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Blake G. Simmons
Pacific University

Daniel C. Howells
Pacific University

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Mari Ward

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Subject Categories

Optometry

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START BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE!

(Step by Step in Finding a Job before You Graduate)

By

BLAKE G. SIMMONS

DANIEL C. HOWELLS

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the
College of Optometry
Pacific University
Forest Grove, Oregon
for the degree of
Doctor of Optometry
May 2006

Advisor(s):

MARI WARD, OD

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DANIEL C. HOWELLS

Mari Ward

MARI WARD, OD

Biographies

Blake G. Simmons graduated from Ricks College with an associate degree in Pre-Optometry. While enrolled at Brigham Young University Blake received a research grant to study the molecular mechanisms of neuronal communication. He then completed a Bachelor of Science degree in Visual Science at Pacific University. His professional career goal, upon completion of a residency in ocular disease, is to join a multidisciplinary eye care practice.

Daniel C. Howells attended the University of Utah for three and a half years of his undergraduate work. He received a B.S. in Visual Science from Pacific University while concurrently enrolled in Pacific's Optometry Program. He plans to pursue a residency, specializing in cornea and contact lens. With a strong interest in small business, he hopes to settle in a private group practice.

Abstract

Great Jobs are taken before they are advertised! This thesis will help optometry students advertise themselves and aid in finding a job upon graduation. Students must start now! Many optometrists in varying practice modalities were questioned and interviewed to create this practical guide. This thesis contains suggestions and resources to prepare students for their professional career.

Key Words: Employment, Job, Salary, Optometry, Plan, Career, Interview, Networking, Optometry Statistics.

Acknowledgments

We would like to sincerely thank Mari Ward, OD for guiding us in the construction of this thesis project. We would also like to express our appreciation to Sharise Simmons and Rachael Howells in the time commitment they spent in order for us to fulfill this project. We have had the opportunity to visit many different doctors and practice modalities throughout the country and sincerely appreciate their time and knowledge they have given us.

Start Before It Is Too Late!

(Step by Step in Finding a Job before You Graduate)

Key Points!

- ❖ **Great Jobs are taken before they are advertised!**
 - **They are not always advertised at the school job fare**
- ❖ **This booklet will help you advertise yourself.**
- ❖ **Finding a job is neither quick nor simple. Start now!**
- ❖ **If you wait till your fourth year, you may find a job but with less desirable pay and in the wrong location.**
- ❖ **Take your career into your own hands and do something!**
- ❖ **Find the job of your dreams!**
- ❖ **Doctors are much more open talking to a 1st or 2nd year student because they do not feel threatened in their practice.**

These following steps I-VII are suggestions and resources in guiding your search for your professional career.

I. How to determine where you want to live?

A. Make a list of what is important to you

- 1. State, Cities, Family, climate, etc....**
- 2. Realize, most places worth living are saturated with optometrists**

B. Other things to look for in the city of your choices (View Appendix 1)

- 1. Schools**
- 2. Market stability**
- 3. Economy**
- 4. City Population**
- 5. Optometrist ratio per capita**

II. Finding Contacts/ Optometrists (View Appendix 2)

- A. How to find the names of local Doctors**
- B. Become a member of your state association**
 - 1. State associations have names and numbers for all of there Optometrists
- C. Contact Lens reps.**
- D. Glass frame reps.**
- E. Drug reps.**
- F. These reps will tell you the truth about the Optometrists**
 - 1. They will tell you what they see at the practices
 - 2. Other Optometrists might be hesitant in telling detail about their colleges
- G. Optometrists, Ophthalmologists, and other health care professionals**
- H. Ask everybody**

III. How to properly contact these individuals

- A. Contacts that are set up in advance are more valuable and you look more professional**
- B. Personalized mass mailer**
 - 1. Microsoft merge software from Microsoft Excel to Word works great!
- C. Telephone**
- D. Postcard questionnaire**

IV. What to do in Interviews/Meeting the doctor

A. Every interview will depend on if you are a first or a fourth year student

B. Conversations will vary: Some doctors will make a job proposition and others will not talk about a job

C. Never make promises you won't keep

D. Don't sign your life away too early

E. Primary visits

1. Key points

- a) You are dating.
- b) Talk and listen!
- c) Look at the place
- d) Hear what they want to say
- e) Listen to opportunities
- f) Take them out to lunch.
- g) Get to know the staff!
- h) Give a business card or send it with the Thank You card.

2. Build relationships of trust:

- a) Ask interesting personal information.
- b) Talk about your families, hobbies, etc...
- c) You are not asking for a job, this is your first contact.
- d) Get to know the Optometrist.
- e) Ask yourself could you see yourself working with this doctor for years?

3. Questions you should ask about the practice?

- a) How does the doctor like the area?
- b) How is managed care and insurance?
- c) What is the patient's stability structure?
- d) Is the city growing?
- e) Where do you do your lab work?
- f) How do you run your practice? Is it computerized or paper?
- g) How did you end up here?
- h) Do not ask prices or salaries

4. Things to do after Primary visits

a) Write everything about the visit.

(1) Names!!!

(2) Ideas

(3) Everything

(4) This will be especially important for your next visits

b) Send your Thank You card!

c) Stay in touch with the optometrists

d) Pro / Con of each office

(1) You may have a lot of pro's but maybe a large con

(2) What is important to you?

