



CAOS • ACÉO
Canadian Association of Optometry Students
Association Canadienne des Étudiants en Optométrie

2019 CAOS SEE Survey Report

Prepared by

Wynn Nguyen, BSc, OD Candidate
UW CAOS President

Raphaela So, BSc, OD Candidate
UW CAOS President-Elect

Quinton Yau, OD Candidate
UW CAOS Technical Operations Director

Jennifer Tran, OD Candidate
UW CAOS Marketing & Communications
Director



Table of Contents

<u>1.0</u> Abstract	3
<u>2.0</u> Introduction & Purpose	3
2.1 Methods	4
2.2 Demographics	5
<u>3.0</u> Location Ambition	6
3.1 Hometown/Hometown Area	6
3.2 Location preference upon graduation	6
3.3 Location preference after 15 years	6
<u>4.0</u> Salary Ideals vs. Expectations	7
4.1 Ideal Salary	7
4.2 Expected/Anticipated Salary	7
4.3 Salary after 15 years	9
<u>5.0</u> Priorities & Preferences	10
5.1 Ideal number of clinics	10
5.2 Expected number of clinics	10
5.3 Top priority in first five years	11
5.4 Top priority after 15 years	12
<u>6.0</u> Rural Relocation	12
6.1 Duration of stay	12
6.2 Expected first year salary in rural area	13
<u>7.0</u> Practice Ownership	14
7.1 Ownership interest	14
7.2 Practice preference upon graduation	15
7.3 Practice preference upon retirement	15
7.4 Practice ownership model	16
<u>8.0</u> Conclusion & References	17



Abstract

The Canadian Association of Optometry Students (CAOS) conducted a survey that was sent out to all Canadian OD students from University of Waterloo, University of Montreal, and US optometry schools to better understand student perspectives about the state of the optometric profession. This year, we used the survey to better understand students' expectations vs. ideals regarding location of practice, annual salary, future priority, and practice modality.

Our results revealed that the majority of students would like to practice in middle-sized cities and not in metropolitan areas, which is what the majority of students describe as their hometown. Student ideal salaries are higher than their expected salaries. After 15 years, their expected average salary doubles. Most students are willing to relocate to rural areas for a given limited time contract and minimum salary.

The top priority when choosing a job in the first 5 years after graduation is salary. After 15 years, there is a dramatic shift to prioritizing lifestyle/work-life balance. Upon graduation, the most popular optometry practice modalities were being an associate or a partner in a small group practice. Upon retirement, the most popular optometry practice modalities were being a partner in a small group practice or solo owner. A majority of students are interested in owning their own practice at some point in their career. Most prefer to buy in or buy out a practice. The goal of this survey is to provide valuable data that can make career strategies between new grads and employers more effective.

Introduction and Purpose

The Canadian Association of Optometry Students/Association Canadienne des Étudiants en Optométrie (CAOS-ACEO) is a North American wide organization that represents Canadian optometry students studying in Canada, USA and Puerto Rico. Our mission is to enhance the professional and clinical development of the next generation of ODs and prepare students by creating awareness of challenges affecting the optometric profession. Additionally, we want to increase the public's awareness of optometry's role as the primary vision care provider. By unifying optometry students, we can collaborate and deal with current and future challenges affecting the profession. If you are interested in learning more about our organization, please visit our website at: <http://caostudents.ca>.

The CAOS executive committee conducts an annual Student Experience and Expectation (SEE) survey. The focus of the 2019 survey was to investigate the student perspective on expectations vs. ideals regarding practice location, annual salary, future priority, and practice modality as they think about their careers. Particularly, we wanted to target 3 main areas: to better understand the ideal annual salary desired by students, to investigate the factors of where and how students would like to practice, and to learn about students' ambition towards practice ownership.



We have found that doctors and students alike have experienced a disconnect when it comes to demand for positions. In some cases, doctors are having difficulty finding suitable candidates, and students are having trouble finding their ideal job. We hope that this report will serve as a means of fostering better understanding between optometry leaders and new graduates and will elicit positive reform on both ends.

Methods

Following the previous two student surveys, SurveyMonkey was used. The survey consisted of 19 questions, which were inspired by feedback from the Optometric Leadership Forum in 2018. Questions to obtain actionable information such as salary, location preferences, and future priorities were devised for students to answer.

To encourage participation, students were entered into weekly draws for a chance to win gift cards as well as limited time prizes, such as a Google Home Mini, throughout the survey.

The survey was emailed to all University of Waterloo Optometry students, and was also distributed to the presidents of each of our CAOS chapters (i.e. University of Montreal, US chapters). In-class announcements and social media posts were used to advertise the survey and prizes.

We made the survey available to students for 3 weeks (from mid November 2018 to early December 2018). The results were then analyzed by the UW CAOS executive team and compiled into this report. The survey received a total of 310 responses from the aforementioned Canadian optometry students.



Demographics

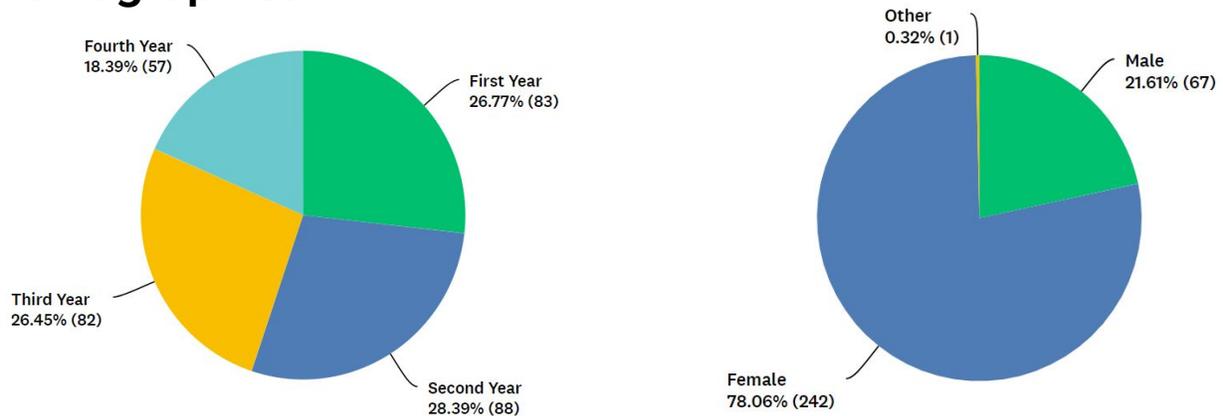


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by year of study and gender

School	Number of respondents
Université de Montréal - École d'optométrie	52
University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science	230
Illinois College of Optometry	5
Indiana University	1
Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, School of Optometry	7
Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences	2
New England College of Optometry	5
Nova Southeastern University	3
Pacific University in Portland, Oregon	2
Western University of Health Sciences	1
Did not specify	2

