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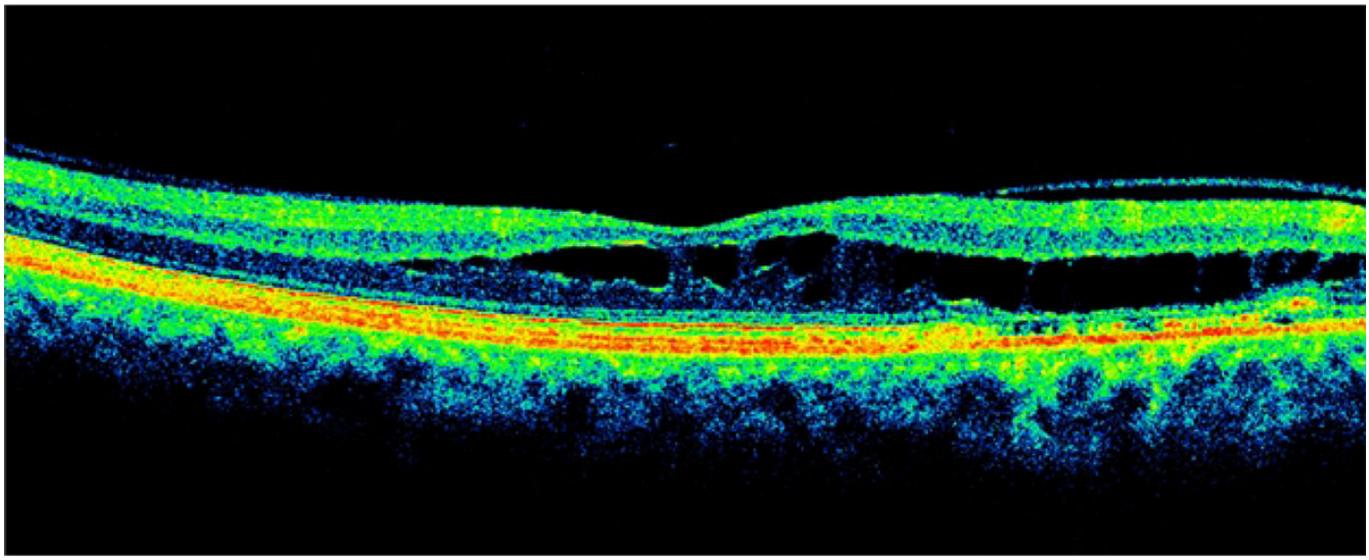

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Articles

Assessing Student Performance in Geometrical Optics Using Two Different Assessment Tools: Tablet and Paper

Gregory M. Fecho, OD, Jamie Althoff, OD, and Patrick Hardigan, PhD | Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)

Abstract
The use of tablets to deliver in-class exams may be appealing to instructors wishing to take advantage of this evolving technology. This study compared two groups: students who took exams using traditional pencil and paper methods, and students who took exams via the SofTest-M application (app) on their iPads. There was no statistically significant difference in exam averages between the two groups. The SofTest-M app provides a valid alternative to pencil and paper for delivering examinations. However, students prefer taking exams using pencil and paper. The results of this study may influence educators' decisions on whether to adopt tablet-based assessments.

Key Words: *tablet, testing, computer-based assessment, paper assessments, student opinions*

Background

Since the release of the first iPad in 2010, tablets have become increasingly prominent in educational settings. According to a 2015 survey by the Pearson Foundation, 51% of college students in the United States own a tablet and use it for academic purposes, while in 2011 only 7% owned a tablet.[1,2] Another survey, by McGraw-Hill, found that 81% of college students used mobile devices for studying in 2014, a 40% increase from 2013.[3] The portability and ease of use of tablets can make many aspects of teaching and learning more interactive and more convenient. It has become common to use tablets in the classroom for conducting formative assessments such as mid-lecture questions to check for student comprehension.[4,5] However, no publications have reported on the utilization of tablets for administering summative assessments such as midterm and final examinations. There are many reports regarding the use of personal computers for this purpose, some showing no significant difference in student performance,[6,7,8] and others indicating that computer-based testing methods should not be considered equivalent to pencil and paper testing.[9,10] Clariana and Wallace[9] describe the "test mode effect," whereby otherwise equivalent tests yield different results when completed with different methods. Their study found that undergraduate students performed better on computer-based assessments than on paper-based assessments. Their results conflict with a previous study in which Lee and Weerakoon[10] discuss the significance of computer anxiety when completing computer-based tests. They found that one-third of health professions students in a microbiology course experienced computer anxiety, and the students performed significantly better on paper-based tests than on computer-based. Leeson[11] describes important factors, such as the student's familiarity with computers, text readability due to screen resolution and font characteristics, and the intuitiveness of the user interface, which may affect student performance on computer-based assessments. Tablet use differs significantly from computer use in these aspects, and there are additional differences such as screen size and the use of a touch screen instead of a mouse. Therefore, the available literature describing computer-based testing should not be

generalized to testing on iPads.