F. Secondary Visits (After you know the optometrist. Job talk has come up. Secondary visits are preferably saved for third/Fourth year.)

1. What they would have done different in their practice?

2. What do you see in your future practice? Where would you fit into their practice?

3. Give encouraging comments!

a) I can see myself living here.

4. What is a good deal?

a) He is not going to want to pay more than you are worth and you want to make more than you are worth.

5. What would the game plan be if approaching an agreement?

a) A good honest doctor will let you review all of their financial information

(1) Make sure some one takes a look at it and analyzes the information

b) Prepare by educating yourself so when they talk

numbers you can feel confident you are getting a good deal.

c) Possibly sign a contract during fourth year, pending passing boards (be weary of signing contracts too soon)

6. Things to do after Secondary visits

a) Write everything about the visit.

(1) Names!!!

(2) Ideas

(3) Everything

b) Send your Thank You card!

c) Stay in touch with the optometrists

d) Pro / Con of each office

e) What is important to you?

V. Analyzing your final options

A. Business and Law (View Appendix 3)

B. What are the proposals

C. Re-evaluate Pro/Cons

D. Contracts (Some questions to find out and think about)

1. Who writes the contract? (this can vary)
 - a) The doctor or a lawyer
2. When do you need a contract?
3. Don't be too eager to sign a contract!!!
 - a) Make sure your lawyer looks it over or at least looks over the parts that you may not understand completely
 - b) Watch out for "the small print"
 - c) Don't hesitate to talk to doctors in the area about your future employer
4. Secure the job with a four to eight week grace period. During this period either of you can void the contract. After the grace period the contract is valid.

E. Know what you are worth

1. There is a wide variety of practice modalities. With this there is a wide range of income. Know your demographics and the going rate for optometry in your area.
 - a) Reference Study #1
2. How are you earning your money? (There are many ways, here are a few that you need to consider)
 - a) Is it Salary? (know the average salaries)
 - (1) Website
 - (a) Review of Optometry (www.revoptom.com)
 - (i) Search: Optometric Income
 - b) Is it a percentage of exam fees?
 - (1) *This may be good if you are busy but not if you are slow*
 - c) Partnership practice, how do you make your money?
 - (1) *What is the split?*
 - d) Pro/Cons of salaries verses percentages of exams?
 - (1) *Each situation will be different. You must evaluate and make your personal decision.*

F. Lawyers

1. Make sure you have a lawyer to read your contract. Do not let someone take advantage of you.
2. What kind of lawyer do you need?
3. Don't be afraid to get outside help reading a contract!

G. CPA

1. Financial information may be taken to a CPA to evaluate worth of practice. Make sure you get all their financial information.

VI. How to make your transition into a job

A. Sign the contracts

B. Start Working

C. Four to eight week grace trial period

D. Educate yourself with taxes and any business ventures you may be involved with

VII. Study/Appendices

A. Study 1: 2004 questionnaire on expected income after graduation, after 5 years, after 15 years.

B. Study 2: By Keisuke Takahashi

C. Appendix 1: City Statistical Information

D. Appendix 2: How to find OD's

E. Appendix 3: Business and Law

F. Appendix 4: Optometric Journals and Web Links

G. Appendix 5: Where Will You Be?

H. Appendix 6: Realistically what is your expected starting salary after graduation?

I. Appendix 7: Realistically what is your expected salary after 5 years?

J. Appendix 8: Realistically what is your expected salary after 15 years?

K. Appendix 9: Comparing appendices 5-8

Study 1

By Daniel Howells and Blake Simmons
Students at Pacific University

Our survey consisted of 240 Pacific University Optometry students from the first, second, and third year classes. We conducted this poll to validate our suspicion that students in general are over estimate their future income and preferred practice modality.

Questions asked include:

- Do you have a job lined up when you graduate?
- If not, realistically when do you plan on contacting future employers?
- What mode of practice are you planning on when you graduate
- What mode of practice are you planning on ending up in after 15 years of practice?
- Realistically what is your expected salary after graduation? after 5 years? and after 15 years?

Our results of the survey closely followed our predictions. First year students where the most optimistic, of our three groups. The majority planned to start contacting future employers in their third year. Second and third year students planned on contacting during their fourth year. We believe that starting earlier will help student find more desirable jobs. This data shows that students in general are not starting as early as we had hoped.

We where impressed to find some reasonable projections of income by the students. **(View Table One)**

Although our prediction where validated in many of the results, there were a few surprises. We found that a couple of students where “outliers” and didn’t truthfully respond to the questionnaire. Even with these few outliers we feel our data is valid and a wonderful representation of the classes predictions. We were impressed to find that 42 students had jobs lined up already, but we assume a majority are in the military or have a close relative holding a position for them.

In our own research we found the published literature to vary in estimations. Our projections of a realistic salary come from journals, the US Census Bureau, and our many interviews with local optometrists. We have found the published numbers to be slightly over simplified. The statistical data published usually is give by a simple average income. This does not take into account the local region or years in practice. In our research we have found current students will face much larger amounts of debt and less desirable modalities. With this in mind, students must start preparing for the future now to ensure they obtain the job of their dreams.

