in effectiveness. The AOA website was the second highest utilized method, but was ranked as fourth in terms of effectiveness. Internet websites was the third highest utilized method and ranked third as well.

In order to gain insight into influencing factors, respondents were asked, in a variety of ways, how their desired career *location* versus desired career *position* had affected their job search. For the majority of new graduates, staying within a 100 mile radius of their hometown was important, with 42.6% stating it was “very important” and

24.6% stating that it was “somewhat important.” Satisfaction ratings indicated that 64% found a position in their desired location. For nearly half of the graduates, it came down to a true 50/50 split, with job location and the actual job position being of equal influence in their search. Location was the overriding and primary influencing factor about 29% of the time, with career position lagging behind at 14%. Interestingly, although location alone factored more heavily into the job search, satisfaction rates for the two were about equal. More precisely, 69% of graduates reported being either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their first career location, but, slightly more, 75% of graduates, were satisfied with their first career position. As expected, satisfaction results somewhat correspond with how prepared graduates felt in securing their first job position. Two thirds of the respondents felt very prepared or somewhat prepared in securing a position after graduation. Since this was a retrospective analysis, however, it is possible that graduates replied to how prepared they had felt based upon how happy they were with the final outcome.

When asked whether MCO or Ferris State University could better prepare graduates in their career search, the responses were wide-spread and split relatively evenly. One third thought MCO could help students more in the job search, one third thought MCO would not be able to assist in this process, and one third was unsure (see Appendix B, Question 21). Some suggestions for MCO to assist in the job search were: better prepare students for after-graduation encounters and how to better differentiate between a good position and a bad one, “reducing class size to diminish saturation,” job interview and contract negotiation preparation, how to bill Medicare for reimbursement for exams, how to get credentialed, more opportunities to pick rotations to potentially end

up in job opportunity, better idea of starting wage/salary. A few responses (n=6) stated that students need to be proactive on their own and that MCO or Ferris is not responsible for job placement after graduation. One response summarized many of the others: "They taught the necessary skills, how to write a CV, how to interview, etc. It's hard to teach confidence and how to sell yourself to a potential employer. However, I was given the impression that it was going to be a lot easier to find a position than it actually was." Several optometrists were surprised to find out it was difficult to find full-time positions and unsure of what a good or bad starting salary would be. "I felt like they did a good job. Kamen had us do a budget and CV. Michigan is small enough that it's easy to find work if you're willing to start with two part-time positions without benefits at first."

The very widespread written responses of the optometrists gives you a taste of all the different situations everyone had in their search process to practice optometry. There are several words of advice and wisdom from optometry graduates (See Appendix B, question 22) ranging from "good luck" to insightful instructions of action to take during the job search. Some of the advice (summarized from Appendix B) includes: do your homework by asking old employees/patients about the practice, start early, don't assume you will find your 'dream' career right after graduation because it is hard work to find your perfect fit, don't stop looking for a job if you are not happy at your first position, don't judge everything on salary because the working environment/atmosphere may be better for your job satisfaction and enjoyment.

Discussion

This survey was aimed at demystifying the often daunting process of finding optometric employment by collecting real-world experience in order to benefit the future optometry graduates. While there are many different ways to acquire a position, it is always beneficial to ask previous graduates what they did right and what they did wrong in the process.

While some graduates expressed disenchantment at how much more difficult finding a job was than they anticipated while in school, the majority of graduates found work within six months of graduating. Most of the optometrists still currently working at their first position are also more recent graduates. About half work at more than one location and yet the salary is lower than expected. The median starting salary of a new optometrist in 2009 was \$78,000, which is above that found in the results of this project.³ With 30% of optometrists making under \$70,000 as a salary, this demonstrates why some of the responders commented on not knowing what the expected salary would be after graduation. The reduced income could be due to working only part time hours as seen in about 35% of the respondents, or buying into a practice, in which the “buying-in” optometrist often-times receives a lower salary due some of his total earning automatically going towards the practice purchase.

Several survey questions investigated the types of methods and their effectiveness. However, the responses collected were not always direct or comparative. Survey participants could select as many “job search methods utilized” as they wanted, but there is no assurance that they ranked the effectiveness of every method they had used. To determine how effective each method was, the participant had to rate how

helpful that method was towards job attainment by giving it 1-5 stars. Despite the written instructions in the survey that stated to not rate a method if not utilized in career search, nothing prohibited a participant from entering a rating on any item, whether or not they had previously selected it as a method they had utilized. This defect in the process of the survey confounded some of the data, but nonetheless, we can conclude that LinkedIn© and Facebook© websites were not effective ways to attain a job. “Networking connections,” the “AOA website,” and “other internet websites” were the most often utilized methods, but the most effective methods replaced the “AOA website” by “other internet websites” in third place, following behind “connections through friends” in second place, and “networking connections” in first.