Since August 2012, Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry (NSU) has mandated that every incoming student acquire an iPad for use in classrooms and labs. During the first week of classes, a general orientation is given to familiarize the students with the basic functions of the iPad, including suggested apps, e-mail setup, and data backup strategies. Students have embraced the technology for taking notes and viewing interactive class materials. In Fall 2013, the College of Optometry acquired the ExamSoft program and began utilizing the SofTest-M app. Like other colleges of optometry, the NSU program traditionally administers in-class examinations using printed copies and Scantrons. Questions are typically multiple-choice, with the occasional short answer format, depending on the course. The SofTest-M app allows for a secure assessment to be taken on an iPad by downloading an encrypted exam file that can only be opened with a password. Before the exam starts, the iPad must be “locked” with the Guided Access setting, making it impossible for the user to view other apps or capture screenshots while the exam is in progress. Questions and answers can be randomized to improve security, and several types of test questions can be created. The ability to include pictures or videos within questions increases the potential to test the student’s clinical observational skills and allows the instructor to test in ways not possible with pencil and paper examinations. The ExamSoft program utilizes a user-friendly and secure cloud-based test bank creation system, and a powerful reporting system allows instructors to provide more effective and constructive feedback to the student. Tagging test items with categories allows for long-term tracking of student performance in areas of concern, providing valuable information for individual student growth or overall course or program development. Data collected from these reports can allow instructors to gather more meaningful outcome measures from their courses than simple test averages. Depending on how each question in the test data bank is categorized, the instructor can gather outcome measures on specific topics, test question types, and even college-level accreditation outcome measures.[12]

All incoming optometry students in the Fall of 2013 were given an introduction to SofTest-M as part of the general iPad orientation. This orientation included the requirement to take a mock examination to become familiar with the mechanics of the program. After this general orientation, some instructors began using the program to administer small assessments such as lecture and lab quizzes. These initial experiences with the SofTest-M app and ExamSoft program showed great potential for efficient and secure creation, distribution, and analysis of assessments. Despite some reluctance to using ExamSoft expressed by a few vocal students, grades on these quizzes did not seem to be affected. There were no significant technical difficulties relating to test administration, grading or student test reviews when using ExamSoft.

The numerous benefits of the system for both instructors and students were clear during initial trials. Nevertheless, instructors may feel that adopting a new way of administering an examination could negatively influence student performance. Technical issues may arise, or psychological barriers when using technology in the exam process could negatively affect student performance on critical examinations. Therefore, we felt further research was warranted to determine whether testing on iPads is an acceptable and valid alternative to traditional pencil and paper testing. The goal of this study was to determine if any statistically significant difference exists in test scores in Geometrical Optics when tests are completed using the SofTest-M app on an iPad instead of pencil and paper. Student opinions on using this software were also obtained to determine whether student attitude correlates with exam score averages. Results of this study may influence educators’ decisions to adopt this technology in their courses.

Based on our initial experiences with the software, we hypothesized that Geometrical Optics test score averages would not be significantly affected when tests were completed using the SofTest-M app on an iPad instead of the traditional pencil and paper method.

Methods

The Institutional Review Board of NSU determined this study to be exempt from review for the following reasons: Test scores were naturally available to one of us as the instructor of record for the Geometrical Optics course, the OAT scores and GPAs that were required in the comparison of the groups involved in this study were provided to us de-identified and as separate data sets, and participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous with minimal risk to participants.

This study compared two groups: students who took exams using traditional pencil and paper methods (Fall 2013 group), and students who took exams via the SofTest-M app on their iPads (Fall 2014 group).

During the Fall 2013 semester of Geometrical Optics, three exams were given using pencil and paper and Scantrons. The two midterm exams were each weighted as 20% of the course grade, and the cumulative final exam was weighted as 40% of the course grade. An additional 20% of the course grade was based on homework and quiz scores. Each exam consisted of 26-28 multiple-choice questions with a two-hour time limit. Students used their own calculators for the exams. There were 111 new, first-year students enrolled in the course. One hundred and ten students took the first and second exams, and all 111 students took the final exam. These students had completed the iPad orientation, along with a mock quiz on SofTest-M, at the beginning of the semester, and the instructor administered small-stakes lecture and lab quizzes with the SofTest-M app during this semester to become familiar with test creation, administration and grading. Our Technology Advisory Committee felt it necessary to pilot SofTest-M on these smaller low-stakes quizzes for the 2013 academic year before adopting the new technology for higher-stakes, in-class examinations for Geometrical Optics starting in the Fall of 2014.

During the Fall 2014 semester of Geometrical Optics, three in-class exams were given using SofTest-M on iPads. The exams were identical in weighting, content and order of presentation to the exams given in 2013, with the exception of the last question on the final exam. Upon review in 2013, this item was ambiguous. It was removed from the 2014 final exam, and it was not included in the data for either year. The exams had the same two-hour time limit as the previous year. Students used their own iPads and calculators for the exams. There were 106 new, first-year students enrolled in the course. Two additional students were repeating the course, and their data was not included. One hundred and five students took the first and third exams, and 106 students took the second exam. All of the students had completed the iPad orientation with a mock SofTest-M quiz during the first week of classes, and they had used their own iPads to take at least seven small-stakes SofTest-M quizzes during the early weeks of the Geometrical Optics lecture and lab courses. This allowed all students to become familiar with the iPad testing format before the first exam on the iPad was given. In addition, while the students' first experience with a high-stakes examination using SofTest-M was in this Geometrical Optics course, it is worth noting that they were also using SofTest-M in another optometry course during the Fall 2014 semester for take-home quizzes and in-class examinations.