For more statistical data refer to **(Appendix 5-8)**

What You Think You Will Be Making

1st, 2nd, and 3rd year Optometry students polled
(all three years of data combined)

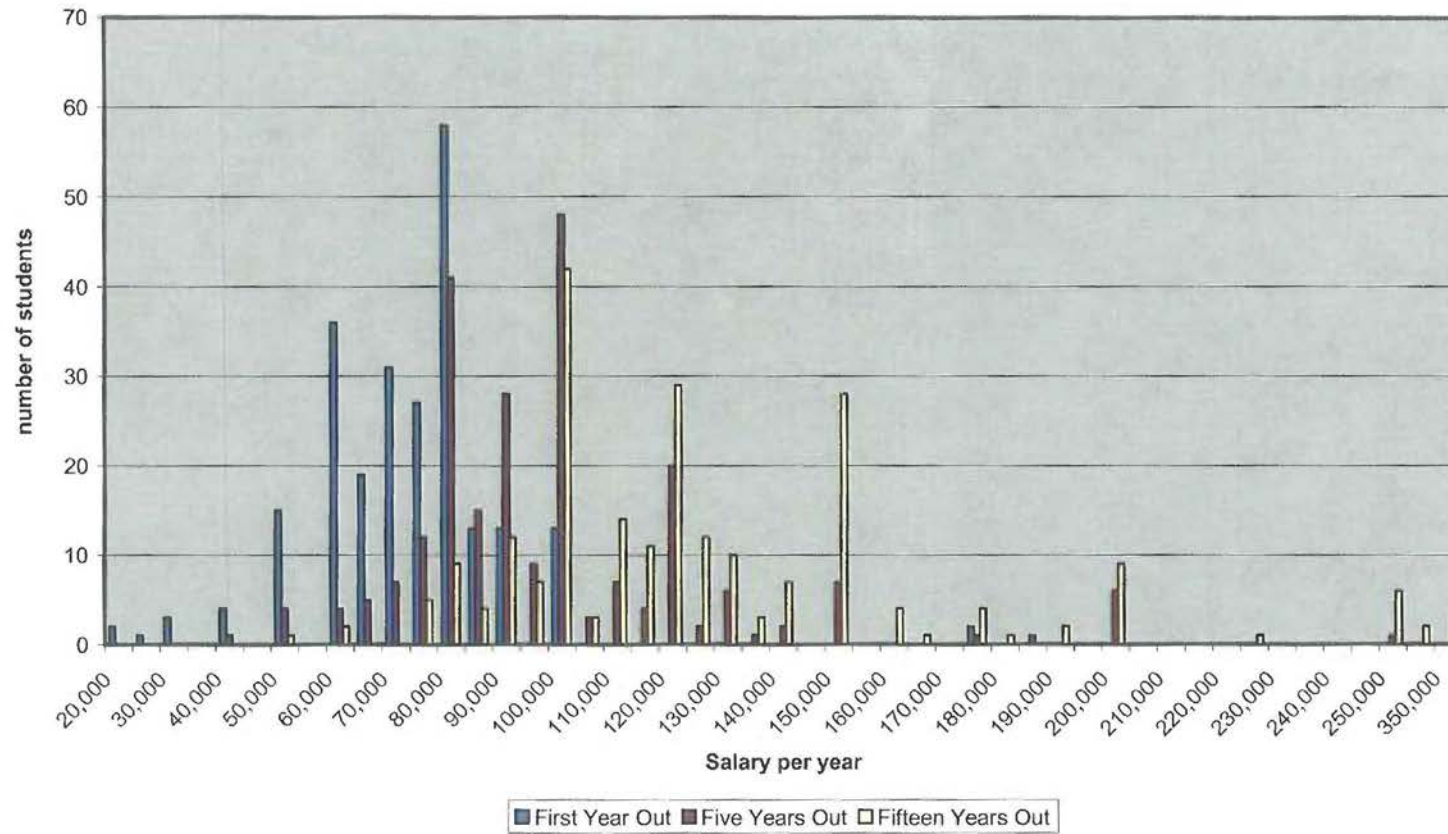


Table One

Study 2

How Much Money Do First Year Optometry Students Expect to Make Following Graduation?

By Keisuke Takahashi, Japanese Optometrist and Masters Candidate

(with editing by the Webmaster)

This is an interesting study, because it was done by the 1st year optometry students and are now the 3rd year students we polled. The results of this study correlate well with our finding and is an interesting article to read. This study can be found at:

http://www.opt.pacificu.edu/test/journal/Articles/Takahashi_Income/Income.html

Appendix 1

City Statistical Information

- Statistical Data:
 - www.city-data.com
 - Population, income, demographics, (Crime Rate), climate, Hospitals, airports, local schools, and local TV and Radio stations
 - [US Chamber of Commerce](#)
 - <http://www.chamberofcommerce.com/>
 - Not every city has a chamber of commerce, pick the city nearest yours and it should have a link for you