Figure 2: Distribution of respondents by school

This year, a total of 310 responses were collected. There were generally equal numbers of first, second and third year students (each approximately 27%) responding to the survey and a slightly lower number of fourth year students (around 18%). The greatest amount of responses came from students studying at the University of Waterloo (230 respondents) followed by the University of Montreal (52 responses). Only 9% of responses came from students studying in US schools, a decrease from the 20% in the previous 2017-2018 survey. This is mostly due to the fact that more Canadian school responses were recorded this year (an increase of 97 Canadian school respondents compared with last year). In the future, there should be more representation in the survey of Canadians studying abroad to more accurately represent the optometry student body. Finally, the respondents were majority female (78%) which was anticipated and matches with the general trend in Canada and USA based off the ASCO Annual Student Report 2017-2018¹. With 310 responses, we feel that this survey will be helpful in revealing the student opinion and provide actionable information for the associations and doctors.



Location Ambition

Question 4. Which of the following would best describe your hometown/hometown area?

Question 5. Where would you like to work when you first graduate?

Question 6. Where would you like to be working in 15 years?

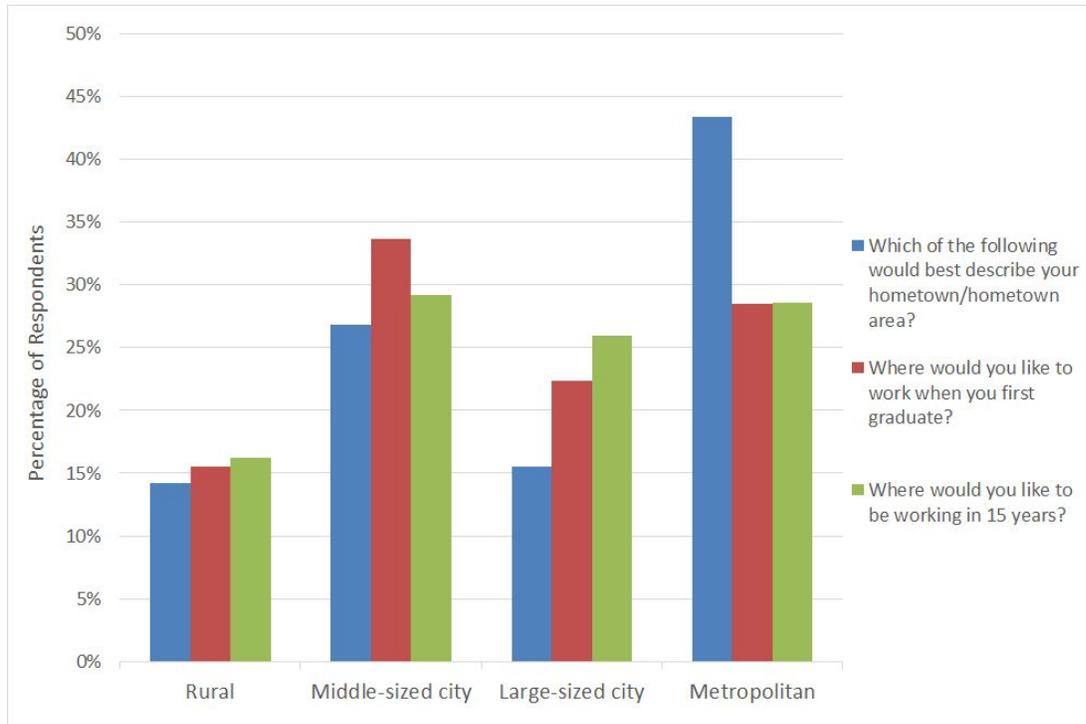


Figure 3. Comparison of where students reside vs. where they wish to practice in their first year post-grad vs. where they wish to practice 15 years post-grad.

Cities were defined to students by their population size along with an example. Rural classifies a population of less than 50,000 (e.g. Timmins), middle-sized cities classify populations of 50,000 up to 500,000 (e.g. Brantford), large-sized cities classify populations of 500,000 up to 1 million (e.g. Greater Hamilton Area), and metropolitan cities classify populations over 1 million (e.g. Greater Toronto Area, Greater Vancouver, Calgary).

The majority of students come from metropolitan areas. This however, does not reflect where they want to practice in the future. The majority of students would like to practice in middle-sized cities, followed by metropolitan cities, then large-sized cities, then rural cities. The trends for practicing immediately after graduating and practicing after 15 years are similar.



Salary Ideals vs. Expectations

Question 7: How much do you IDEALLY WANT to be paid (in your first year after graduation)?

Question 8: How much do you EXPECT/ANTICIPATE to be paid (in your first year after graduation)?