Protocol for test administration using pencil and paper exams was standard and straightforward during the Fall 2013 semester. However, the use of SofTest-M during the Fall 2014 semester required some changes to the testing protocol. Students were required to download the encrypted exam file onto their iPad. These exam files were available to download several hours before each test began, but the exams were password-protected and therefore inaccessible until the actual start time of the test. There were two instructors present during each test administration who were familiar with SofTest-M and available to address any technical issues during the exam. There were two extra iPads available for student use as needed, as well as several backup paper copies of the exam. Upon entering the exam room, students were given the exam password and several sheets of scratch paper and were expected to prepare their iPads to start the exam. This entails setting the iPad to "Airplane Mode" in order to block internet access and turning on "Guided Access" so that the students are not able to leave the SofTest-M app or take screenshots during the exam. The software requires these settings in order for a secure exam to be

opened in the app. Once all students were prepared, they were told to begin the exam. Upon starting the exam, the SofTest-M app began the two-hour timer set by the instructor. At the end of the time limit, the exam automatically saved and closed. As students completed the exam, they would return their scratch paper to an exam proctor and show the preceptor that their exam was permanently closed and therefore unable to be viewed or modified. Upon leaving the room, students would exit Guided Access mode and reconnect to the internet in order to upload their completed exam file. Any students who forgot to upload their exam file were sent an e-mail reminder, and all exam files were always uploaded and ready to grade within several hours of the end of the exam time.

A quasi-experimental design was employed to look for differences between the two groups: the pencil and paper test group (Fall 2013 group) and the iPad test group (Fall 2014 group). The dependent variable was the raw score on the three Geometrical Optics exams, with a maximum possible score of 26 on the first and second exams, and 28 on the final exam. To control for variation in academic ability between classes, comparisons were made between the pencil and paper test group and iPad test group by undergraduate GPA and academic average OAT score. De-identified GPA and OAT averages for both groups were provided by the Dean of Student Affairs. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all study variables. The Welch t-test was employed to look for differences between the two groups by each exam. Welch's t-test is more robust than a Student's t-test and maintains type I error rates close to nominal for unequal variances and for unequal sample sizes. Furthermore, the power of Welch's t-test comes close to that of Student's t-test, even when the population variances are equal and sample sizes are balanced.[13] Statistical significance was found at $p < 0.05$ and R 3.1.2 was used for all analyses.[14]

An online survey was e-mailed to students at the conclusion of the Fall 2014 Geometrical Optics course to ask them about their experience with the software. Two weeks later, an e-mail reminder was sent. The Fall 2013 students were not surveyed because they were only exposed to small-stakes quizzes and did not take course examinations in class using SofTest-M. The students chose one of five answers for each of the survey questions: "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Neither Agree nor Disagree," "Disagree," or "Strongly Disagree." We assigned a value of 5 for "Strongly Agree," 4 for "Agree," 3 for "Neither Agree nor Disagree," 2 for "Disagree," and 1 for "Strongly Disagree." The mean response and standard deviation were then calculated for each question. The midpoint value for the 5-point scale was 3.0. For statistical purposes we treated the scale as an approximation to an underlying continuous variable whose value characterizes the respondents' opinions or attitudes toward SofTest-M.[15] In describing the trends of student feelings, we used any mean of 3.5 or above as representing "Agree" and a mean of 2.5 or less as representing "Disagree." For simplicity in presenting the survey responses in **Table 2**, we combined the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" responses and calculated the percentage of students that generally agreed with a given statement. We also combined the "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" responses and calculated the percentage of students that generally disagreed with a given statement.

The survey also included free text boxes so students could share strengths, weaknesses and any other general feedback regarding SofTest-M. We used a grounded theory approach in analyzing these responses, relying on our empirical observations and data to qualitatively evaluate the free text responses and inductively obtain the general themes.[16] The steps we followed in applying grounded theory to our data analysis included open axial, and selective coding.[17] The open coding phase involved listing all of the individual statements collected from the survey, analyzing the comments and summarizing the main point of each comment to create an initial label for each statement. For the purposes of this study, a topic was considered significant when three or more comments were given the same label, while comments that were raised only once or twice were not further considered during axial or selective coding. In the axial phase we analyzed the labels made in the open coding phase for relationships and grouped comments into categories and subcategories according to their commonalities. Finally, in the selective coding phase, we were able to determine the broader overriding themes that emerged from these data.