Appendix 2

How to find OD's

- Optometrists in Your State
 - Yellow Pages online
 - Switchboard (<http://www.switchboard.com>)
 - The most comprehensive and updated listings
 - There are many resources online
 - Blue Book of Optometrists
 - Can be found at libraries or can buy online
 - Directory of American Academy of Optometry (<http://www.aaopt.org/membersearch/>)
 - Geographic Directory of Academy Fellows
 - Become a member of a state association
 - State Optometric Association Contact Information (http://www.optometry.org/state_board.cfm)
 - State associations have names and numbers for all of there Optometrists
- How to find Reps
 - Glass Frame Reps.
 - Optical Yellow Pages (<http://www.amazon.com>)
 - Directory to Suppliers, Manufacturers & Import Firms
 - Publisher: Jobson Publishing Corp
 - Can be found at libraries or can buy online
 - Contact Lens Reps.
 - TQ (Tyler's Quarterly Soft Contact Lens Parameter Guide) (<http://www.opticalinternet.com/tq/index.htm>)
 - Back index is a list of major contact lens companies and contact information
 - Drug Reps.
 - Example:
 - Alcon
 - 1 (800) 757-9195
 - Allergan
 - 1 (800) 669-6890

Appendix 3

Business and Law

The business and law section of this thesis is brief, but very important. This topic is unique to each state and country, thus we are unable to cover business and law adequately.

- Business
 - State Business Programs
(<http://www.business.gov/busadv/maincat.cfm?catid=306>)
- Contracts
 - Finding a lawyer
 - http://www.businesslaw.gov/dsp_legalcontent.cfm?legalid=20984
- Reference:
 - Classe G. John, Thal S. Lawrence, Kamen D. Roger, Rounds S. Ronald. *Business Aspects of Optometry*. Butterworth-Heinemann: 2nd edition, 2003
 - Practice Options, Business organizations, Insurance, starting a practice, Financial Aspects of a practice.
- **State Laws**
 - State Board Requirements
(http://www.optometry.org/state_requirements.cfm)
 - This tells what states have Law Exams
 - American Optometric Association (you need your ID # and Password to access)
(<http://www.aoanet.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?site=AOAstage&WebCode=PrescAuth>)
 - These tell what states can treat with what drugs
 - Glaucoma Treatment
(<http://www.aoanet.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?site=AOAstage&WebCode=PrescGlaucoma>)
 - Oral Medications
(<http://www.aoanet.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?site=AOAstage&WebCode=PrescOrals>)
 - Summary Chart
(<http://www.aoanet.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?site=AOAstage&WebCode=PrescChart>)
 - What State allow you to prescribe orals, topicals, steroids, etc...
 - Malpractice Fact Sheet
(<http://www.aoanet.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?site=AOAstage&WebCode=PrescMalpractice>)