One disclaimer to the ineffectiveness of social media reflected in the results may stem from the rapidly changing role of LinkedIn© and Facebook© over the past ten years. In an effort to maximize the survey response rate, the classes of 2000 through 2011 were included; however, for many of these respondents, the aforementioned social media sites did not even exist during their initial job search process. Facebook© was not founded until 2004, and it was not until 2006 that it became open to anyone with an email address, and LinkedIn© started in 2003.^{4,5} It took a few years after their founding for these sites to gain the popularity and household-name status they have today. So for at least half, if not more, of the graduating classes surveyed, these sites would not have been very applicable or relevant in their job search; therefore, results show poor effectiveness for social media but there is still potential in these methods in the future. In the same way that email and Internet conferencing have revolutionized standard networking, social media may provide a free and easy access point for employers and employees alike to

access new and established contacts. LinkedIn© allows users to browse through contacts' resumes, made easier with a few clicks of the mouse. Facebook© often suggests new "friends" based on shared "mutual friends." It is not a far stretch for professional connections to be discovered, browsed, and managed more quickly and easily in these online formats. Allowing more direct access to "friends of friends" or "colleagues of colleagues" make Facebook© and LinkedIn© reasonably poised to significantly augment the networking process. As social media grows with time, they can become a type of networking that can provide many convenient benefits and thus assist in finding better professional networking opportunities.

The results indicate that networking plays the dominant role in securing a job. Two of the survey respondents nicely summarize this idea: "Networking can go a long way" and "The majority of the time it truly is not what you know but who you know." Our survey indicates that contacts from networking, family connections, and connections through friends are the best ways to find a career. One explanation for these results is that after graduating from optometry school and passing all three rigorous National Board Examinations, employers assume you are qualified. However, a personal connection can often be a good indication of whether you would be a good "fit" for the practice/employer.

Networking is often easier said than done. For many new graduates, the thought of "who you know vs. what you know" may seem confusing or even repellant, as data and the "what we know" is the main focus of the optometric education. In addition, in order to prevent cheating, networking and collaboration are pushed aside during optometry school because each individual must prove his/her knowledge independently

of others by the nature of the professional academic setting. So what is a career-seeking optometry student to do? Advice for the intellectual introverted types comes in many forms. Published in 1936, Dale Carnegie's book *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, remains popular today. While the Internet and social media has changed how we communicate, basic communication skills and tips on networking continue to be crucial to graduates' success. One insightful article, *How to Network: 12 Tips for Shy People*, provides many practical tips and implores introverts to not apologize for needing someone's help in networking:

*Introverts and inexperienced networkers often apologize when asking for an individual's help because they see networking as an imposition, not as an exercise in relationship building [...] You don't have to apologize for wanting to learn more about the individual with whom you're networking. One day you may be able to help her out.*⁶

Individual knowledge is emphasized in order to succeed in optometry school; however, in the post-graduation world, networking suddenly takes precedence. If networking by the inexperienced is viewed as "insincere at best, manipulative at worst" it can hinder one's ability to build connections.⁶ While networking can provide the career opportunity, it is then up to the graduate to determine whether the career position and location would be the best possible fit for them.

Often some compromise between ideal position and location has to be made. Yet, the actual job position contributes just as heavily as the area where the job is located. We have established that location was actually slightly more important to most new graduates

when they searched for their first job. One explanation for location taking the forefront may be because many new graduates work in commercial modes of practice initially. Indeed, the majority at 41% indicated this as their first mode of practice. These corporate employers are often assumed to be similar, so it would make sense for respondents to base their search primarily on location. However, in using location to narrow their search, many graduates may inadvertently be shutting themselves off to career opportunities, especially when refusing to budge from more saturated areas where opportunities may be more limited. Several free responses expressed difficulty in finding a job in the Grand Rapids, Michigan area, especially in private practice, which one respondent claimed to be a nearly impossible task. It is the authors' experience that Grand Rapids is often cited as "over-saturated" in the MCO academic setting, which seems to line up with graduates experiences in the area. In fact, more saturated locations usually include the more popular metropolitan areas that tend to be more attractive to young professionals.⁷