Results

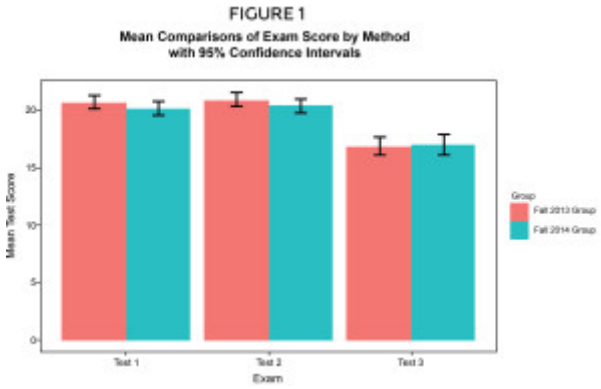

Figure 1: click to enlarge

One-hundred and eleven students constituted the pencil and paper test group, while 106 were in the iPad test group. To examine if the groups had similar academic abilities, we compared their average undergraduate GPA and OAT scores. Using a Welch t-test we found no statistically significant difference by GPA or OAT score **(Table 1)**. Using a Welch t-test we also found no statistically significant difference between the groups for any Geometrical Optics exam **(Figure 1)**.

Survey results

roup	N	M	SD
il 2013 Group	110	20.70	3.32
il 2014 Group	105	20.18	3.42
il 2013 Group	110	20.93	3.35
il 2014 Group	106	20.42	3.09
il 2013 Group	111	16.68	4.31
il 2014 Group	105	17.03	4.83

riable	N	M	SD
il 2013 Group GPA	111	3.33	0.32
il 2014 Group GPA	106	3.33	0.32
il 2013 Group OAT Score	111	314.23	20.12
il 2014 Group OAT Score	106	317.60	21.96

Table 1: click to enlarge

A total of 60 out of 106 students from the iPad group completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 57%. Survey results are presented in **Table 2** and are divided into two categories: student opinions of the SofTest-M application, and student opinions on comparing in-class examinations on paper vs. in-class examinations on the iPad using SofTest-M. Most students agreed that the basic technical aspects of SofTest-M were simple to use. The students found SofTest-M easy to use (4.22 ±0.80, 90% agreed), found downloading the exams simple (4.52 ±0.60, 98% agreed), and found the software easy to adapt to (3.97 ±0.97, 75% agreed). The average response to the question that there were too many technical issues during test-taking fell slightly above our cutoff for “disagree” (2.55 ±1.17, 58% disagreed, 22% agreed).

Table 2: click to enlarge

On average, students prefer to take traditional pencil and paper exams (3.75 ±1.24, 60% agreed). Student feelings were divided regarding whether SofTest-M negatively affected their exam performance (2.78 ±1.42, 32% agreed, 45% disagreed), and whether it took longer to take exams (3.03 ±1.39, 43% agreed, 47% disagreed), and they were divided in their feelings that more instructors should use SofTest-M (2.73 ±1.33, 32% agreed, 43% disagreed). On average, students disagreed with the statement that they did not have time to finish the exams given on the iPad (2.17 ±1.26, 70% disagreed). Student opinions were generally indifferent regarding whether SofTest-M represented an improvement in formatting and presentation of questions (2.75 ±1.17, 38% neither agreed nor disagreed, 40% disagreed). Finally, most students agreed that they needed scratch paper for the exams given on the iPad regardless of course content (4.20 ±0.95, 80% agreed).

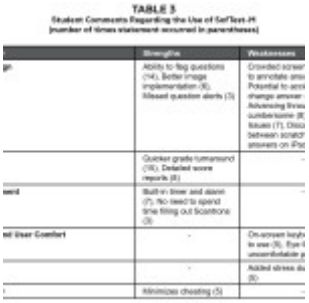

Table 3: click to enlarge

Thirty-four students provided strengths and weaknesses of SofTest-M, and 12 students provided general feedback regarding their use of the software. In total, these students provided us with 159 individual statements. Each of the statements was assigned a label representing the main idea being conveyed. Because the students were asked to provide strengths and weaknesses of using SofTest-M, the comments naturally fell into these two main categories. Sixty-three cited strength comments, and 68 weakness comments were determined to be significant during open coding. Comments were then divided into six subcategories relating to software design, grading, time management, ergonomics and user comfort, stress and exam security. **Table 3** organizes the comments based on this grounded theory analysis and lists the number of occurrences for each statement.

Discussion

We have found that there are no statistically significant differences in average Geometrical Optics exam scores when comparing the traditional pencil and paper method to the SoftTest-M app on iPads. Early studies of computer-based assessments describe a “test mode effect,”[9,10] but more recently published literature implies that performance on computer-based assessments is equal to performance on traditional pencil and paper tests.[6,7,8] Our study further shows that the mode of testing does not affect performance when using this more recently developed tablet-based assessment method.

Perhaps the most striking result from our survey is that most students preferred pencil and paper exams in spite of largely agreeing that SofTest-M is easy to use. We feel this preference is partially due to the students’ comfort with pencil and paper assessments and relative unfamiliarity with SofTest-M. Ward et al.[18] found an increased anxiety level in students taking examinations on a computer compared to those who took exams using pencil and paper. They suggested that the increased anxiety level originates from the unfamiliarity with the technology, and we could expect this anxiety to lessen as exposure increases. While computerized test-taking is not an entirely new concept — the OAT and Part 2 of the National Board exam are given on desktop computers — the overall exposure to computerized testing over the entire career of the student is minimal, while paper examinations remain commonplace. The significance of this point might be apparent when comparing our study results to those of Higgins et al.[19] The much younger fourth-grade students in their study preferred computer-based exams over pencil and paper

exams, perhaps due to the fact that they had spent fewer years developing a strong preference for pencil and paper exams. We agree with suggestions by Ward et al. that students' feelings toward a new technology may improve over time. If instructors in subsequent didactic courses utilize SofTest-M, it is possible that students will become accustomed to taking exams on their iPads, and this increased exposure may reduce the stress of using a new method of testing. Hanson et al.[20] did in fact find that students at the Indiana University School of Medicine reported fewer concerns with computerized testing after taking two tests via ExamSoft on desktop computers than before taking those tests. Stress from using a new test-taking modality was not frequently mentioned in our survey, but more students might have expressed this concern if we had included this topic in the survey questions.