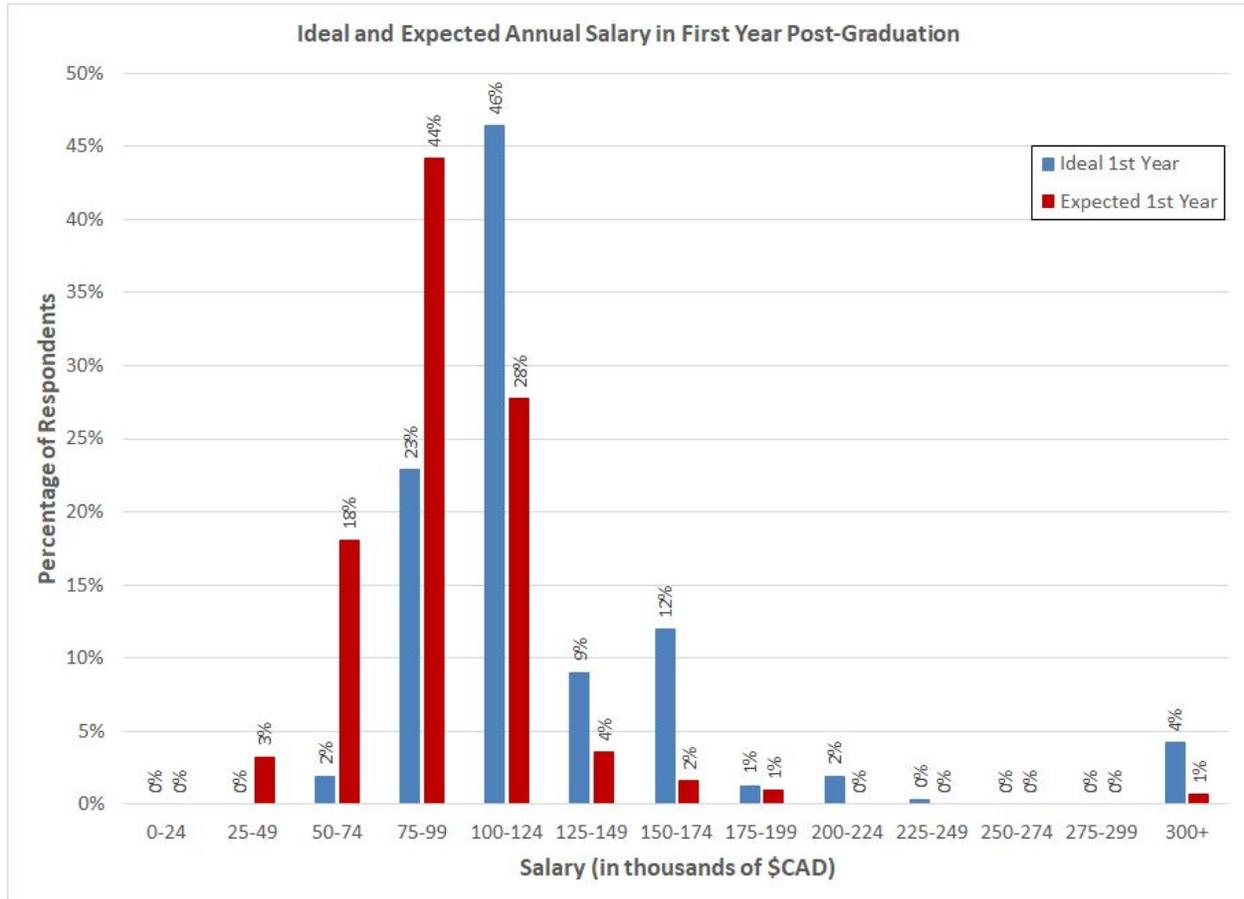


Figure 4. Ideal vs. expected annual salary in first year after graduation.

Students were asked to report their ideal annual salary (selecting from a slider response of \$0-\$300,000+) in their first year after graduation. Based on 310 total responses, the mean ideal salary is \$120,000. Similarly, the median ideal salary is \$110,000. The ideal salary range is \$60,000 to \$300,000.

Next, students were asked to report their expected annual salary in their first year after graduation in contrast to their ideal salary of the previous question. The mean salary students expect is \$90,000, a significant \$30,000 less than their ideal salary. Likewise, the median salary students anticipate is \$85,000. Eliminating 2 outliers, the range for expected salaries is \$30,000



to \$196,000. This is significantly less than the ideals range. This lower amount is derived from students' preconceived notions and anecdotes from mentors or friends about realistic salaries, competition for jobs, practice location, lack of experience, and numerous other factors.

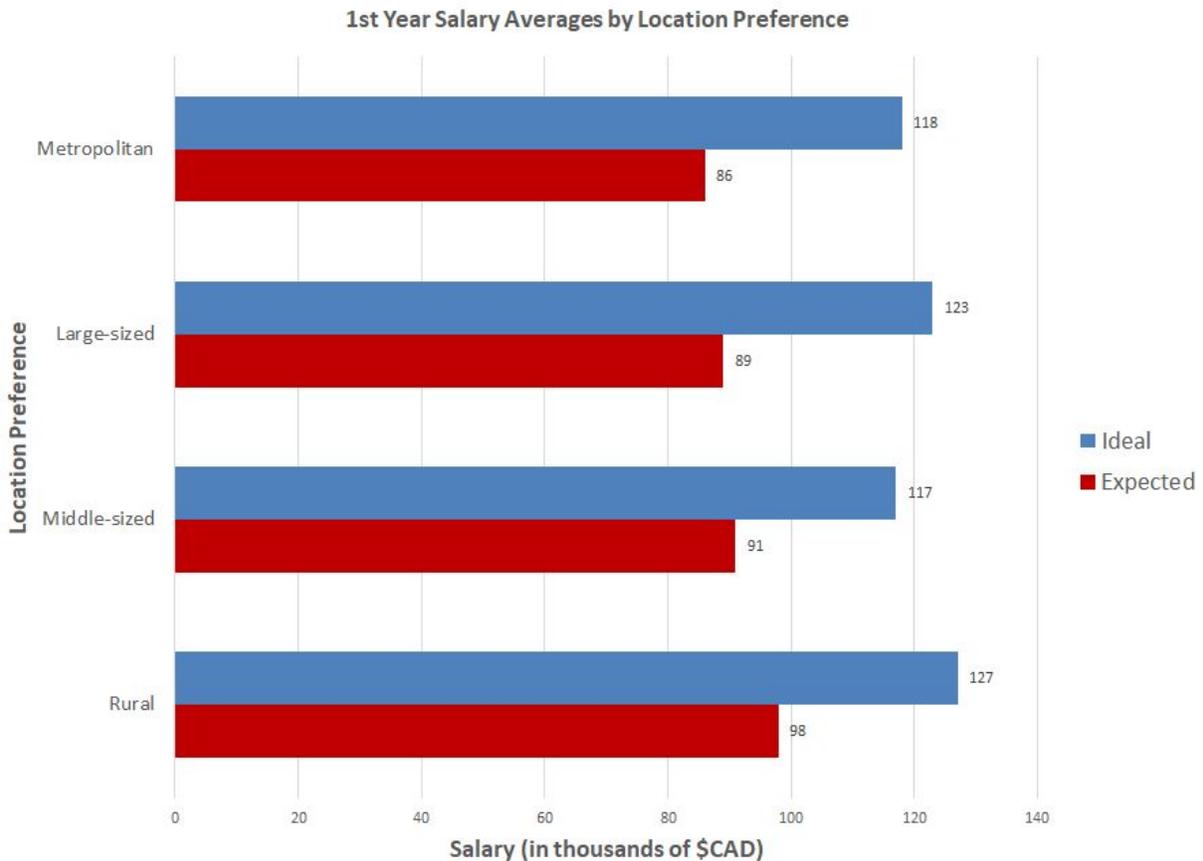


Figure 5. Average salary ideals vs expectations depending on location preferences

The average salary ideals are similar in metropolitan areas with middle sized areas, and similar in large sized areas with rural areas. The average ideal salary for metropolitan area is less than a rural area at \$118,000, compared to \$127,000.