Upcoming studies may provide more insight in terms of saturation and/or supply and demand statistics of the optometric workforce. While the highly anticipated ASCO/AOA Workforce Study (stated to be circulated the first quarter of 2013) has not been released yet, statistics from the 1997 AOA census indicate optometrist-population ratios, per 10,000 people, from lowest to highest by region, are as follows: South (10.1), Northeast (12.2), West (12.4), Midwest (13.1).^{2,8} More precise numbers by state can be found from the 1997 National Census of Optometrists.² Researching the area via the Internet, Yellow Pages, Google Maps©, *Blue Book of Optometrists*, and via knowledge from optical laboratory representatives/networking are all methods to determine if a

particular community can support another optometrist- which may vary on practice type and demographics; i.e. starting a VT practice in a mainly retiree community may be unsuccessful even in an unsaturated area due to the demographics of the area.^{2,8}

Dissatisfaction rates indicated that 30% of MCO graduates are either neutral or dissatisfied with their first career location and/or career position, which is surprisingly higher than these authors expected. However this is still low considering that 44.0% felt either neutral or unprepared in regards to how prepared they felt in finding a job upon graduation. It is the authors' experience that the MCO curriculum, while shedding some light on different modes of practice, elaborates much less on the actual job search itself, and almost none at all on practice location. Choosing a location may seem like a very personal decision, made of mostly subjective factors like proximity to family, weather, and lifestyle; however, there are more elements to consider. Licensing requirements vary by state, with different states having their own state boards as well as substantial variations in the profession's scope of practice. For example, prescribing oral medications is allowed in all but three states- Florida, Massachusetts, and New York; two of the more liberal states in terms of scope of practice are Kentucky and Oklahoma, allowing optometrists to perform therapeutic laser procedures.^{9,10} Depending on the state, a license may allow different degrees of freedom for one's scope of practice. While these factors may seem more minor when compared to overall lifestyle and climate, they do add up, and may deserve more discussion in the academic setting.

Proximity to hometown and family can be a dominant influencing factor in deciding where one wants to practice. In terms of family proximity, the majority of respondents wanted to stay within a 100-mile radius of their hometown. Interestingly,

demographic data indicated that while only 10% of graduates had attended an undergraduate institution outside of Michigan, 30% answered the survey from an out-of-state location. While the location the survey was answered does not necessarily correlate with where the respondent permanently lives (i.e. vacations, business trips, etc), the 20% increase may indicate that more graduates are moving out of state after graduation. This may mean that graduates need to move out of state to find jobs, or just simply that other lifestyle/personal factors make an out-of-state location preferable.

Responses as to whether the MCO's curriculum can better prepare students for their job search were evenly split: one third thought MCO could help students more in the job search, one third thought MCO would not be able to assist in this process, and one third was unsure. Some responses indicated that skills such as networking and finding a good career could only be learned in the "real world" and through pounding the pavement. While other respondents felt that more experiences in interviewing and negotiating could have been taught, or that a wider variety of rotation sites- with greater flexibility for students to set up their own sites/connections-would foster relationships and help lead to job placement. In terms of location, more out-of-state rotations may also help to facilitate student familiarity with different location options, but may be hard to implement since, per the authors' experience, the in-state rotations tend to be more popular historically.

Conclusion

From this study, our intention is not to discourage anyone from certain types of job search methods, but instead to highlight which methods have proven to be more effective. Between rigorous clinical rotations, passing national board exams, and then state board requirements, identifying less effective ways can direct a fourth year student/new graduate to not expend as much time and energy on ineffective methods. It is beneficial to know which methods are effective so one can focus more on those activities more likely to produce a career opportunity, especially in a time crunch. The search for a working position in optometry often seems like an individual endeavor, yet collaboration and networking were considered the most effective methods to find a job by the majority of graduates. Given that success in the optometric academic setting is largely an individual endeavor, important “real world” job search success skills such as networking may need to be refreshed upon and advocated so they do not fall too far “out of practice” for students when they transition from the academic setting. While some believe these skills cannot directly be “taught” at school, basic how-to networking tips and discussions should be incorporated to benefit future graduates.

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APPENDIX A
SURVEY

THE MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY NEW GRADUATE JOB SEARCH SURVEY

Dear MCO graduates,

We would like your valuable opinions about a topic we don't learn too much about while in optometry school, but which becomes crucial to us upon graduation. You are invited to participate in our survey, "The Michigan College of Optometry New Graduate Career Search," as part of our Senior Research Project. The survey consists of approximately 22 questions.