It is also possible that student anxiety manifested as, or resulted from, the perception of inadequate exam time while using SofTest-M. Although most students indicated that SofTest-M did not prevent them from finishing their exam in time, there was a notable minority that felt this was an issue. Our study did not attempt to analyze any differences in speed between groups, and it is unclear whether these students' perceptions were accurate. However, research currently indicates that computerized testing offers an advantage for timed tests because answers do not have to be recorded on a separate answer sheet.[21,22]

Responses to the survey questions also emphasized the students' strong desire for scratch paper during exams. This was also one of the most commonly cited weaknesses of SofTest-M in the free-response section of our survey. This was likely due to the inability of SofTest-M to allow annotation and highlighting of questions and answer choices, a practice that students are accustomed to on pencil and paper exams. Blazer[23] discussed the importance of this feature in a 2010 report for Miami-Dade Public Schools and referred to the use of an electronic marker to highlight passages on computer-based exams. The ability to highlight words and phrases in the question stem was added to the software after our study was completed. Perhaps as the software matures more annotation features such as drawing and writing may be added, and scratch paper will become less of a demand.

Image 1. For long questions or questions with many answer choices, students may have to scroll or adjust the window size to view all necessary information. On the right side of this screen, the Questions List is opened and showing all Flagged Questions from this exam.
Image 1: click to enlarge

The free-response section of our survey implicated the visually crowded screen as another significant weakness of SofTest-M. Students complained that information can get crowded on the screen, and that it is inconvenient to scroll through question text and answer choices for some of the longer questions **(Image 1)**. When using SofTest-M, images or attachments within individual questions may also compete for screen space, although these attachments can be closed and reopened as needed **(Image 2)**. The impact of scrolling on performance in computer-based assessments has been studied in various

settings, and some studies suggest that the ability to view all question content without scrolling results in higher test scores.[19,21,24] However, we hesitate to assume these findings apply to SofTest-M exams because the process of scrolling on a computer is different than on a tablet. Scrolling through information on a computer screen involves a scroll bar, mouse wheel or page up/down keyboard keys. On a tablet, the students place their finger directly on the screen to move the content up or down to the desired location.

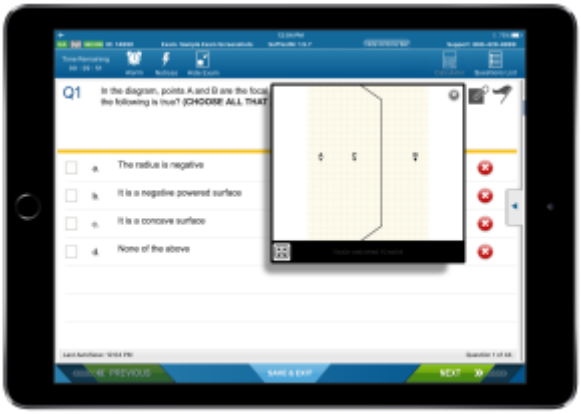

Image 2. A question attachment such as an image or diagram opens automatically when the question is opened. The image may obscure parts of the question text or answer choices, but it can be moved or closed and reopened as needed.
Image 2: click to enlarge

The greatest strength of SofTest-M that was mentioned in the free-response section of the survey was quickly receiving exam scores with detailed category reports **(Image 3)**. Faster scoring and more specific feedback are commonly mentioned benefits of computer-based assessments,[25,26] and Bennet[27] has cited these as important reasons that state education agencies are employing more online tests. At the NSU College of Optometry, Scantrons are scored using an external grading center, and any errors such as a mis-key can cause significant grading delays. ExamSoft, on the other hand, allows for direct control of the grading process with the ability to easily adjust and re-score items and assessments as needed. This has decreased the time it takes for faculty to distribute grades to the students. The ability to tag and categorize questions also enables the instructor to provide customized, detailed feedback regarding a student's performance **(Image 3)** and can help guide the student in determining particular topics that need to be reviewed.

