CAOS • ACÉO

Canadian Association of Optometry Students

Association canadienne des étudiants en optométrie

CAOS Survey Report 2018 Supplement

Topic: Jan 2018 UW Graduate Survey

Prepared by: Abraham Yuen BSc, OD

January 2018

CLASS OF 2017 SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- 57% of graduates work in a metropolitan for their primary practice location
- 80% of graduates work in 2-4 practice locations
- 57% of graduates work weeknights and 22% work on Sundays
- Family, Income Potential and Significant Others were the top three influences to practice location
- The average student debt incurred was $75 457 CAD
- The average gross income per month is $6170, but about half in Greater Toronto Area
- The top area of special interest is “Cornea & Contact Lenses”

PURPOSE

This survey was conducted to gather preliminary data on the optometric workforce in Canada amongst new graduates. It is a follow-up to a similar survey conducted by the Canadian Association of Optometry Students (CAOS) at the beginning of January 2018 that polled Canadian optometry students across Canada and US on financial burden, how and where they want to practice and their special areas of interest. The purpose was to provide a comparison between student perception versus a graduate’s perception of these issues in order to help our associations and regulators prepare for the future of the profession.

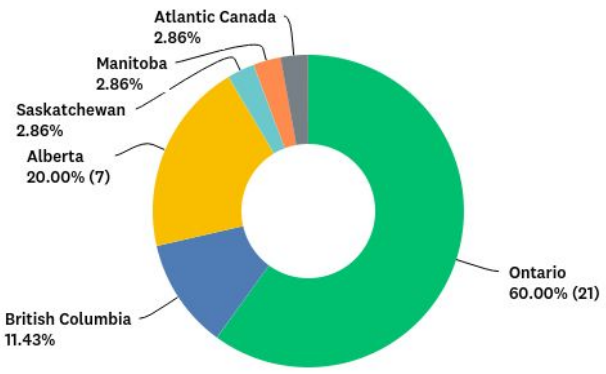
METHODS

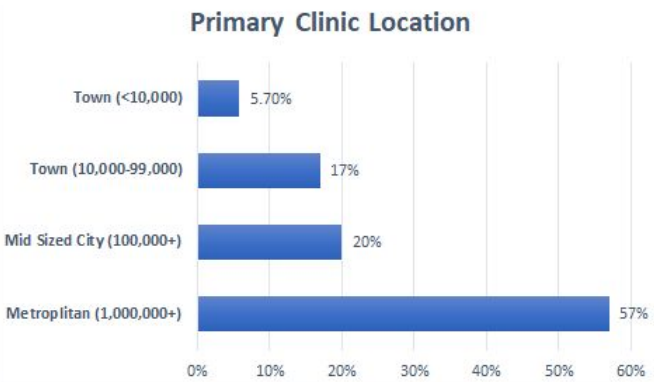
A survey of 14 questions hosted via SurveyMonkey was sent to the Class of 2017 and was open for a period of two weeks at the end of January 2018. Due to time constraint and lack of method of communication to reach the graduates from other schools, all respondents were from the University of Waterloo (Q1). A total of thirty-five (n=35) respondents participated in the survey. The University of Waterloo class of 2017 comprised of 93 graduates, equating to 37.6% response rate.

ANALYSIS: DEMOGRAPHICS

In **Question 2** (right), respondents were asked to identify the province or territory they are working in. Due to the sample size, only 6 provinces are represented in the survey. 60% of respondents were from Ontario, followed by Alberta and British Columbia as the top responses. While this is the province that the graduate is practicing in, it may not be their province of origin. Due to survey limitations, it may be being the scope of our discussion to analyze their reasons for moving.