The expected salary increases as population size decreases. The lowest expected salary is \$86,000 for those wanting to work in metropolitan areas and highest at \$98,000 for those wanting to work in rural areas.

In both cases of ideal and expected salaries, the difference between metropolitan areas and rural areas is about \$10,000. This may suggest that those who prefer to work in metropolitan areas are willing to sacrifice their salary, but not by much.



Question 11: How much do you WANT to make after 15 years of practice?

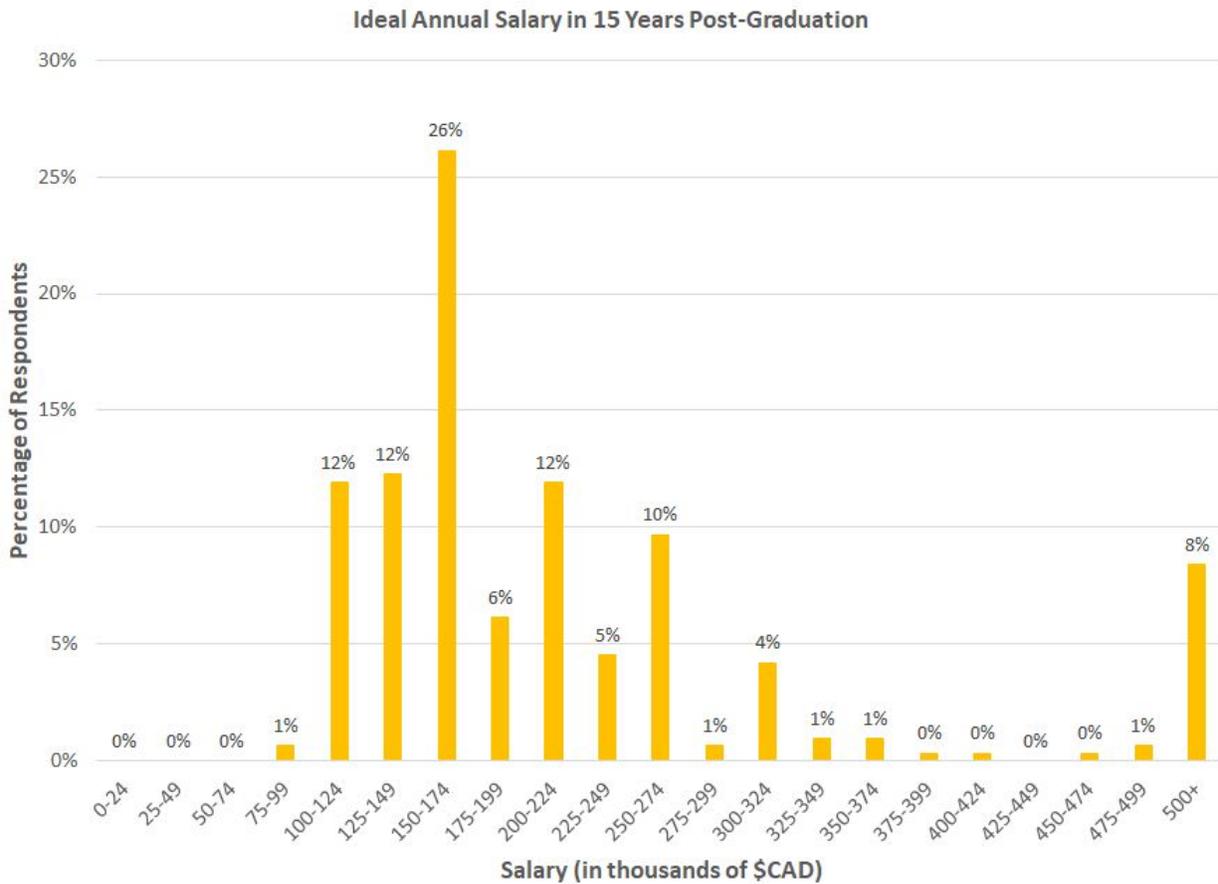


Figure 6. Ideal annual salary students want after 15 years of practice

We asked respondents about their ideal salary after 15 years of practice. We expect this number to be higher than their response from the previous question which asked about their ideal salary during their first year of practice. Responses ranged from \$88,000 to \$500,000. Results indicated that the mean ideal salary students want after 15 years of practice is \$213,000. This number is \$90,000 more than the mean ideal salary students want in their first year of practice. Students desire to earn significantly more as they become more proficient, experienced, and well-established clinicians as their career progresses.



Priorities & Preferences

Question 9: How many clinic(s) do you ideally want to work at after graduation?

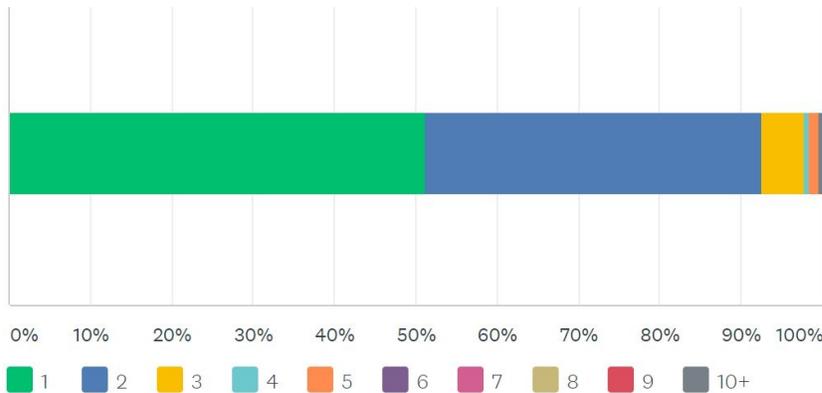


Figure 7. Ideal number of clinics students want to work at after graduation

Question 10: How many clinic(s) do you expect/anticipate to work at after graduation?