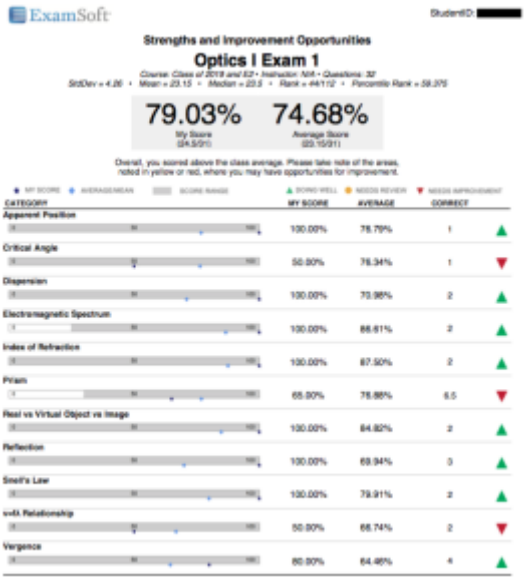

Image 3. Student score reports can be customized to

include more or less information according to instructor preferences.
Image 3: click to enlarge

The ability to flag questions was another commonly mentioned strength of the SofTest-M design. The software has the ability to flag questions so that the student can return directly to the questions by accessing a question list menu **(Image 1)**. This menu can show a quick overview of the unanswered and flagged questions, and a simple tap returns the student directly to these questions. Russell et al.[28] and Johnson and Green[29] confirmed the importance of features such as reviewing questions, skipping questions and changing items that have already been answered. These features allow students to utilize test-taking strategies similar to those they have developed on pencil and paper exams.

The use of any technology introduces the potential of technical problems and software bugs, which could cause serious problems for the administration of an examination. Rabinowitz and Brandt[30] articulated this point, stating that computer crashes are more difficult to resolve than broken pencils. However, during our study, technical issues were rare and never prevented a student from completing and submitting an exam. Our policy is to bring two backup iPads and five paper copies of the exam for student use if needed. The backup iPads were used on occasion for students whose iPads were either stolen or broken, but the paper backup copies were never needed. During examinations for another course, we encountered software bugs in the form of app crashes that exit a student out of the exam. Because the exam is frequently and automatically saved locally to the iPad while the student is taking the exam, no exam progress is lost in the event of an app crash. Resuming an examination is trivial and simply requires a “resume code” entered by the proctor. We did not experience any of these crashes during the examinations in this study. In order to minimize technical issues with the software, we instructed students to keep both the SofTest-M app and the iPad operating system (iOS) updated to their most current versions. However, because the major annual iOS updates (e.g., from iOS 9 to iOS 10) are more likely to create compatibility issues, students are told to wait for approval from our Technology Advisory Committee before completing these particular updates.

Because SofTest-M can only be used on the iPad, and no other available apps allow for secure tablet-based exams, we did not attempt to separate student feelings regarding taking exams using SofTest-M and taking exams using iPads. While the survey focused on gathering student opinions on SofTest-M, distinguishing between feelings toward iPad testing and feelings toward SofTest-M as well as asking questions regarding the general use of the iPad during testing would have been informative. For example, feedback regarding glare from the screen, asthenopia from prolonged viewing of the display, and legibility of the print would have been valuable. It is also worth noting that the survey was only available online, and although it was simple to complete, this may have discouraged participation by students who are uncomfortable with technology and created bias in survey results. A final limitation of the study was the unavoidable use of a quasi-experimental design and the relatively small sample size. Therefore, we suggest others replicate the study.

Further research to compare the anxiety level of students taking examinations using SofTest-M and students using pencil and paper would be useful to increase our understanding of students’ mindsets during exams. Studies evaluating student performance with different question types, especially those available only with computerized testing, such as video questions, can help better define the usefulness of such unique questions in the examination. Students were divided on whether it took longer to complete their examinations with SofTest-M, and this is another possible topic for future study. Lastly, faculty experiences including test creation, category management and exam implementation experience could be explored in future research. Since implementing this study, many more faculty at the NSU College of Optometry have begun using ExamSoft, and initial anecdotal experiences have been largely favorable.

In light of our findings, instructors can confidently implement ExamSoft into their curricula in lieu of paper

and pencil exams for multiple choice-type examinations without fear of a negative impact on student performance. Findings from this study can be used to assure students that their performance will not suffer if an instructor decides to use this modality of testing. The instructor can also inform students that SofTest-M is an easy and approachable system to use. We strongly urge the use of scratch paper for calculation-based examinations because of the limited annotation capabilities of the software. The importance of scrolling completely through both the question stem and answer choices should be emphasized to students. Instructors might also consider making adjustments to test items, such as limiting answer choices or reducing font size, to fit more information on the screen at one time. Students' experiences will be optimal if they are made aware of all software features, such as question flagging, and if instructors take the time to categorize all questions and provide individual student feedback.

Conclusion

We have concluded that there were no differences in test averages between students who took Geometrical Optics examinations using pencil and paper compared with those who took exams via the SoftTest-M app on their iPads. Students were divided on how they viewed their exam performance when using SofTest-M and overall preferred to take traditional pencil and paper examinations. Adoption of new technology in education should be implemented not because it may be trendy, but because it has the potential to produce effective outcome measures that can help strengthen students' understanding of the material in addition to strengthening the curriculum. ExamSoft has the potential of accomplishing these goals, and so far we have had a positive experience using the system. Students may not readily appreciate some of the most significant benefits of ExamSoft, such as the ability to categorize each question, generate individual reports highlighting a student's strengths and weaknesses, and eventually track a student's performance in each of these course topics over the entire curriculum. The advantages of such tailored feedback may become more apparent to students as more instructors take advantage of these features of ExamSoft. We hope the findings from our research help educators make informed decisions regarding the implementation and adoption of tablet-based assessments into their courses and curricula.