Appendix 4

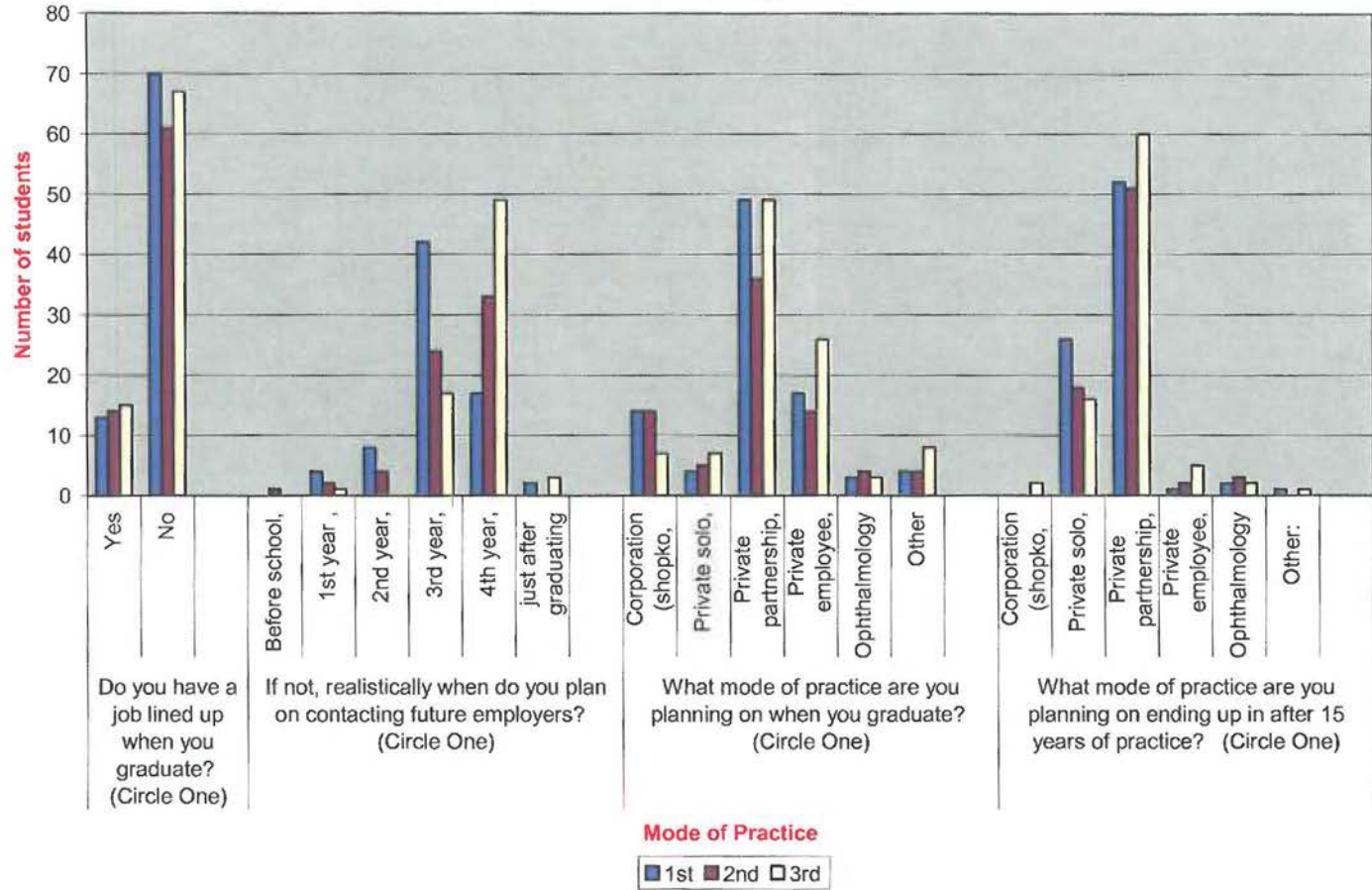
Optometric Journals and Web Links

Search for these Journals on library websites or Google

- [Acta Ophthalmol Scand. List of Issues](#)
- [Archives of Ophthalmology](#)
- [British Journal of Ophthalmology](#)
- [CLAO](#)
- [Cornea](#)
- [Current Eye Research](#)
- [Current Opinion in Ophthalmology](#)
- [Experimental Eye Research](#)
- [Eye and Contact Lens](#)
- [Eye](#)
- [Graefe's Archive of Clinical and Experimental Ophthalmology](#)
- [International Contact Lens Clinic - List of Issues](#)
- [International Ophthalmology Clinics](#)
- [Investigative Ophthalmology](#)
- [Journal of Glaucoma](#)
- [Journal of Ocular Pharmacology](#)
- [Lancet](#)
- [Molecular Vision](#)
- [Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics](#)
- [Ophthalmic Research](#)
- [Ophthalmologica](#)
- [Optometric Management](#)
- [Optometry Library #2](#)
- [Optometry Library Electronic Journals in Vision Science](#)
- [Optometry Library](#)
- [Optometry Today - Main Page](#)
- [Progress in Retinal and Eye Research - List of Issues](#)
- [Review of Ophthalmology](#)
- [Review of Optometry](#)
- [Survey of Ophthalmology](#)
- [Transactions of the American Ophthalmology Society](#)
- [Visual Neuroscience](#)

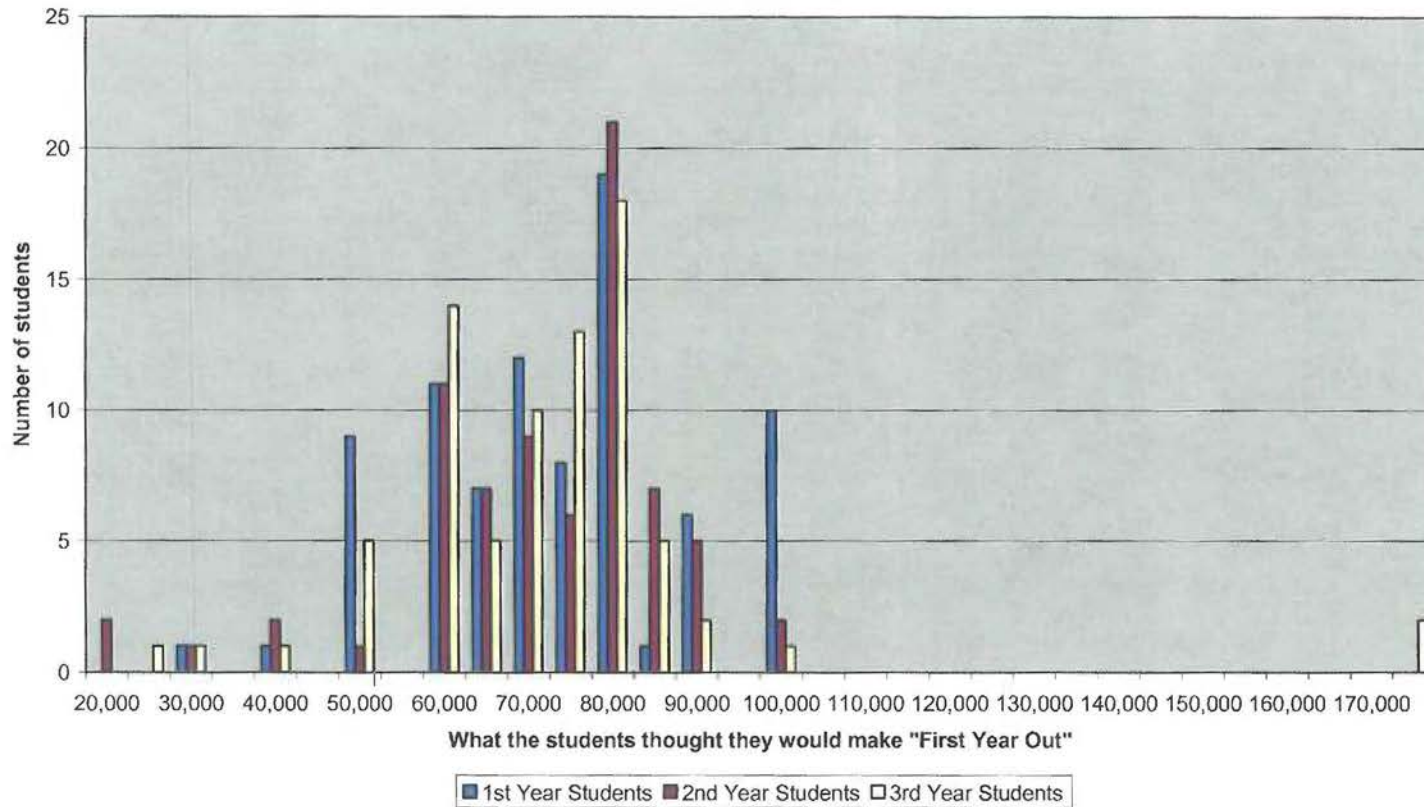
- [Links to Optometry and Ophthalmology Sites](#)

Where Will You Be ?