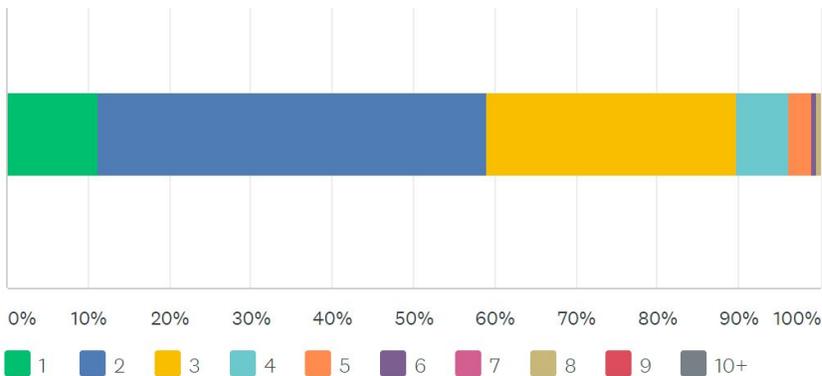


Figure 8. Expected number of clinics students will work at after graduation

The majority of students would ideally like to work in one clinic upon graduation (51%), while working in two clinics is the ideal option for 41% of respondents. The remaining students stated that they would like to work in three to five clinics upon graduation. However, a majority of students realistically expect to be working in two or three clinics after graduation, 48% and 31% respectively. A smaller percentage of respondents, 11%, anticipate working in one clinic after graduation, while 10% of students anticipate working in four or more clinics.

It is evident that most students prefer to be in more full time positions, working at one or two clinics upon graduation. Those wanting to work in two or more clinics may be hoping to learn more in their first years after graduation from different workplace styles. The results regarding their expectations vs. ideals may reflect students' awareness of possible job saturation and availability of part time vs. full time positions.



Question 12: What would be the top priority for you in the first 5 years?

Question 13: What would be the top priority for you after 15 years of practice?

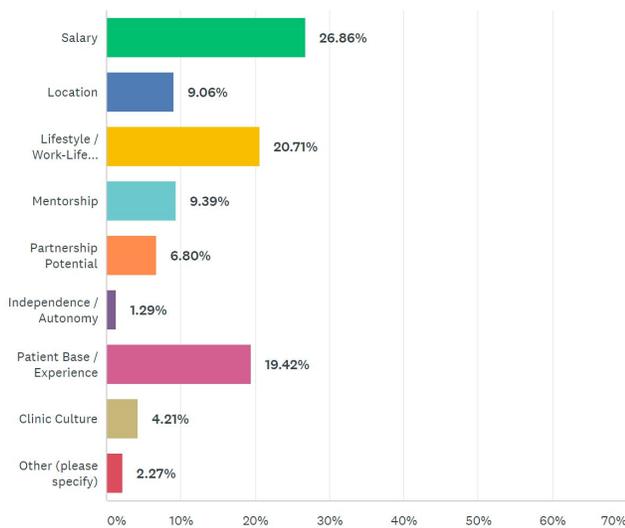


Figure 9. Distribution of top priority in the first 5 years from a list of options

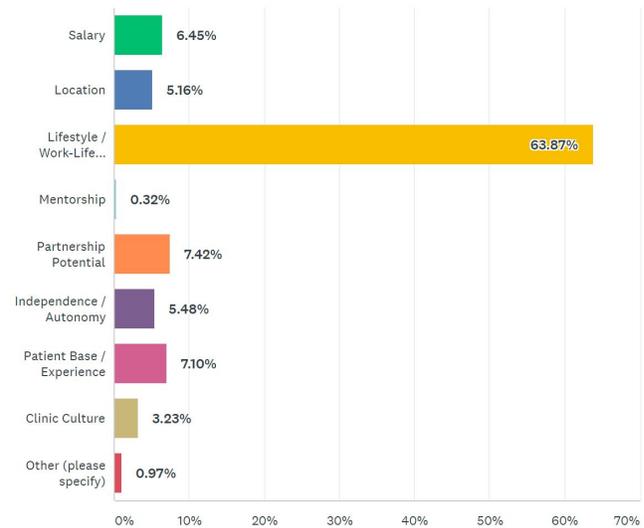


Figure 10. Distribution of top priority in 15 years from a list of options

Increasingly over the years, graduates have had more opportunities to choose where they want to practice, and therefore, the qualities they look for in a clinic are important to consider. We feel that it is important for doctors to know what is considered to be the top priority in order to better market job opportunities to new graduates.

For the first 5 years out of graduation, salary (27%), lifestyle/work-life balance (21%), and patient base/experience (19%) were the top 3 priorities. Location, mentorship, and partnership potential were the next three followed by clinic culture and independence. Some other mentions were growth potential, which in our opinion is similar to partnership potential, and family, which is closely associated with location.

In contrast, after 15 years of practice, lifestyle/work-life balance was the overwhelming priority with 64% of respondents. This may suggest that students are choosing to focus on other aspects of their lives, or that they anticipate making a sufficient enough income to support themselves, prompting their priorities to shift away from salary.

Overall, we recommend that when marketing to students, salary (first year salary, potential growth, etc.), lifestyle/work-life balance (weekends/holidays), as well as patient-based experience opportunities (demographics/speciality services) should be presented.



Rural Relocation

Question 14: If you were offered a contract to relocate to a rural area (population < 50 000 e.g. Timmons OR > 3 hours from a major city centre e.g. Muskoka from Toronto) in Canada, how long would you stay?