Acknowledgement

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Dr. Fecho [fecho@nova.edu] is an Assistant Professor at Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry. He teaches Optometric Theory and Methods and a course on Anomalies of Binocular Vision. He also provides patient care in the Eye Care Institute's Vision Therapy and Binocular Vision Service.

Dr. Althoff is an Assistant Professor at Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry. She teaches Geometrical and Physical Optics and Clinical Gerontology and she provides patient care in the Eye Care Institute's Primary Care and Geriatric clinics.

Dr. Hardigan is a Professor in the College of Medicine at Nova Southeastern University. Dr. Hardigan earned both his masters and doctoral degrees at the University of Wyoming, where he studied psychometrics. He has published more than 120 peer-reviewed abstracts and publications.

Learning Environment: Students' Perceptions Using DREEM Inventory at an Optometry Institute in Pakistan

Dr. Qamar Riaz, Dr. Shazia Sadaf, and Dr. Abdul Hameed Talpur | Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)

Abstract

Purpose: *Educational environment is an important component of a curriculum and an indicator of the quality of its graduates. A number of factors are responsible for shaping the educational environment. This study was undertaken to measure the educational environment of an optometry institute in Pakistan as perceived by its students.* ***Methods:*** *This was a cross-sectional survey conducted at Isra School of Optometry, Karachi, Pakistan, using the Dundee Ready Educational Environment Measure (DREEM). The DREEM questionnaire was administered to all the students of the institute, maintaining anonymity. Global and domain scores for the institute and across different years were calculated using non-parametric tests.* ***Results:*** *For a total of 78 students (90%) who returned the completed questionnaires, the median DREEM score was 61.5% (123/200). The highest percent score was observed for "students' perceptions of academic self" (72%) and the lowest for "students' perceptions of teachers" (56.8%). There was significant difference in the perceptions of students in different years of education.* ***Conclusion:*** *Median DREEM score was more positive than negative. The study highlighted strengths of the program and areas requiring improvement. Remedial measures addressing the areas identified would improve the quality of the educational environment and thus the program.*

Key Words: *Dundee Ready Educational Environment Measure, educational environment, optometry, perception*

Introduction

Educational environment refers to the whole range of components and activities within which learning happens. This includes faculty, teaching and learning methods, learning resources, monitoring and evaluation. Educational environment has been shown to directly affect students' performance both at undergraduate and graduate levels.[1] An educational environment that is not conducive to learning not only impedes learners' ability to acquire new knowledge, thus hindering their growth as professionals, but also adversely affects their social life and contribution in the community.[2] The availability of a learner-friendly environment becomes even more essential in disciplines that are directly related to health care and patient interaction.[3] Optometry is one such profession where optometrists are trained to prescribe and fit lenses to improve vision, and to diagnose and treat common eye diseases using topical diagnostic and therapeutic drugs and non-surgical procedures.[4]

Optometry is an emerging discipline in Pakistan with only three institutes offering graduate programs in vision sciences or optometry. Isra School of Optometry is the only such institute in the province of Sindh. It has been functioning since 2006 and caters to students from other provinces as well. Its facility is equipped with a library, many lecture halls and tutorial rooms, a laboratory and a computer room with internet access. It offers a four-year program during which students gain competence in the theory and contemporary practice of optometry with the aim of protecting, advancing and promoting the vision and eye health of people not only in Pakistan but also in other countries. Currently, 87 students are enrolled in Isra School of Optometry: 31 in the first year, 24 in the second, 20 in third, and 12 in the final year.

The higher numbers of students in the earlier years is indicative of the development of the program over the years.

As with any other program, it is crucial to periodically evaluate the educational environment of the institute as perceived by its students. This helps to identify areas with deficiencies so that measures can be taken to improve them if required. It may also provide the evidence to support continuation of current practices/methods of teaching and learning so they can be shared with other institutes that wish to replicate them. A number of studies have been done to evaluate the educational environment of medical and nursing[5] colleges internationally and in Pakistan.[6,7] No study that explores the educational environment of an optometry institute has been found, but some studies have suggested means for improving learning and teaching strategies in an optometry institute.

A number of instruments have been used in the literature to measure educational environments in medical and allied healthcare education, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. However, the Dundee Ready Educational Environment Measure (DREEM) continues to be the most widely used instrument. The DREEM questionnaire was originally developed at Dundee and released as AMEE Medical Education Guide No. 23 by Genn in 2001 and has been accepted as an international instrument for assessing the educational environment.[8] It has been widely used as an instrument to collect information about the educational environment in many undergraduate health profesional institutions across countries, cultures and nationalities.[9] The instrument's validity has also been established in Pakistan.[10,11]

The aim of this study was to explore areas of strength and weakness in the educational environment at the Isra School of Optometry as perceived by its students using the DREEM questionnaire.

Materials and Methods

A prospective, cross-sectional, descriptive study was conducted at the Isra School of Optometry in Karachi in August 2013. The validated DREEM questionnaire[12] was used to identify perceptions of students at Isra School of Optometry regarding their educational environment, i.e., areas perceived as positive and strengths of the program and areas that might require improvement, so that appropriate timely interventions could be made.