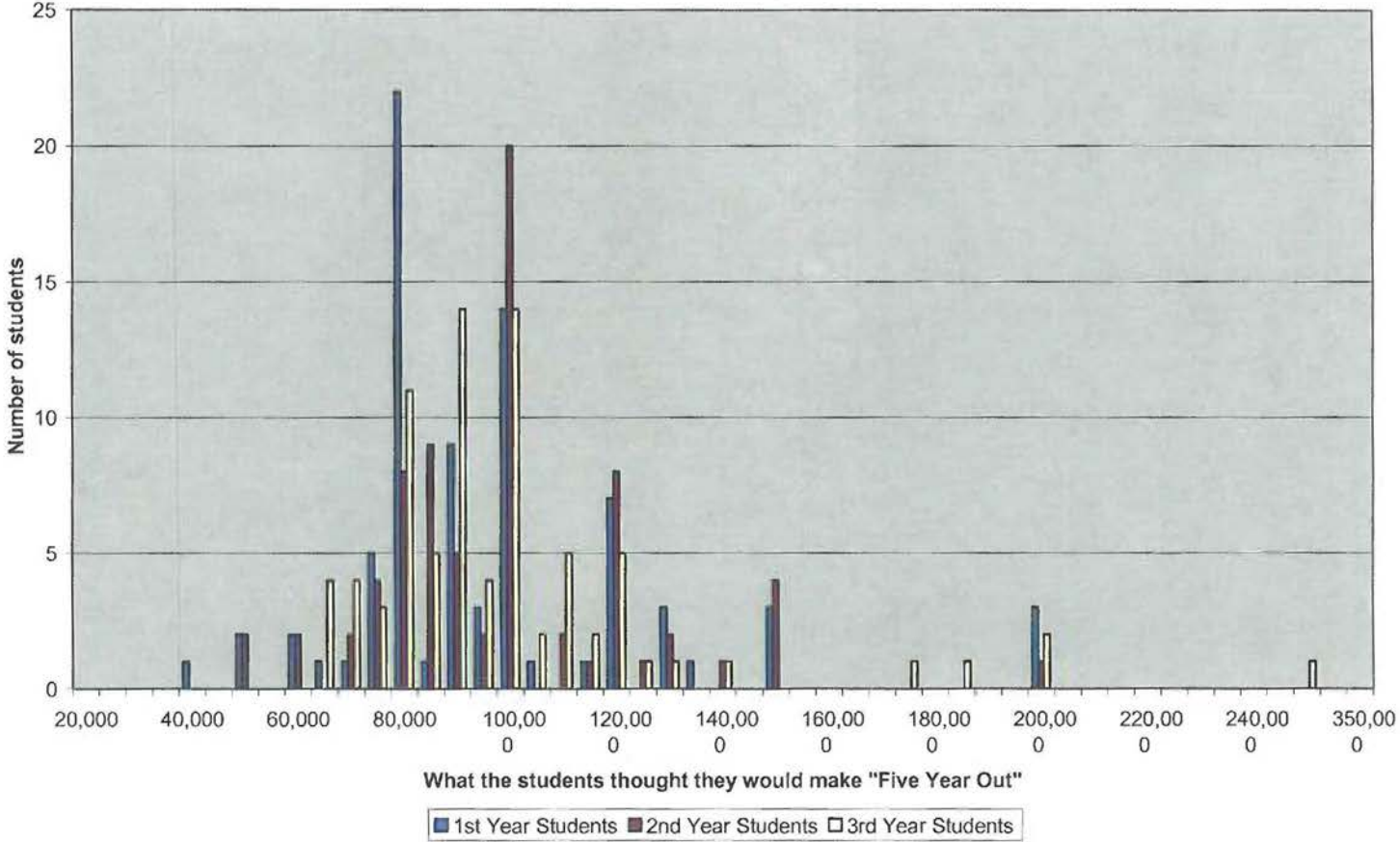
Appendix 5

Realistically what is your expected starting salary after graduation?
(Assume full time)