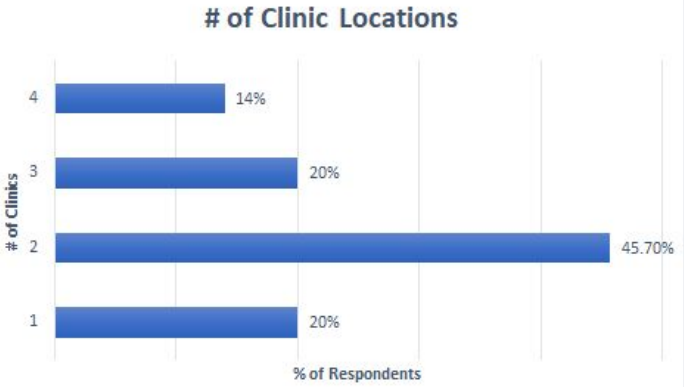
Q2 What province or territory are you practising in?





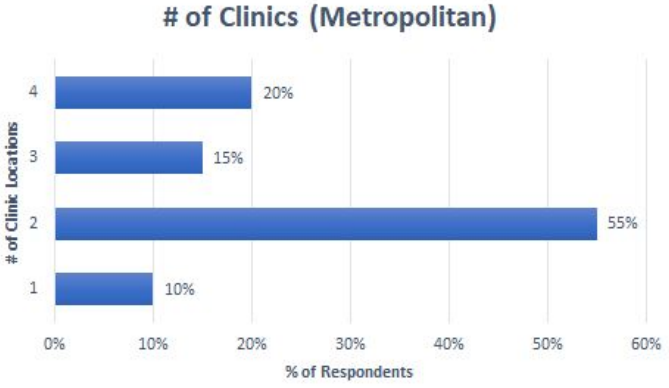
In **Question 3**, survey takers were asked to identify the city/town of their primary practice. This was then grouped in the analysis by population size: Metropolitan (1,000,000 or more), Mid-Sized City (100,000- 999,000), Town (10,000- 99,000) and Town (<10,000). Any responses of a suburban community fell under the Metropolitan category despite its population size (ie. Markham, ON) The Metropolitan areas identified in this survey include: Greater Toronto, Greater Vancouver, Edmonton, Calgary and Ottawa, all of which exceed a population of 1,000,000. In the survey, 57% (n=20) of respondents were from a metropolitan area.

The respondent subsequently identified the city/town of their secondary location in **Question 4,** if they practice at more than one location. The responses were grouped into the same category yet again. Only 57% (n=20) of the total 25 respondents responded with a secondary location.



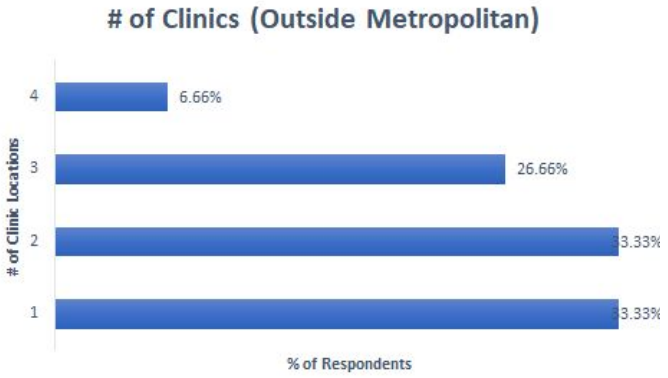
WORK SITUATION

Next, graduates were asked (**Question 5**) how many different clinics they are currently working in. 20% indicated working at 1 location, while 46% worked at 2 locations. 20% worked at 3 locations while 14% worked at 4 locations. This is in line with the student perception polled by CAOS, where 85% of students expected to work in 2 or more clinics, compared to 80% of graduates, who are working at 2 or more clinics in their first year. However, only 5/232 or 2.2% of students indicated that they wanted to work in 4 locations, while 14% of graduates are currently working in 4 clinics during their work week. This discrepancy may indicate the higher prevalence of part-time positions, especially in metropolitan areas.