Your survey responses will be strictly confidential, and data from this research will be reported only in the aggregate. Your information will be coded and will remain confidential. If you have any questions at any time about the survey or the procedures, you may contact Monika Dembinska at umichmoni@gmail.com. Also, contact us if you would like a copy of the finished project.

Thank you in advance to the MCO classes of 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011. We appreciate your valuable time and support.

Please start with the survey now by clicking on the **Continue** button below.

Sincerely,

Monika Dembinska and Katie Buchholz

QUESTIONS:

1: Please fill in the following demographic information:

Age: _____

Undergraduate location _____

MCO Graduation Year: _____

Marital status during optometry school/ current marital status: _____

2: When did you become licensed after graduation: (month, year) _____

3: Did you do a residency after graduation?

a.) no → (forwards to Question 5, skips Question 4)

b.) yes → (go to Question 4)

4: If you indicated that you did a residency after graduation, please specify the type and school/location _____

5: How long did it take you to secure your first position?

- a. 0-6 months
- b. 6-12mo.
- c. 1-2 years
- d. >2 years

6: How long did you work in your first position?

- a. 0-6 months
- b. 6-12 months
- c. 1-3 years
- d. 3-5 years
- e. Currently working at first position

7: What type of position did you first work in? Please only fill in **ONE** comment box corresponding to your **FIRST POSITION**, with details such as type of practice, number of doctors, etc.

- a. Private practice, specify type and number of doctors _____
- b. Started own practice, elaborate _____
- c. Commercial practice, specify where _____
- d. VA, specify where _____
- e. Community health center, specify where _____
- f. Other _____

8: What was your approximate starting salary at your first position?

- a. 60,000 – 70,000
- b. 70,000 – 80,000
- c. 80,000 – 90,000
- d. 90,000 – 100,000
- e. 100,000 – 110,000
- f. 110,000 – 120,000
- g. 120,000 – 130,000
- h. 130,000 – 140,000
- i. 140,000 – 150,000
- j. 150,000 – 160,000
- k. 160,000 – 170,000
- l. 170,000 – 180,000
- m. 180,000 – 190,000
- n. 190,000 – 200,000
- o. Other _____

9: How many hours did you work at first position?

- a. 15-25 hours/week
- b. 25-35 hours/week
- c. 35-45 hours /week
- d. 45-55 hours /week
- e. Other _____

10: Were you working in multiple locations or just one?

- a. One location
- b. Two locations
- c. Three locations
- d. More than three locations

11: What methods did you utilize to search for a post-graduation position? (Select all used)

- i. Internet websites (posted ads/monster/craigslist/etc.)
- ii. LinkedIn
- iii. Facebook
- iv. AOA website
- v. Family connections
- vi. Through connections with friends
- vii. Networking connections
- viii. Cold calling practices of interest
- ix. Starting new practice
- x. Purchased practice
- xi. Other : _____

12: For the previous question, "What methods did you utilize to search for a post-graduation position?" please elaborate on any of the answers you wish to provide more details/information on. (_____ free response text box _____)

- i. Internet websites (posted ads/monster/craigslist/etc.) _____
- ii. LinkedIn _____
- iii. Facebook _____
- iv. AOA website _____
- v. Family connections _____
- vi. Through connections with friends _____
- vii. Networking connections _____
- viii. Cold calling practices of interest _____
- ix. Starting new practice _____
- x. Purchased practice _____
- xi. Other : _____

13: Please rate which methods you thought were most helpful in finding a position?
(1 star not helpful, 5 stars most helpful, or leave blank if not utilized in career search)

- i. Internet websites (posted ads/monster/craigslist/etc.) _____
- ii. LinkedIn _____
- iii. Facebook _____
- iv. AOA website _____
- v. Family connections _____
- vi. Through connections with friends _____
- vii. Networking connections _____
- viii. Cold calling practices of interest _____
- ix. Starting new practice _____
- x. Purchased practice _____
- xi. Other : _____

14: How important was it to practice in or nearby (within a 100 mile radius) your hometown location?

- a. Not important at all
- b. Not very important
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat important
- e. Very important

15: What was the location (city, state) of your first position? _____

16: Did you find your first position in your "desired" location/area or did you have to compromise by working further away or at a different type of practice, for example?

- a.) Yes, briefly explain _____
- b.) No, briefly explain _____

17: Did the ideal location or the ideal practice position factor more heavily into your initial job search?