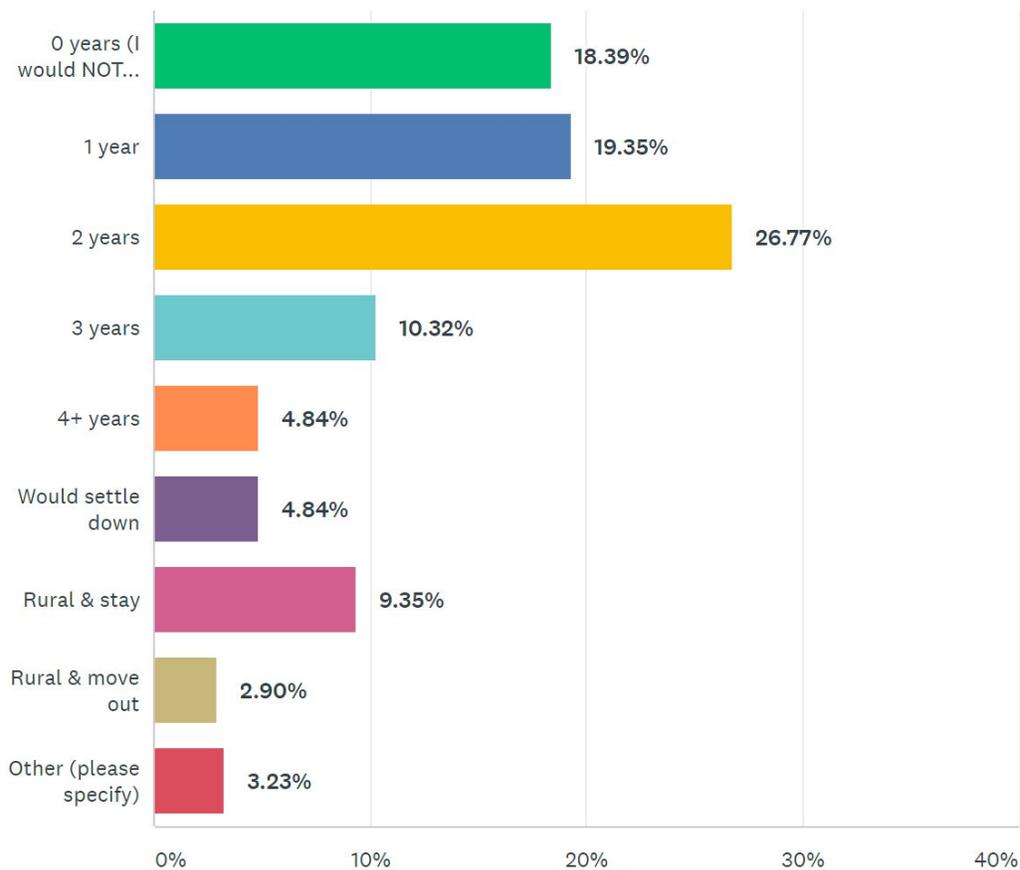


Figure 11. Length of time students are willing to relocate to a rural area

The majority of students, 75%, are willing to practice in a rural area, with a small percentage of these students indicating they want to settle down in the area or already live there and would stay. Most of that majority is willing to relocate to a rural area for a specified time period; relocating for 1 or 2 years was the most common choice (46%). Most students already living in a rural area would stay (9%), while a small number would like to relocate out (3%). The majority of those who answered “Other” stated that it truly depends on the salary.

This indicates that many students now are willing to relocate to a rural area, provided that a limited year contract is discussed upfront.



Question 15: What first year annual salary would you expect to relocate to a rural area? (Please SKIP if you chose “I WOULD NOT RELOCATE” or “I ALREADY LIVE IN A RURAL AREA” in Q14).

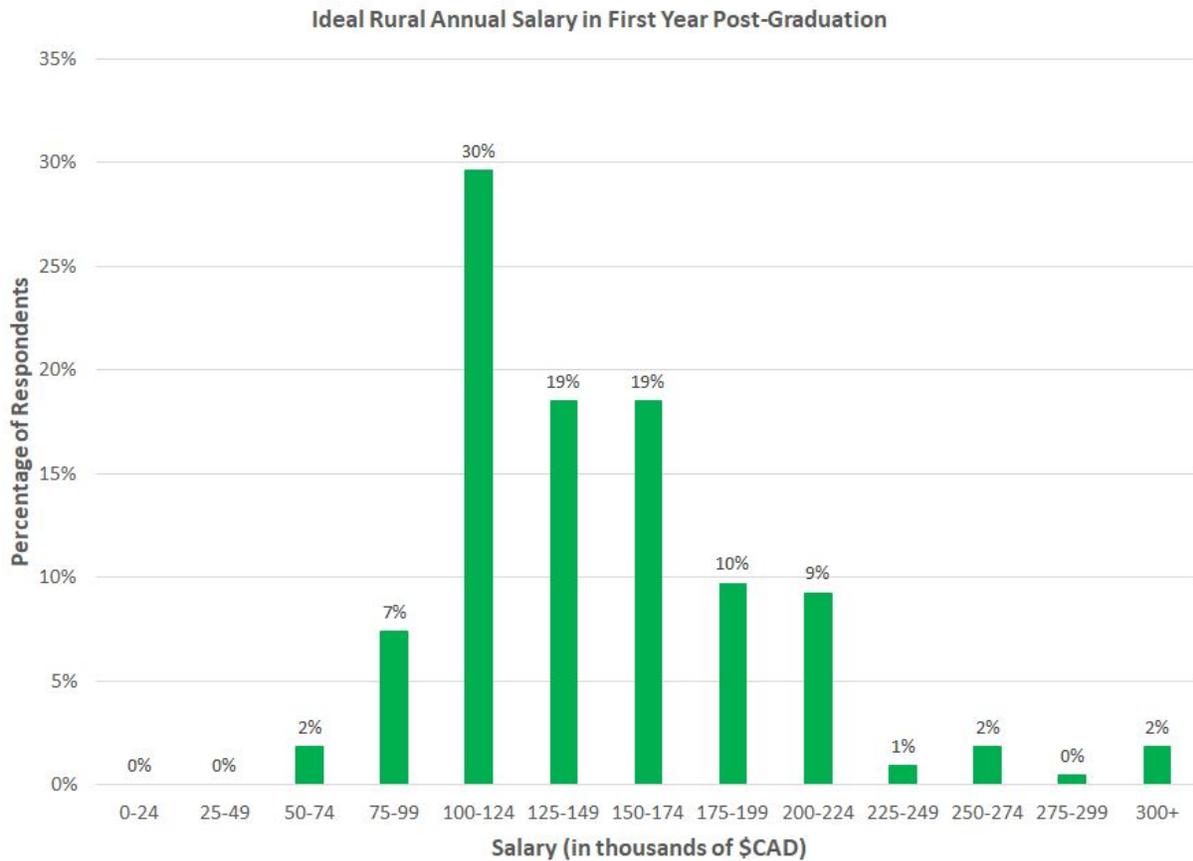


Figure 12. Ideal annual salary for students who would relocate to a rural area

Of those stating that they would relocate, the average salary they would relocate for is \$144,000. The salary range given by students was between \$60,000 to \$300,000. The majority, 70% of students, would relocate for a salary between \$100,000 and \$175,000.



Practice Ownership

Current ODs are looking for opportunities to work with new graduates and potentially pass on their clinics. We recognize this changing landscape of the profession and asked students about their interests regarding practice modality and ownership.

Question 16: Are you interested in owning your own practice?

