

Best in Class 2018

ODs With a Sense of Dedication and Purpose



MARGE AXELRAD / SENIOR VP, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Today's optometry college graduates are such a diverse and impressive group of young people. It's a reflection of the wide range of potential avenues and specialties afforded today's students, who are just as dedicated as many of their

predecessors, motivated by a strong sense of purpose in their involvement and future practice choices.

All of these students, selected by their schools to represent the Best in Class for this special VM report, have volunteered their time—working with their college peers, organizing learning and community events and, in

a few cases, initiated new ideas and programs to enrich the curriculum and their schools' vision programs and career path choices.

They are all a reflection of a bright future for the profession. *Vision Monday* congratulates all of this year's optometry graduates and dedicates this special section to shine the spotlight on the Best in Class 2018. ■

TRISTAN BARRUECO, OD

SUNY College of Optometry
New York, N.Y.



Tristan Barrueco, OD, a Basking Ridge, N.J. native, was among the 249 SUNY students from across the state who received the 2018 Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence from State University of New York chancellor Kristina M. Johnson this year. Barrueco also received the National Board of Examiners in Optometry Certificate of Commendation for securing the highest score at SUNY Optometry on the national board exam.

After completing a degree in biomedical engineering at the University of Rochester in 2010, Barrueco attended U.S. Navy's Officer Candidate School and was commissioned as an ensign. An unexpected medical discharge left him wondering what to do next. "Then a friend who had recently graduated from optometry school started teaching me about the field," he recalled.

After shadowing an optometrist, Barrueco was all in, excited to find a career that built on his experience and put him on the front lines in diagnosing and treating many conditions. "The more I shadowed, the more I became convinced that optometry was the career for

me. I loved learning about the medical aspect of optometry. I relished the satisfaction of helping people see," he said.

Barrueco just finished a rotation at the Lyons Veterans Administration Hospital in New Jersey where his work focused primarily on the treatment and management of ocular disease. But it is his work as treasurer of Student Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity that has perhaps changed Barrueco the most.

"I entered SUNY Optometry incredibly naïve to the plight of eyecare throughout most of the world. Upon watching a video at the introductory meeting, I was instantly moved by the impact of eyecare services in developing countries. I believe that every citizen on this earth should have the right to see. The ability to see an eye doctor or afford glasses should not confer the ability to see," he said.

That belief took him to San Juan del Sur, Nicaragua, last January, where he served at a free clinic that saw more than 4,400 patients who do not have access to eyecare. And last May, he helped see more than 3,500 people at a OneSight Vision Care Clinic in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. He also works with the New Jersey Special Olympics, providing vision and ocular health screenings for athletes during each of his summers at SUNY Optometry.

Barrueco will continue his work with a residency in primary care, ocular disease and specialty contact lenses at VA Salt Lake City Health Care System. "The fact that it merges two different areas makes it very unique and excites me a lot, as they are both great passions of mine. Having served in the Navy, it brings me great pride to be able to give back to the veterans at the VA hospital," he said.

HIS SCHOOL SAYS... "Barrueco entered SUNY Optometry after serving as an officer in the United

States Navy. He has flourished academically and clinically, winning numerous awards and placing at the top of his class. He has also been devoted to volunteer work."

JACOB BOROFF, OD

The Ohio State University
College of Optometry
Columbus, Ohio



During Dr. Jacob Boroff's time as an undergrad at the College of Wooster, he was torn about which avenue to pursue. Pharmacy and medical school were the top contenders, but then he became involved with a FIELD program during his junior year where he shadowed health care professionals within the Wooster community.

"I was blessed with the opportunity to shadow Dr. Rebecca Lauffenburger. She introduced me to the joys and wonders of optometry and the impact that vision can have on a person's quality of life; including young kiddos who rely on their visual system a great deal early in their educational journey. After those shadowing experiences, I never looked back and I am very happy with my decision," Boroff said.