- a. Location, Location, Location
- b. Position, Position, Position
- c. True 50/50 split
- d. Other, please explain _____

18: How satisfied were you in your first *location*?

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Somewhat satisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat dissatisfied
- e. Very dissatisfied

19: How satisfied were you in your first *position*?

- a. Very satisfied
- b. Somewhat satisfied
- c. Neutral
- d. Somewhat dissatisfied
- e. Very dissatisfied

20: How prepared were you to find appropriate position after graduation?

- a. Not prepared at all
- b. Not very prepared
- c. Not very prepared
- d. Neutral
- e. Somewhat prepared
- f. Very prepared

21: Do you feel MCO or Ferris could have better prepared you for your career search?

- a. Yes, please specify why _____
- b. No, please specify why _____
- c. Unsure, please specify why _____

22: Please share any additional thoughts, concerns, and/or advice regarding your job search experience: _____

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING OUR SURVEY!

APPENDIX B

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS

WRITTEN RESPONSES TO SURVEY QUESTIONS

Note: All responses are unedited from survey.

Question 16: Did you find your first position in your “desired” location/area or did you have to compromise by working further away or at a different type of practice, for example?

a.) Yes, briefly explain _____ (39 selected yes out of all respondents)

b.) No, briefly explain _____ (18 selected no out of all respondents)

****Yes, briefly explain: _____ (39 selected yes out of all respondents)**

1. Found a position in my desired location/area.
2. Further away from home. 50 miles one way
3. I was looking to practice in the Northwest. City wasn't much of a concern as practicing in the Northwest...Oregon, Washington, Idaho.
4. Yes. Location was desirable.
5. I had to work in multiple practice locations and modalities. I also worked in a nursing home.
6. I was excited to move to the northeast for my first position- I wanted a new adventure.
7. Yes, moved back to Traverse City where I was born and raised and work in town
8. yes it's in my desired location
9. My first position was great, learned a lot, group OMD practice. Area was perfect.
10. Although I would have liked something closer to home (within 20 miles), 50 miles was a compromise I was willing to make. Plus, I really wanted to work in private practice.
11. My wife wanted a larger city, but I couldn't refuse the offer that I got to buy out the existing doc.
12. No I did not find a position in my desired location and had to commute.
13. Yes, I worked very hard in school & residency and was very lucky to find a job in my ideal location in MI.
14. The location of my first position was ideal.
15. It was fairly close, I didn't feel that I needed to compromise very much.
16. Tohatchi was not my first choice for a position but they were able to get paperwork done faster than another facility. Both places were "desired."
17. I was open to many options and fell into an ideal situation.
18. Yes
19. Corporate, when wanted private
20. I was not picky about location- I wanted to be in Michigan, and was
21. One location was close to home the other was 30+ minutes from home. Split time approximately 50%
22. It was within 1 hour of my hometown which was perfect. I was not interested in going back to my hometown but didn't want to be too far away.

23. In desired location
24. Yes, where we were currently living my husband was employed, but he had to quit his job because my position was too far away.
25. Got my desired position where I wanted
26. The practice was not in my desired location, but I made it work by commuting 30 min each way.
27. I wasn't able to find anything in my desired location so I did relocate to Toledo. It was still close enough though being about a 90 minute drive from home
28. I work within 30 miles of my home which for northern michigan is pretty close.
29. Yes. I got my 1st residency choice
30. Yes. Adrian is within traveling distance from my desired living location
31. Liked the area, not first choice in mode of practice
32. N/A With the military, we are given limited options
33. Searched within 100 mile radius of husband's job and was happy to have three job offers within my search area. I chose based on where I thought I would have the most satisfying work experience, I did not accept the job that offered me the highest salary.
34. We wanted to stay in the area for a year or two due to my husband's job
35. Yes, about 40 minute drive. Not bad.
36. Very close to home.
37. It was only once weekly so it was fine to drive 50minutes one way.
38. In exact town I wanted
39. It was within an hour of my hometown, which was my desired location.