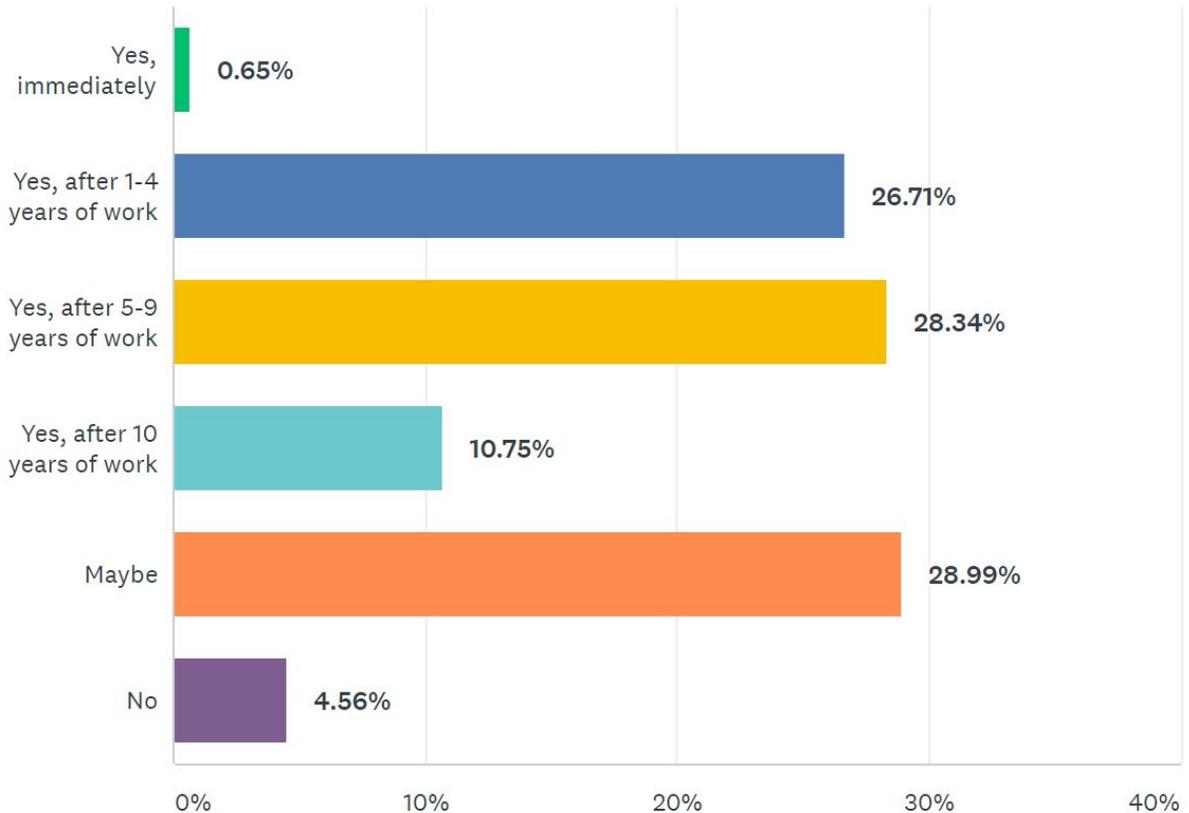


Figure 13. Interest and timeline of owning a practice

The majority of students (66%) are interested in owning their own practice at some point in their careers. A small subset of respondents, 0.65%, wanted to own their own practice immediately after graduation, but the remaining majority are interested in owning their own practice after one to ten years of work experience. 29% are unsure and 5% of students would not be interested in owning their own practice.



Question 17: Select your preference upon graduation

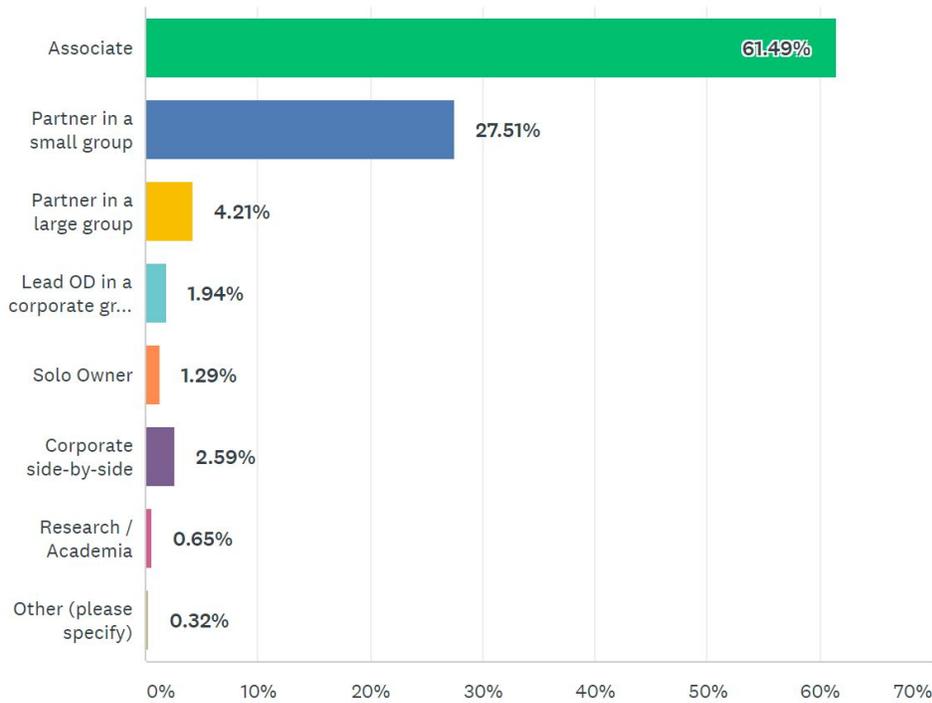


Figure 14. Preferred practice modality upon graduation

Question 18: Select your preference upon retirement (i.e. what you retire as/ultimate career goal)