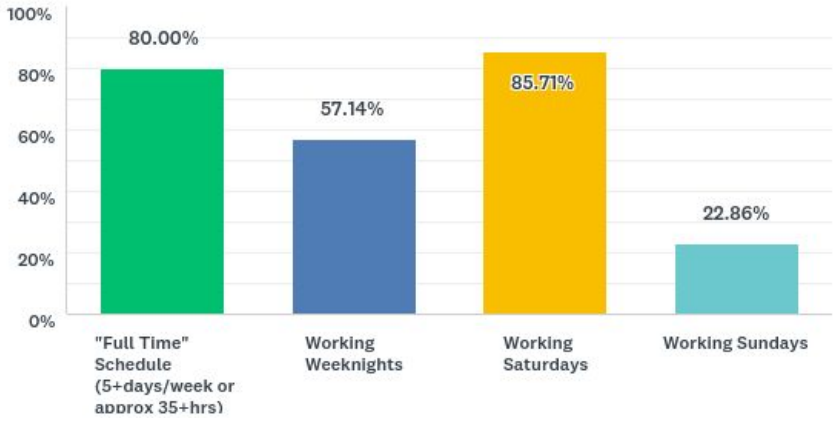


Subsequently, the data was extracted and divided into two sub-population groups: those

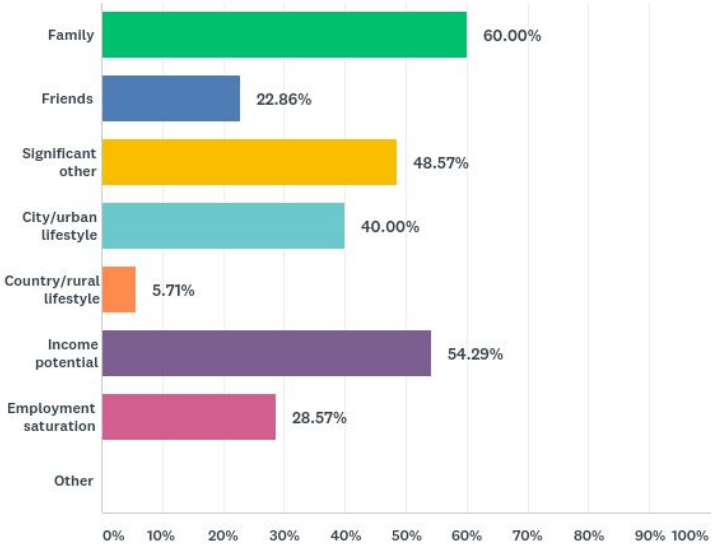
who identified their clinic in a metropolitan area (n=20), which we classified as 1,000,000+ in population versus a non-metropolitan area (n=15). Of the respondents in a metropolitan area, 90% work in 2 or more clinics with 35% of respondents having to work 3 or more locations. In comparison to those working outside metropolitan areas, 33% of respondents worked only 1 location, versus 10% in a metropolitan area. This may be that metropolitan areas are likely more competitive and saturated, offering only part-time positions. Clinics outside the big cities may be able to hire an associate for more days of the week or “full-time thus reducing need to work at multiple clinics.



In **Question 8,** respondents were asked to select all the options that apply to their current work arrangement(s). 80% of graduates indicated that they were able to work an equivalent of full-time schedule, making up 5 or more days a week of work OR approximately 35 hours or more. 86% of graduates have to work Saturdays, which is normal for optometry, as it is usually the busiest day of the week. However, 57% indicated working weeknights as part of their schedule and 23% indicated having to work Sundays as well. This may be an increasing trend amongst new grads as these are highly desirable appointment times for the working population and families. How this will change in the future remains to be seen, as graduates begin a family of their own and requiring weeknights and weekends to take care of family.