****No, briefly explain _____ (18 selected no out of all respondents):**

1. Did not have desired location
2. I only wanted to work at the Petoskey location, but it went out of business so I had to drive an hour over to the Gaylord one.
3. Looked to practice in the Grand Rapids area but ultimately got no bites. Eventually became open to working pretty much anywhere in the lower peninsula.
4. I had to make a compromise, as full-time optometry positions were not available closer to home
5. Different location than I intended on, but working out fantastically for the time being.
6. I compromised for the first 4 years of working- long drives and commercial setting
7. I compromised by working in a corporate location when I really would rather be at a private practice
8. It was a desired location, but I had no choice
9. Was offered job where I did my rotation and was happy c location

10. I chose an open faculty position
11. Compromise with 60 min commute
12. Had to compromise on distance. Only wanted to work where I could provide comprehensive eye care.
13. Proximity To home was a non-factor for myself and I wanted to be in more of a medical setting
14. Mission needs come first.(military placement)
15. Compromised. Further away from desired location.
16. Practice location was a huge sacrifice, but one that was necessary to have the military position.
17. Compromised with a short drive.
18. Was a 45 minute drive, but I was very excited to be at a private practice.

Question 21: Do you feel MCO or Ferris could have better prepared you for your career search?

- a. Yes, please specify why _____ (16 selected yes)
- b. No, please specify why _____ (22 selected no)
- c. Unsure, please specify why _____ (14 selected unsure)

a.Yes, please specify why: _____ (16 selected yes)**

1. Oh, where to start....
2. The only career assistance provided was emails of open positions forwarded along to students. I don't know that there's anything else that can be done through MCO, other than reducing class size to diminish saturation.
3. Yes. MCO could have better prepared me for any job by having me see more patients and giving me less time with each patient because that is how the real world works and you have to adapt to it. Finding a job is easy. Finding a good job is not easy. You have to take your time and be very selective. My second job has been light years better than my first job. I consider my first job a learning experience. MCO needs to better prepare their students for what they will encounter after graduation and how to differentiate between a good position and a bad one.
4. Yes, there are many more options for optometrists than just practicing and I wish MCO would have taught more about that. Also, there was no preparation for job interviewing, negotiating, etc
5. A career placement center website like they have now would have been rather helpful.
6. They could have taught me how to get credentialed, and how to bill Medicare so I would actually get paid.

7. Setting up more networking opportunities, talking about different types of practices and the differences between them. Discussing the idea of waiting for the perfect position as opposed to taking any that comes along.
8. I was pretty certain that I wanted to persue a career within the government, specifically the IHS. There wasn't a lot of information or knowledge available at MCO/Ferris regarding this.
9. I still do not have full time work... I have been very picky, because my ideal is private practice, and GR is very saturated.
10. Not happy c rotation options, would like to have more opportunity to pick rotations that would potentially end up in job opportunity
11. Explain ways to search in 4th yr or at capstone
12. Little help, pro or con was given. AOA stresses private practice, yet do little to help new grads in their search.
13. Sure, you're never 100% prepared, but MCO/Ferris does do a good job passing along opportunities. Ferris also has a career/job website, though not specifically geared for- and all that helpful for optometry. The thing I was least prepared for regarding the job search was just how difficult it would be to find a full-time (or close to it) job. I really was shocked how few opportunities I found. In school, I expected to have something more easily accessible right after graduation/residency, but the truth is that it's hard to find a job!
14. While I already had a job lined up, I don't remember much mention of how to find a job right out of school. I know my classmates were (some still are) having a hard time finding a place.
15. Knowing more specific stats regarding starting wage would have been nice. As i recall the ranges were a bit vague.
16. Possibly by giving us more exposure to the types of practices and ways to reach out to those practices we were interested in.

Question 21 continued: Do you feel MCO or Ferris could have better prepared you for your career search?

b.No, please specify why:** _____ (22 selected no)

1. I felt the faculty at MCO did an excellent job of mentoring me and preparing me for a job in academia.
2. They taught us what we needed to know
3. No, it wasn't that hard to find positions if you were open to location.
4. I feel like working in commercial locations is not really addressed in optometry school and it is something that a large percentage of graduates end up doing full time or at least a day or two a week to supplement their income. I also think that salaries are not realistically presented in optometry school and you leave thinking you are going to make a lot more starting off than you most likely will.