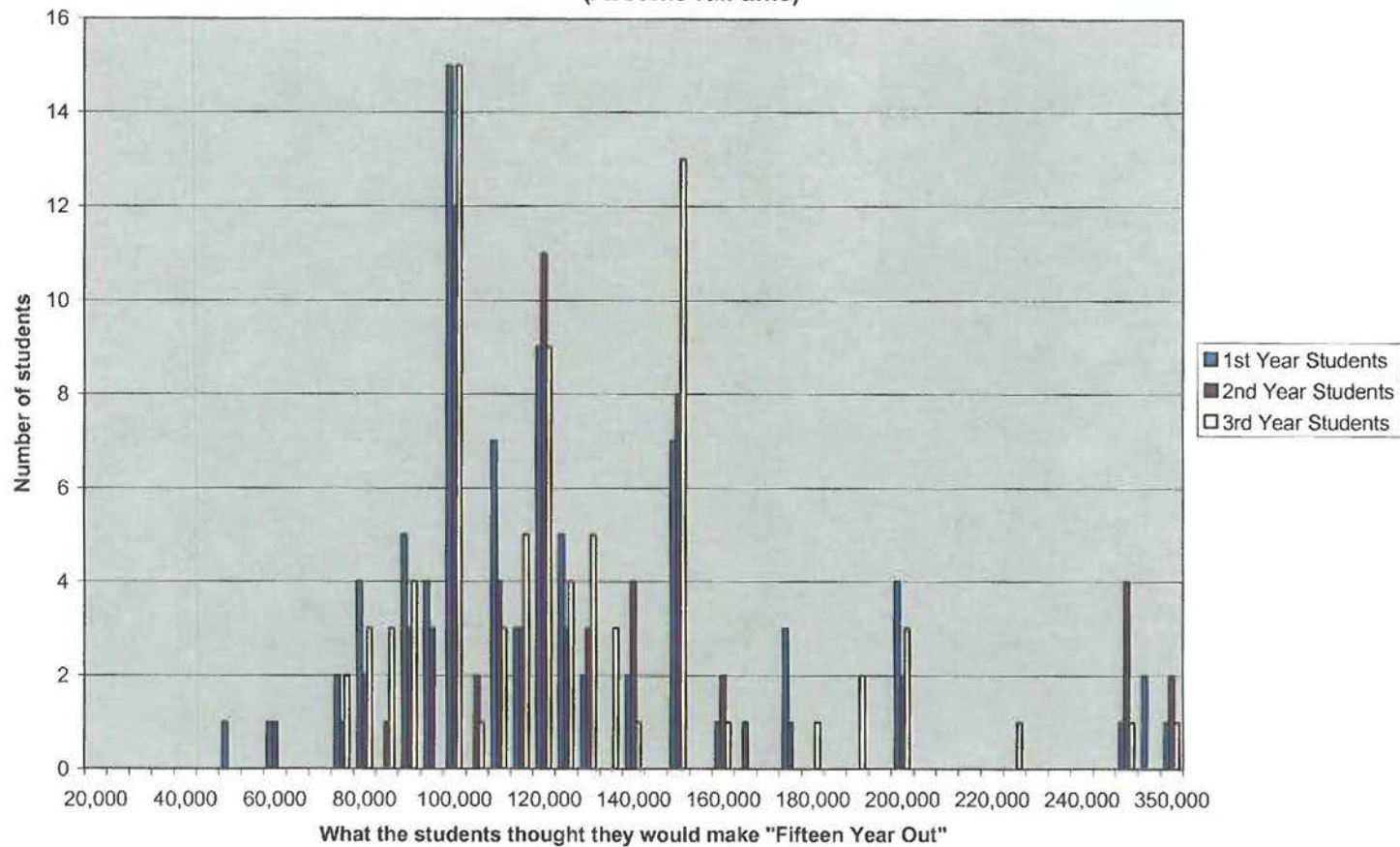
Appendix 6

Realistically what is your expected salary after 5 years?
 (Assume full time)