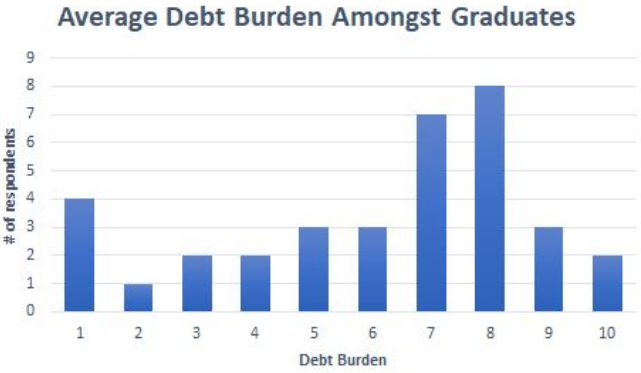


In **Question 12**, respondents were asked what reasons most influenced their location of where they want to practice optometry. They were allowed to choose up to 3 options. The top influencer amongst graduates was Family at 60%, followed

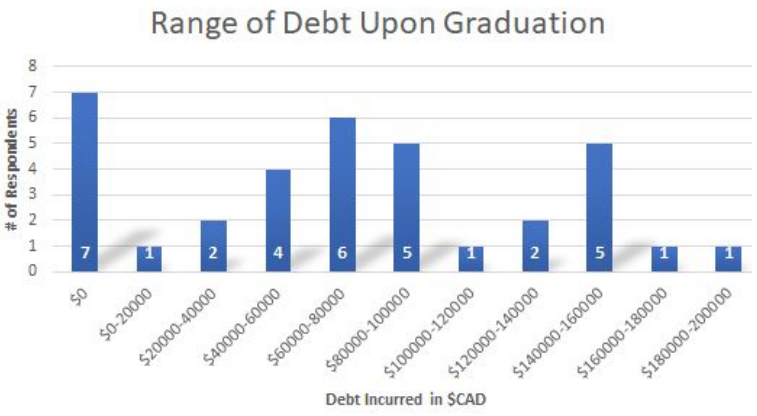


closely by Income Potential at 54% and Significant Other at 46%. This closely mirrors the influencers affecting students, in which they indicated Family (70%), Income Potential (51%) and Significant Other (42%) as their top three factors in choosing a practice location, as polled in the CAOS Student Survey. While Income Potential appears important, Family still comes first and may be a dealbreaker in the job search if it means being away from people they care about the most. Significant Other may not play as big a role, as many graduates may not yet be married and the future may still change ahead for them. In terms of lifestyle, 40% of graduates indicated that the city/urban lifestyle is highly desirable and influences them on their practice location. This is apparent as 57% of graduates currently practise in a metropolitan area.

FINANCIAL BURDEN



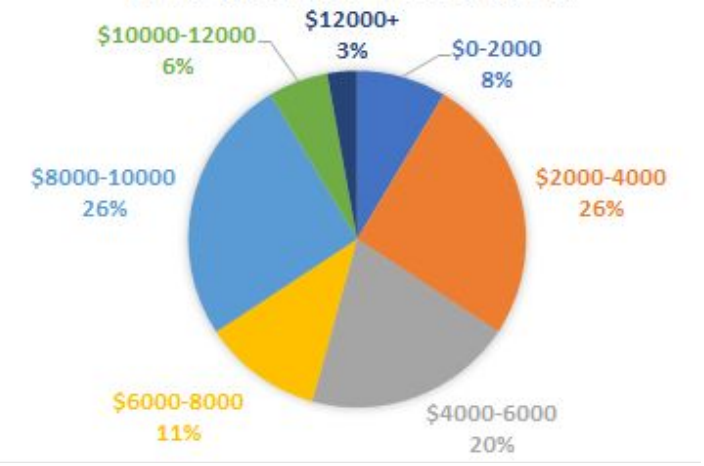
In **Question 7,** graduates were asked to rank how burdened they felt about their financial debt after optometry school. They were given a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being no burden at all, 5 being neutral and 10 being most burdened by it. The average burden from the financial debt is 6.08 with a median burden of 7. While this scale is subjective, 7 of 35 respondents or 20 % chose 1- not burdened or 5- neutral, which may have skewed the results. This may correspond to the fact that 7 or 20% of respondents do not have financial debt, according to question 9 below. When those responses are taken out, the average burden rises to 6.92 which is comparable to the CAOS Student Survey (6.91).