5. I think there is adequate networking opportunities available. It's up to the graduate to step out on his/her own and seek the positions he/she wants. FSU may offer a career fair but it may not be realistic to expect that for a profession like optometry, unless it's recruiters from chains, and that may not be everyone's first choice for employment.
6. Too many other factors weight into finding a position than what MCO prepared us for
7. That's not their job. MCO provides the education; I felt I needed to do the leg work to find a position.
8. Negotiating salaries.
9. I don't think it's their job to do so. Part of our country's problems lie in everyone expecting things to be done for/given to them- but I'll stop this soapbox now. ;)
10. I think the tools were there, it was just too busy and hectic and I procrastinate. All in all, I could have been better about using the resources and networking as suggested. I feel like MCO seems better now, with business cards students can pass out and the private practice meeting.
11. It is up to each individual to do their own leg work to find the position that they want.
12. I didn't have the problems many new grads have in finding a job.
13. It's up to me to find a good job
14. I thought that by sending emails several times a week/month after graduation~ about who was hiring around the state of Michigan was extremely helpful. Not sure if they still do that~ but that helped me a lot.
15. They taught the necessary skills, how to write a CV, how to interview, etc. It's hard to teach confidence and how to sell yourself to a potential employer. However, I was given the impression that it was going to be a lot easier to find a position than it actually was
16. I knew what I was getting into before I got to school so I could focus on what I needed to get out of it.
17. No we have a wonder career services program at ferris and I thought dr kamen gave excellent tools to secure a position. Fact is as a student you need to network with ODs in areas you would like to practice. Also doing a residency will help you be more competitive in securing a employment opportunity. Lastly if you don't like your employment options then start cold and build your practice in your desired location.
18. They were right in stressing the importance of networking. I got my current job in NY by working for this Dr before opt school and staying in touch throughout. He hired me when my husband and I were ready to move back to NY from DC.
19. Did not need the assistance in my situation

20. Thankfully, I was able to secure my current position while still at MCO via a scholarship program. As such, I did not have to worry about a career search during the majority of school.
21. I felt like they did a good job. Kamen had use do a budget and CV. Michigan is small enough that it's easy to find work if you're willing to start with two part-time positions without benefits at first.
22. It is up to Ferris to give me an education, not find me a job. Finding a good job is what you put in, IMO [in my opinion].

Question 21 continued: Do you feel MCO or Ferris could have better prepared you for your career search?

c.**Unsure, please specify why: _____(14 selected unsure)

1. Didn't really help with how to find jobs. Was exposed through the help of the Optometry Student Government procuring corporately-sponsored dinners.
2. I feel MCO does a lot to connect students with ODs, but I feel many students don't understand the importance of networking and making career connections in securing positions post-graduation.
3. I think they did a good job getting our CV & cover letters into good shape. They may be able to do more education regarding available resources. However, it really comes down to personal motivation and networking.
4. My job was secured by my scholarship
5. I was very certain about what type of position I wanted, so I went through the last few years of school and residency with this in mind, which made it easier to start searching after I was out
6. Honestly, I don't remember what MCO did/didn't do for us regarding looking for a job!
7. I'm not sure
8. I went in planning on going into practice with my father, so I didn't pay much attention to career searching. I'm sure there is always room for improvement in any area!
9. You can only teach so much about business in school. It ultimately comes down to networking and hussling.
10. Not just the school at fault, ODs are not usually willing to help each other out. MCO's problem is that they should expand rotation sites to foster relationships to have more 4th years with job offers before they graduate.
11. After speaking with students from other schools, I feel our practice management courses are top-notch and the faculty is excellent. Practice management doesn't always cover all you need to know about a career search, but it certainly gives you a much better idea of what type of practice you'd be comfortable in.

12. Due to my residency I didn't look for a job until the end of my residency. I felt MCO helped me with the tools for getting a job. However my current job position in MN was found due to an email from Colleen.
13. Unsure because really didn't have to search for a position. Was hired at last rotation location.
14. Would have liked to be better prepared but not sure what Ferris could have done. Just have to get out in real work and figure out why works.

Question 22: Please share any additional thoughts, concerns, and/or advice regarding your job search experience.... (22 unedited open-text responses...)