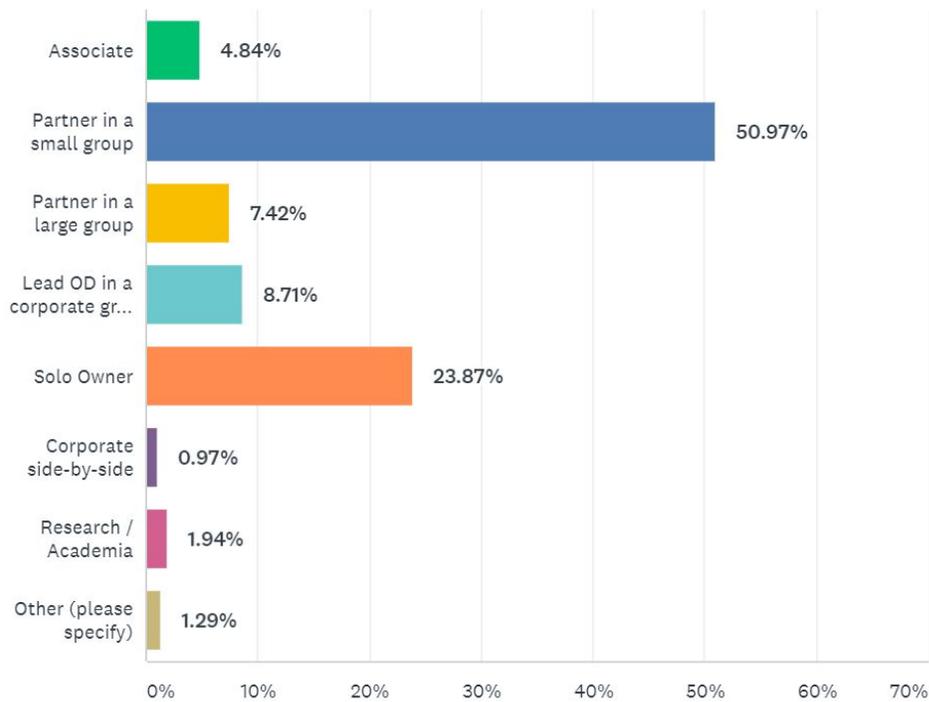


Figure 15. Preferred practice modality upon retirement



Next, we asked students what their preferences were regarding their position in a clinic upon graduation and upon retirement. To clarify the options, examples were attached to the modalities, as outlined below.

Upon graduation, 61% of respondents indicated that they would like to be an associate. The next most common preference with 28% of respondents was that of being a partner in a small group (1-3 partners). The remaining 11% of respondents preferred to be in different roles or positions such as a partner in a large group (4+ partners), a lead OD in a corporate group practice (eg. FYIdoctors, IRIS), a solo owner, a corporate side-by-side (eg. FYIdoctors, IRIS), research or academia.

A large shift was seen when students were asked about their preferences upon retirement; a majority of 51% has the ultimate career goal of being a partner in a small group. Solo ownership of a practice was also a common preference upon retirement with 24% of the responses. Only 5% of respondents chose being an associate as their preference upon retirement. Overall, this data exemplifies a desired change in students' positions as their careers progress.

Question 19: If you selected ownership/partnership, would you prefer to...

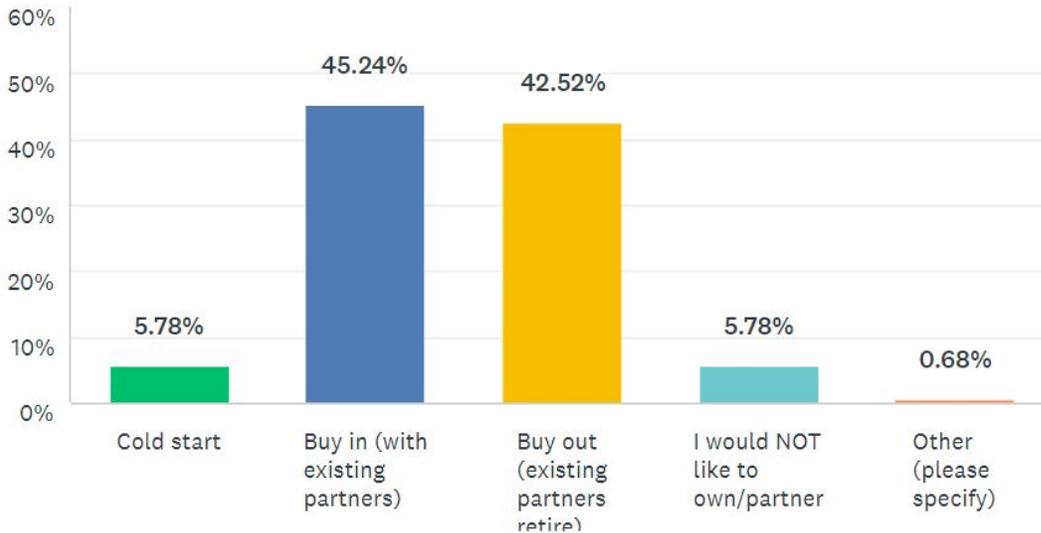


Figure 16. Preferred practice ownership model

Finally, respondents were asked to choose their preference regarding the modality in which they would own or partner in a practice. The majority, 88%, would like to buy a clinic. About half of that majority preferred to buy in with existing partners, while the other half preferred to buy out when existing partners retire. 6% would like to cold start while another 6% do not want to own or partner in a practice. Those who answered Other clarified that they would buy in if the practice shared their vision or that they did not know. Overall, students expressed interest in wanting to own or partner a clinic in some capacity.



Conclusion

The goal of the survey is to provide meaningful insight of today's student perspective, more specifically their expectations, priorities, and future ambitions. The results and recommendations are summarized below.

- The majority of students would like to practice in middle-sized cities upon graduation and after 15 years of practice. Their hometown population does not reflect where they want to practice in the future.
- Upon graduation, the mean ideal salary is \$110,000 and the mean expected salary is \$90,000. The mean ideal salary for metropolitan areas is \$118,000 while the expected salary is \$86,000. The mean ideal salary for rural areas is \$127,00, while the expected salary is \$98,000. After 15 years of practice, ideal salary is \$213,000.
- Most students want to work 1 or 2 clinics, but expect to work upwards of 2-3 clinics. The top priority in the first 5 years of practice is salary; but after 15 years of practice, there is a dramatic shift in priority to lifestyle/work-life balance. Therefore, salary seems to be an effective method to target new grads, and work-life balance is an effective way to retain associates.
- Students are willing to relocate to practice in a rural area for up to 2 years, given an average salary of \$144,000.
- The majority of students are interested in owning a practice within 9 years of working. In terms of practice modality, most students prefer to work as an associate upon graduation, but again, we see a shift in preference upon retirement, in which students prefer being a partner in a small group. Most students would like to buy in or buy out a practice.

Depending on where one is in their optometric career, their expectations, ideals, and priorities can change drastically. Therefore, it is important to consider these values as one's career progresses. This survey provides valuable data that can make building relationships between new grads and employers more effective.

References

1. <https://optometriceducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ASCO-Student-Data-Report-2017-18.pdf>