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Boroff received both an OD and MS degree in Vision Sciences. “My master’s project looked at visual quality of different soft multifocal contact lenses. My areas of interest include ocular disease. And I will be doing an ocular disease residency starting this June at the Dayton VA medical center. I hope to continue with the VA, work within a hospital-type setting, academia or any mixture of the three. I will be getting married in June and we will be living in the Dayton/Beavercreek area for at least two years so I am looking to find job opportunities there that incorporate my interests.”

Boroff was recently awarded The Ohio State University College of Optometry’s 2018 Graduate of the Year Award at the school’s commencement ceremonies. This award is given to the most outstanding member of each graduating class based on clinical excellence, academic achievement, leadership and professional promise. The award is based on nominations of faculty and staff who have worked with students in classrooms, laboratories and in clinics.

HIS SCHOOL SAYS... “Jacob had numerous qualities that led to him being named this year’s Graduate of the Year Award and as a member of the Beta Sigma Kappa international Optometric Society. He displays a work ethic and professionalism that is beyond exemplary. He is dedicated to elevating patient care to the highest level and has a passion for contributing to the current body of knowledge that will impact the quality of future standards of care.”

JUSTIN CHEVALIER, OD

Northeastern State University Oklahoma
College of Optometry
Tahlequah, Oklahoma



Justin Chevalier, OD, did not specialize in a particular area while at NSU, he said, but by seeing patients for Cherokee Nation, he was given an unparalleled emphasis on ocular disease and was highly exposed to areas such as contact lenses, vision therapy, low vision and much more.

Chevalier will be completing an ocular disease/refractive surgery residency at Triad Eye Institute in Tulsa, Okla. “I hope to work in a referral center type setting after my residency and eventually work toward owning a private practice with my wife, Caitlin, who also just graduated from NSU.”

Chevalier said he was inspired to be an OD by getting to know his hometown optometrist at a young age and sharing in his hobbies like hunting and fishing. “We would visit for hours and talk about hunting, fishing and optometry and over the years I decided I really enjoyed what he got to do all day long. I have also always enjoyed staying involved and I have grown to love the fact that optometry allows me to work with people in not only a clinical setting but in community and legislative settings as well.”

Chevalier served as AOSA trustee elect/trustee from 2015 to 2017 representing NSU students at

the national level. He also served as the clinic coordinator for the NSU Bedlam clinic for 2017, which is the school’s volunteer clinic that provides diabetic eye exams to an underserved population in Tulsa. He was actively involved in other student organizations at NSU like SVOSH and Practice Management Club, and he was also a member of the NSU Student Government. “I was fortunate to be active in the legislative process for optometry here in Oklahoma as well as on the federal level, visiting Washington D.C. twice to meet with politicians.”

HIS SCHOOL SAYS... “Justin Chevalier was our top optometry graduate this year. He will be doing a residency. He was an AOSA trustee among many other activities while in school.”

TAYLOR DAHMS, OD

University of Missouri St. Louis
College of Optometry
St. Louis, Missouri



Taylor Dahms, OD, received a B.A. in Chemistry from Southern Illinois University. At UMSL’s College of Optometry, she was involved with many organizations including Student VOSH, the Student Governance and Affairs Committee, presi-

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New Attitudes About Practice Options Emerge From NewGradOptometry Survey

NEW YORK—Nearly 1,100 readers of NewGrad-Optometry.com (NGO) took part in a wide-ranging survey conducted last year and shared information and attitudes about where they practiced, what types of career paths they were considering, the pressure of student debt and