1. It is indeed difficult to find a desirable position right now. There are openings for part-time, commercial O.D.'s scattered throughout the state but finding a full-time private practice position is nearly impossible. I was lucky enough to find a selling O.D. with a good practice, but I know that over half of my class was forced to work one day here, another here, etc. in less than ideal locations.
I think the job market is vastly oversold to entering students, and there are too many O.D. students in general. I sincerely hope graduating students have an easier time finding work than I did.
2. Open your mind and don't just go for the most money. Go for good souls and happy patients. If possible, ABSOLUTELY contact other docs and or significant staff members who are no longer employed to get an idea of why they left. Also, if a doc is unwilling to compromise over contract negotiations just walk away. If they aren't watching out for you then they never will. Also- extra curricular and community involvement go a long way in your impression- shows how willing you are to put yourself out there in your new community and that you have skills to build and grow the practice.
3. The majority of the time it truly is not what you know but who you know.
4. Continue searching and applying for positions if you are unhappy with your current position. I had to continue interviewing for 2 years after my first position to finally have a job offer that was competitive in salary, benefits and other priorities before leaving a practice I was miserable at. Now I actually enjoy optometry at the office I work at, but I was miserable for 2 years at my first location. I was beginning to really regret going into optometry because of the fast-paced, greedy corporations out there and the retail hours. Now it is a much better, fullfilling career at my current corporate optical. MCO did a poor job in portraying the evolution of optometry now which is fast-paced, money hungry corporations that do not understand optometry is more medical these days and do not provide you with adequate chair time, technicians and equipment to handle medical cases and the disrespect we receive from these opticals and patients and co-workers. That is unless one is lucky enough to work at a VA. Owning your

own practice isn't as rosy as MCO makes it out to be either due to the tremendous financial responsibility of owning one's own practice and the find all burden of being able to pay off student loans. If you are looking for more respect in the medical field then optometry is not right for you unless you happen to end up at a VA

5. Start as early as possible, face to face contact/ interviews are much better than the internet, your first position will probably not be where you finish your career, learn all you can at your first position, treat your patients like your family, if you do, they will follow you to any practice, and that is what will support you in the long run.
6. I thought I knew exactly what I wanted in a position before graduating. It has been an interesting experience learning more about where and how I want to practice. My advice is to be open to locations outside of "ideal" and to be open to all modes of practices. You might be surprised at the opportunities available if you keep an open mind.
7. I was very lucky but I also worked very hard in school and during my rotations & residency. I paid attention to the movement of doctors in Grand Rapids. I attended WMOA meeting and was able to get a couple leads that way. I actually had a few back-up plans in place. If you don't want to work commercial then you need a residency and you need a plan before you graduate.
8. It will take effort and time, in most cases, to be in your dream job/location. Be patient and don't be "ashamed" to work in commercial. It's not where but HOW you practice. When I was at Wal-Mart I referred and connected with area ophthalmologists and they, in turn, referred contact patients to me. You have to earn respect in life and that can happen anywhere if you work hard and ethically!
9. Be patient, and wait for the position that suits you best, not the most convenient position. It's hard to leave something that's comfortable to pursue your dream. It's easier to start searching for your dream position at the beginning instead of settling for whatever comes along.
10. Always keep your eyes and ears open, and talk to reps. Try to do your externships in locations near your ideal location, and make as many business connections as possible at that time. Go to local society meetings.
11. Only 3857 days until retirement!
12. Get to know as many people as you can. It is all about who you know not even how qualified you are.
13. Stay in contact or make connections with doctors from the area you would like to practice. They are always a handy source for referrals or advice and you never know when they might decide it is time to add a partner.
14. I still do not have full time work... I have been very picky, because my ideal is private practice, and GR is very saturated.

15. MCO needs to be a lot more open in allowing students to set up their own rotations... By opening up a rotation c a practice/location he or she would like to work is the best way to secure future employment....
16. Technically, my first "position" was the residency, so I filled out this survey for my first position after that. However, I did work at several places at once, which were NOT ideal, but helped gain experience and money until I found a long-term/stable job. I think this is fairly typical of new grads, and if anything, I wish I would have known that more than likely, you will not be working at your "dream career" immediately out of school. I definitely think the residency helped in getting jobs, however.
Good luck with your survey! :-)
17. Try to maintain all professional relationships with colleagues, you never know which one may offer you a job someday.
18. Do your research on the company or doctor so you know what your getting yourself into!
19. Networking can go a long way.
I selected the area where I wanted to live, and sent a cover letter with my CV to every practice in the area. I was very blessed to have a couple practices contact me, and one of them worked out. However, the job market for optometry in Michigan was much less robust that I expected.
Good luck!
20. Start early. Nothing is ever perfect but find something where you feel you are practicing everything you've been taught.
21. My main concern is finding employment in the Lansing/GR area after I separate from the USAF. Being out-of-state, I will not have the contacts/networks formed that many of my peer group will have. I feel this places me at a large disadvantage, not only during the hiring process, but also in the job/position search process.
22. Maybe a little more help interpreting contracts for employment. Maybe more budgeting help for debt management. Longer AOA dues deferment. Learning more about trouble shooting with equipment problems, changing slit lamp bulbs on older models.