In Question 9, respondents were given a chance to reveal how much financial debt they owed after graduation in Canadian Dollars. They were given a slider scale to indicate the amount. The dollar values were then subsequently grouped into categories of $20,000 increments. The amount of student debt ranged from $8000 to $200,000 CAD, with seven respondents indicating no debt at all. The average graduate debt was $75,457 CAD, which is in line with the estimate students gave in the CAOS survey, where the average debt upon graduation was estimated to be $82,670 CAD on average. This information may be useful for prospective students, as we now have consistent data of the debt burden amongst Canadian-trained optometry students.

FINANCIAL INCOME

Next, respondents were asked to indicate their gross income per month from optometry services and related products in **Question 10.** The responses were then grouped into categories of $2000 increments.Monthly gross income ranged from $1000 to 12000 per month. **The average gross income per month amongst graduates is $6170, which extrapolates to $74,000 per annum.**

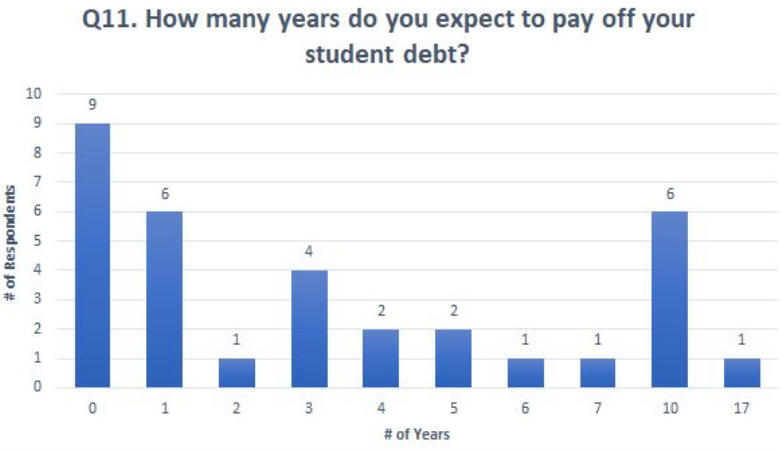


This data was then sub-divided into regional averages:

- **Atlantic Canada** $12,000 or $144,000 per annum
- **Ontario** $4840 or $58,000 per annum
    - **GTA** - $3450/month or $41,400 per annum (n=12)
    - **Rest of Ontario-** $6700/month or $80,400 per annum (n=9)
- **Prairies** $6700/month or $80,400 per annum
- **Alberta** $8200 or $98,400 per annum
- **British Columbia** $7600/month or $91,200 per annum

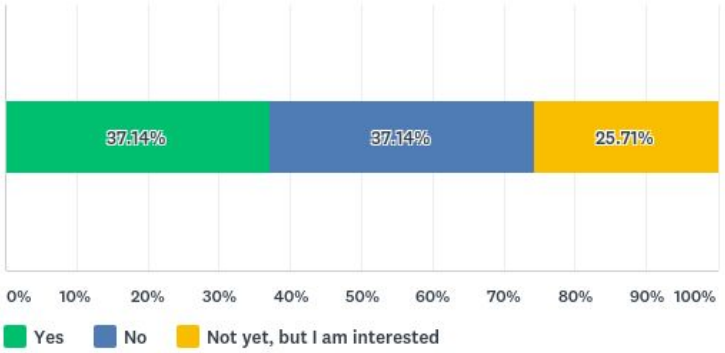
However, provinces outside Ontario or Alberta had relatively small sample sizes and may not be accurately represented. However, the graduates with the lowest gross income were from Ontario. This is further classified into Metropolitan versus the rest of Ontario. Here, we see a discrepancy where the metropolitan graduate is making $3450 per month on average while a practitioner outside GTA can make $6700 per month on average, on par with the national average. It must be noted that sample sizes overall is small, and there may be a large standard deviation in the data.