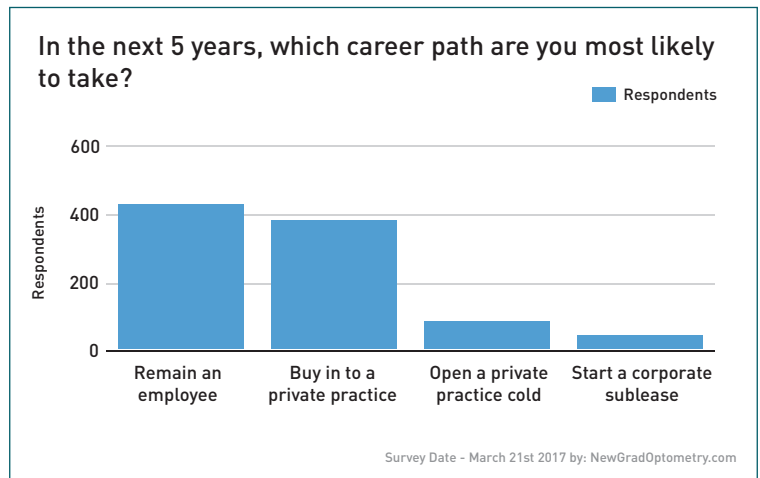
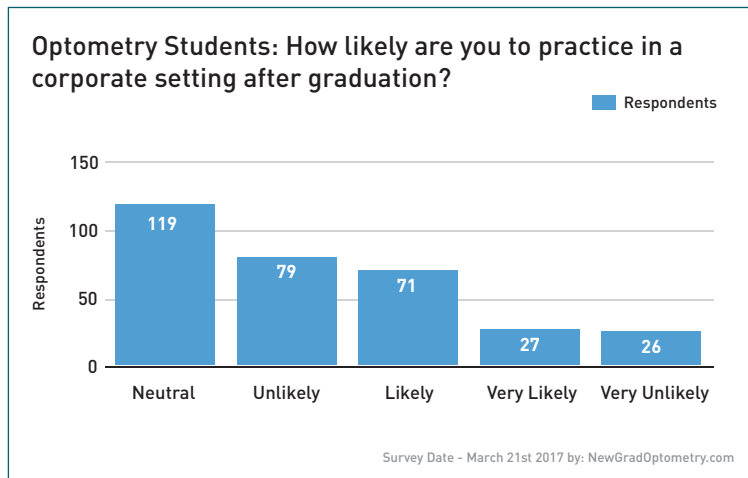
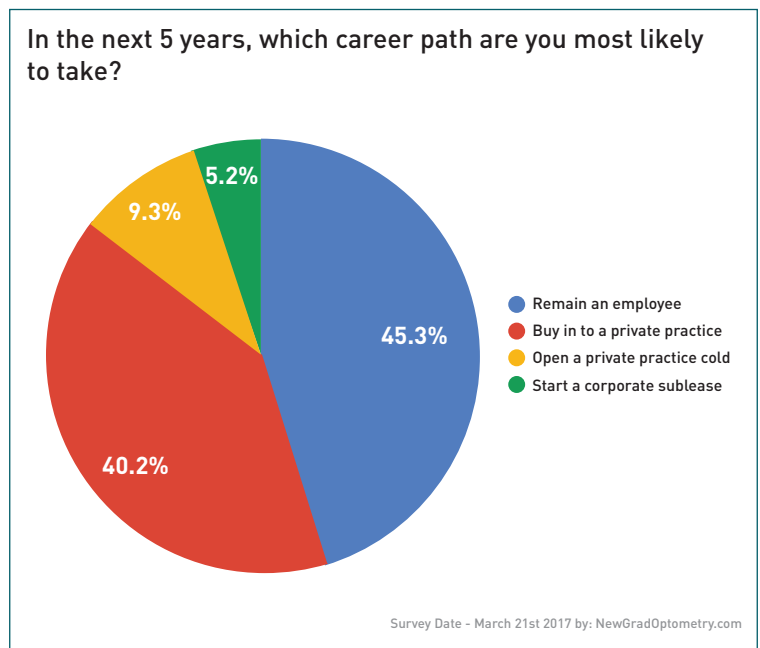
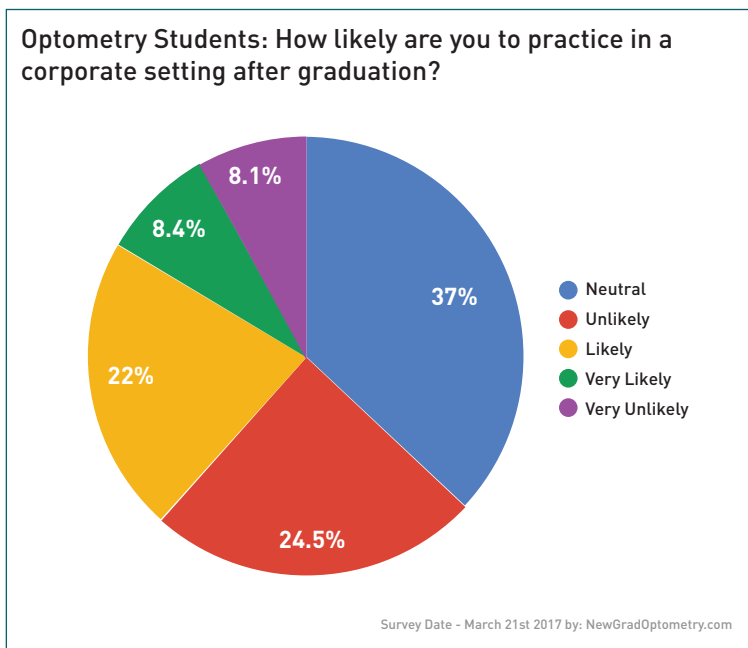
their long-term practice ideals and interests.