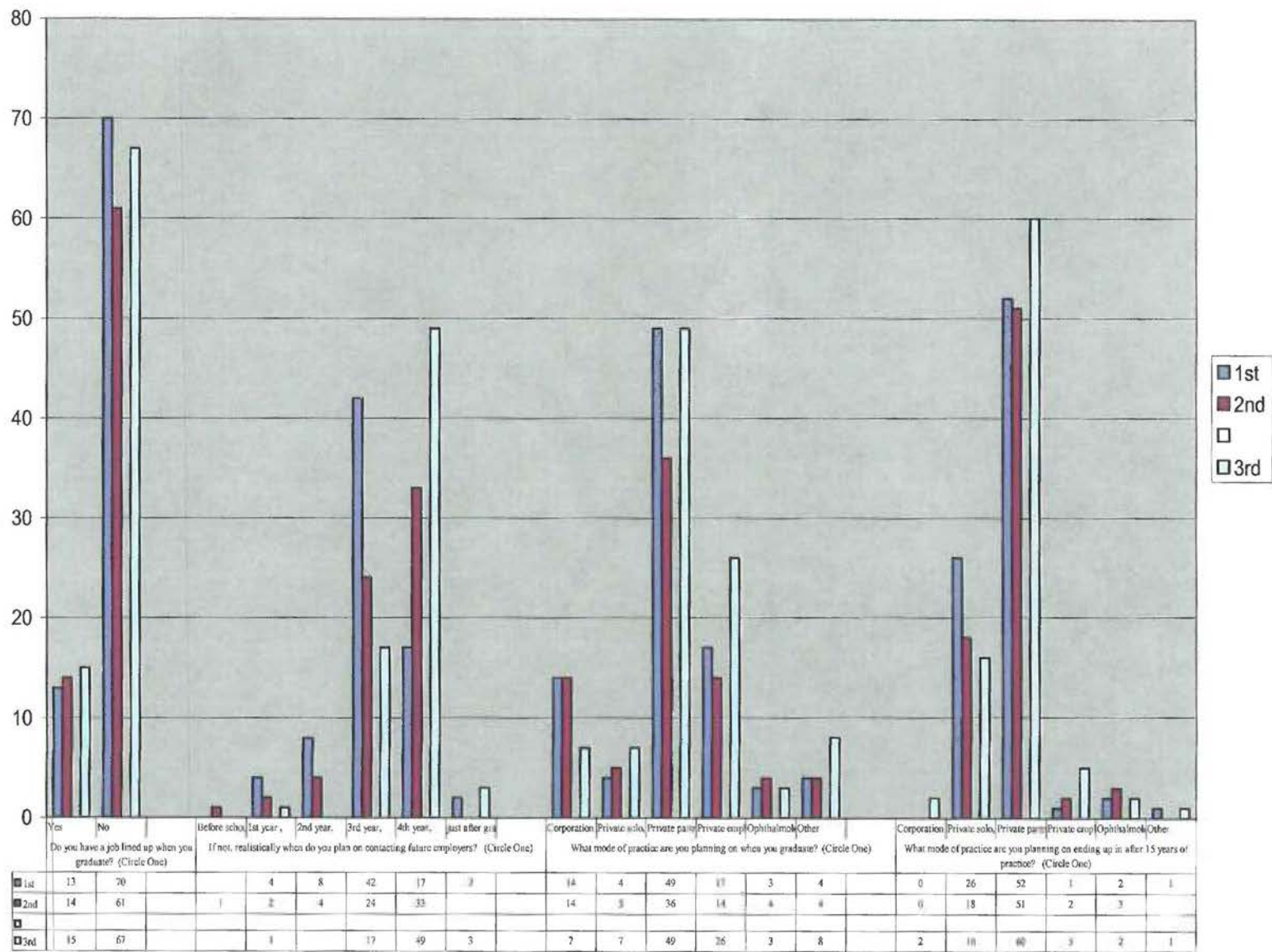
Appendix 7

Realistically what is your expected salary after 15 years?
 (Assume full time)



Appendix 8

Appendix 9



Our Thesis Process from Start to Finish

Dan and Blake began discussing their thesis idea during their first semester of optometry school. Their idea really took off in November of 2002 when they started talking about how they wanted to end up in a group practice. They had a common problem. They did not know any doctors of optometry and were not sure where they wanted to end up. They started to talk to 3rd and 4th year optometry students about how they were researching their future professional careers. Blake and Dan were astonished to find out that the majority had not begun their research. Most students were planning to contact optometrists during their fourth year or just following graduation. They spoke with so many students that were not finding the jobs of their dreams. The fourth year students were graduating with large student loans and had to take the jobs that were available. Dan and Blake wanted to avoid this predicament.

Dan and Blake came up with their idea, that if students started earlier they may be able to practice in their desired modality. Thus they wanted to help 1st and 2nd year students begin early enough to achieve their goals following graduation. Their journey started with researching places they wanted to live. This included everything from pulling out the map to making lists of pros and cons of desired areas. Then they brainstormed on how they would make contacts with the optometrists in the cities of their interest. They mainly researched private practices and compiled a list of hundreds of optometrists. These contacts consisted of a large, but focused, multi-state area.

They wrote a personalized letter and merged it with their list in Microsoft excel. The letter generated was sent to over three hundred optometrists in the top areas of interest. Letting the responses of those letters further guide their search they contacted those individuals that responded to their first letter. These responses ranged from Texas, Colorado, Oregon, and Utah. They were pleased with the outcome of their efforts. They received on average 5 responses for every 100 letters they sent. Although this might seem like a small pay off, the contacts establish where very promising. They were not looking for hundreds of jobs, they only needed one. The responses varied from positive to not so positive, but overall they were able to make several very strong contacts.

Through these contacts they began the next phase of their research by planning trips to the various cities. Blake was interested in Colorado and Dan in Utah, after setting dates and appointments with the doctors they made their trips. Later that year they took a trip and visited many doctors from Portland Oregon down to the border of California. Each day they would have one or two appointments. Between appointments they would look in a phone book and call doctors in the area. They were surprised at the number of doctors that were happy with them dropping by. They may not have had a job opening, but they may in the future or know someone that is hiring. Although they found a varied response with OD's discouraging them to encouraging them, they persisted. For example: one optometrist told Blake that what he was doing was pretty much a waste of time because the OD had no idea where he would be in 3-4 years and start closer to graduation. On the other hand, most doctors complimented them on their initiative and were impressed with their efforts. These were the doctors they were looking for. These were the doctors that were planning ahead and were preparing their practice for the future.

Now with their thesis idea validated, they concluded that their project was valid and would benefit themselves and other students with their project. They contacted Dr. Ward to be their advisor and started putting the thesis together. Their goal was to make a quick reference guide for optometry students to research different practice modalities and begin early within their 1st year. This guide would give suggestions from choosing their place to live to how to contact doctors and secure a job.

To finalize their thesis they felt a questionnaire to the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd year students at the college of optometry would confirm their thesis that few students begin early enough. **(View Study 1)**

Blake and Dan have benefited tremendously following the guidelines presented in this thesis. With their strong contacts they have been able to establish relationships with doctors in their future communities. Several good employment opportunities have been established.