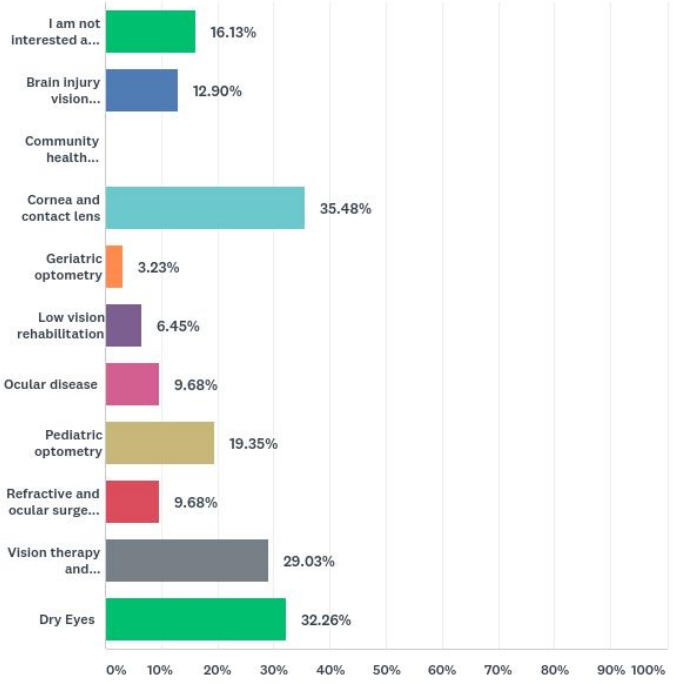
In **Question 11**, respondents were asked how many years they expect to pay off their debt. Nine respondents indicated zero, which likely includes the seven respondents without student debt. The responses ranged from 1 year to 17 year with the **average goal being 5 years** to be debt free (seven respondents indicating zero was excluded due to no student debt).



SPECIAL INTEREST

Graduates were asked in **Question 13** if they are currently incorporating any special areas of interest in their clinic(s). 37% of graduates indicated that they do practise a special focus of optometry in their clinic, while 63% indicated that they have not. However, 26% are interested in adding a focus area in the future.





Lastly, in **Question 14**, graduates were asked which area of special interest they are currently practicing or would like to incorporate in the future. A list of 9 residency areas of interest were taken from OR Match, with the addition of dry eyes included in the survey. Four respondents skipped this question, while 16% (n=5) answered that they were not interested at this time. Of the 75% interested or are currently incorporating an area of interest, the top responses were Cornea & Contact Lenses (35.5%), followed by Dry Eyes (32.3%) and Vision Therapy (29.0%) rounding the top 3. In contrast, students surveyed in the CAOS Student Survey indicated Ocular Disease as their top choice, followed by Cornea and Contact Lenses, then Vision Therapy. This may be due to the fact that Dry Eye was not included as an option to students, and graduates are more likely to consider ocular disease as part of their comprehensive care rather than a special area of focus. It may also be noted that Dry Eyes is likely to fall under Ocular Disease as a whole in the context of residencies.

CONCLUSION/NEXT STEPS

While some interesting data about our graduates relating to practice modalities, work life, financial burden and special interest areas were revealed, the sample size is small (n=35) and has implications on the validity of the results. When the data is subdivided by province, this poses a greater problem as sample sizes were even smaller outside of Ontario. At the Optometry Leaders Forum 2018 (Ottawa), CAOS proposed to launch a **National Graduate Workforce Survey** to include both Canadian & US-trained grads to gather more information with a larger sample size to prepare our workforce and marketplace for the future employment trends in optometry and help bridge the gap between graduates and employers.