Slightly more than half of the respondents worked in a private practice setting at the time of the survey while corporate settings, including employed and sublease situations, made up an additional 30 percent of the respondents. The

remaining 20 percent said they worked in other modalities.

Optometry students were asked about their preferred practice modality and the overwhelming majority said they preferred to work in a pri-

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dent of the Golden Key International Honor Society and was the national liaison to the AOA Contact Lens and Cornea Section this past year. She has also served as UMSL's president of the American Academy of Optometry Student Chapter.

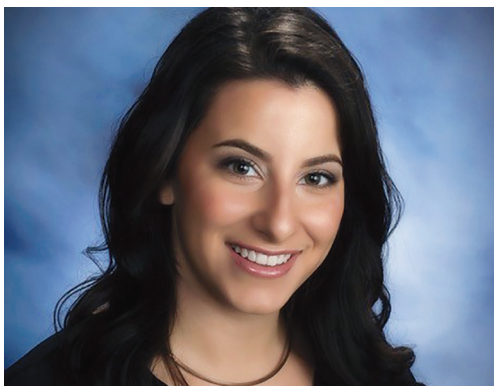
Her school noted that Dahms has been an exceptional leader and a great representative of the college, attending numerous annual American Academy of Optometry meetings and Optometry's Meeting, presenting scientific posters at numerous symposia, and serving as a monitor at the 2016, 2017 and 2018 Global Specialty Lens Symposium in Las Vegas.

At graduation she received several honors, including being awarded the prestigious Outstanding Clinician Award. Dahms has also done research with scleral contact lenses. Dahms reports she'll soon be practicing at the Eye Care Center of Colorado Springs in Colorado Springs, Colo.

HER SCHOOL SAYS... "She has been an exceptional leader and great representative of our College of Optometry."

JULIANNE SHELTON, OD

New England College of Optometry
Boston, Massachusetts



Julianne Shelton, OD, achieved her undergraduate B.S. at Le Moyne College, prior to attending NECO. She said, "I didn't have a declared concentration

throughout all of optometry school but a few of my clinical rotations helped me to become more specialized on the cornea and specialty contact lenses."

Shelton tells *VM* she always knew she wanted to be in a patient care-based profession, but, she said, "I didn't realize I had an interest in the eyes and vision until I had an eye unit in my undergraduate neuroscience class. I found, and still find, that the profession blends together my love of science and my interest in patient care to help others in a meaningful way."

At NECO, Shelton was president of the student council.

Shelton's fourth year clinical experience includes several activities, all of which were completed with honors. Those included time with the VA Hudson Valley Care System in Montrose, N.Y., work with Dr. Stephen Byrnes in Londonderry, N.H., work with Eye Centers of South Florida in Miami and East Boston Health Center in Boston.

As for future plans, Shelton tells *VM* she'd like to move closer to her family in her hometown of Syracuse, N.Y. to hopefully join a private practice.

HER SCHOOL SAYS... "Julianne was president of the student council, the highest leadership role among the students. She is born to be a leader."

MELISSA ZALESKI, OD

Nova Southeastern University
College of Optometry
Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Dr. Melissa Zaleski's parents are both physicians so health care has been a part of her life from an early age, she said. "I love to interact with people and knowing I can help people see is an amazing reason to wake up every morning. I was also really driven to help with children's vision because I had difficulties learning to read as a child and no one could figure out that my eyes were two different prescriptions and that they weren't focusing



together. I would love to pay that forward in my career with visual health and learning."

Zaleski brings her passion for public health and children's vision to her education outlook. She is finishing her Master's degree in Public Health this summer as an intern in D.C. with the AOA office, and is working on advocating for eye exams for children entering kindergarten in certain states.

Zaleski was named Chancellor's Award recipient this year. The award is given to a student who best exemplifies the characteristics of a fine optometric physician—a combination of scholarship, leadership, integrity, humanity and loyalty to the profession. Zaleski served as the AOSA trustee for NSU and was elected as the national vice president of the AOSA. She created a student trade show at NSU called OPTions that allowed industry partners to interact with optometry students.

Zaleski is moving to the Tampa Bay Area with her optometry classmate, and now fiancé, Dr. Samuel Petro. "We are both starting later this summer at different locations once our Florida licenses come in."

HER SCHOOL SAYS... "She also completed her Master of Public Health during her four years of optometry school. We are confident that Dr. Zaleski will continue to move our profession forward in the future." ■

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New Attitudes About Practice Options Emerge From NewGradOptometry Survey

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vate practice after graduation. Given that some 29.4 percent of respondents currently work in a corporate setting and 9 percent say they prefer to work there is indicative, NGO writes, that perhaps students are open to a range of career path choices over time.

In terms of the realities of the “real world” of practice, recent optometry grads felt they could use better preparation from schools about the business aspects of optometry practice. Nevertheless, an overwhelming majority of respondents (82 percent) said they would still choose optometry if they could travel back in time.

Diving deeper, however, NGO learned that when they isolated graduation years from 2017

to 2020 (representing optometry students at the time of this survey), they saw a split of 89.4 percent responding Yes they would still choose optometry and 10.6 percent said No they would not. When they isolated those respondents whose graduation years were 1977 to 2016, representing optometrists at the time of this survey, NGO saw a split of 79.1 percent Yes and 29.0 percent No.

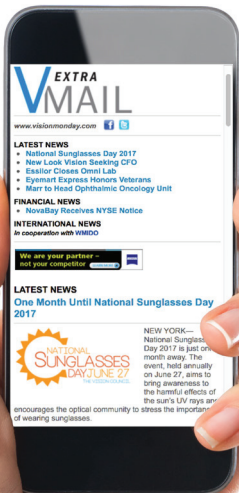
NGO noted, “This potentially indicates that as

optometrists continue practicing, they are more likely to change their answer from yes to no. Is this regret? Burnout? Generational shift?”

It’s hard to know for sure, as NGO qualifies that its survey is not meant to be a stringent, statistically measured survey. But as an attitude gauge, it’s interesting to see what the survey reveals about the ideas and interests among today’s diverse optometric students and new grads. ■

“Recent optometry grads felt they could use better preparation about the business aspects of an optometry practice.”

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