TABLE 1
Guide for Interpreting Overall and Subscale Scores

Domain	No. of Items	Scores	Interpretations
Students' Perception of Learning	12	0 – 12	Very poor
		13 – 24	Teaching is viewed negatively
		25 – 36	A more positive perception
		37 – 48	Teaching highly thought of
Students' Perception of Faculty/Course organizers	11	0 – 11	Abysmal
		12 – 22	In need of some retraining
		23 – 33	Moving in the right direction
		34 – 44	Model course organizers
Students' Academic Self Perception	8	0 – 8	Feelings of total failure
		9 – 16	Many negative aspects
		17 – 24	Feeling more on the positive side
		25 – 32	Confident
Students' Perception of Atmosphere	12	0 – 12	A terrible environment
		13 – 24	There are many issues that need changing
		25 – 36	A more positive attitude
		37 – 48	A good feeling overall
Students' Social Self Perception	7	0 – 7	Miserable
		8 – 14	Not a nice place
		15 – 21	Not too bad
		22 – 28	Very good socially
Overall	50	0 – 50	Very poor environment
		51 – 100	Plenty of problems in the environment
		101 – 150	More positive than negative environment
		151 – 200	Excellent environment

Table 1: click to enlarge

DREEM is a 50-item, self-administered, closed-ended inventory based on students' perceptions of five

areas directly related to their educational environment. These areas are: learning, teaching, academic self-perception, atmosphere, and social self-perception. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale as follows: 4 = strongly agree, 3 = agree, 2 = unsure, 1= disagree, and 0 = strongly disagree. However, 9 of the 50 items (number 4, 8, 9, 17, 25, 35, 39, 48 and 50) are negatively phrased statements and were scored reversely, i.e., 0 for strongly agree, 1 for agree, 2 for unsure, 3 for disagree, and 4 for strongly disagree. The instrument has a total possible score of 200, which is indicative of the ideal educational environment. The Practical Guide described by McAleer and Roff[13] for interpreting the overall and subscale scores, and the number of items in each subscale is given in **Table 1**.

Items with a mean score greater than 3 mainly represent strong areas, while items with a mean score of less than or equal to 2 are indicative of problem areas that require immediate review and remediation. Items with a mean score between 2 and 3 reflect areas that are neither strengths nor weaknesses but could possibly be enhanced.

Data collection

Data was collected using the self-guided DREEM questionnaire administered on the last day of end-of-year exams. This time was selected to ensure maximum participation. Also, by this time every student would have spent at least a year in the institute — time sufficient to understand the educational environment and develop perceptions regarding it. Students were briefed about the aims of the study and the importance of high levels of participation during a face-to-face session in a lecture hall. The DREEM questionnaire was distributed as a hard copy to all 87 students of the institute. The students were asked to return the completed questionnaire on the same day to help ensure a high response rate. Because participation was voluntary, return of the completed forms was taken as consent to participate. Confidentiality was maintained by keeping the forms anonymous and having them collected by a researcher who was not a faculty member at the institute. Approval from the institutional ethical review committee was obtained to conduct the study. The study adhered to the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki.[14]

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPS) version 19 was used for analyzing the data. The completed surveys were manually entered into a Microsoft Excel data sheet and exported to SPS for descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. Medians and interquartile ranges were used to express a measure of central tendency, and non-parametric analytical methods were used. Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric one-way analysis of variance and pair-wise comparisons using a non-parametric multiple comparison procedure were conducted to measure significant differences between the DREEM score and domain scores across different years of education. Significance was taken at $p < 0.05$.

Results

A total of 78 students returned the completed questionnaire, giving an overall response rate of 90%. This rate was 90.3% (n=28) for year 1, 83.3% (n=20) for year 2, 90% (n=18) for year 3, and 100% (n=12) for year 4 students.

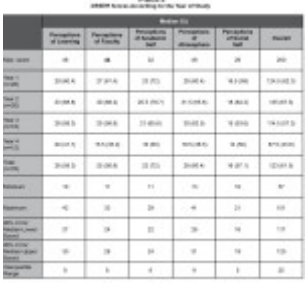

Table 2: click to enlarge

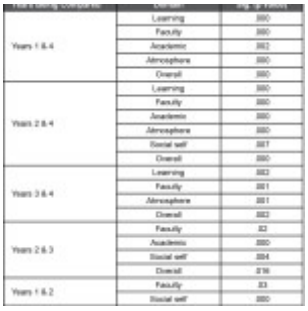

Table 3: click to enlarge

Among the 78 respondents, 36 (46%) were male and 42 (54%) were female. The mean age of the students was 21.4 years (minimum 18 years and maximum 25 years).

The total (median) DREEM score for all the respondents was found to be 123/200 (61.5%). The domain scores for the whole group were compared on a percentage basis because of the different maximum score of each domain. The highest percent score was observed for the “students’ perceptions of academic self” domain (72%) and the lowest for the “students’ perceptions of teachers” (56.8%). By year, the median score was highest for year 2 (135, 67.5%) and lowest for year 4 (87.5, 43.8%). The overall scores of the program and that of years 1 (124.5), 2 (135) and 3 (114.5) indicated students’ perceptions of the educational environment as “more positive than negative.” However final-year students perceived the educational environment as having “plenty of problems.”

Table 4: click to enlarge

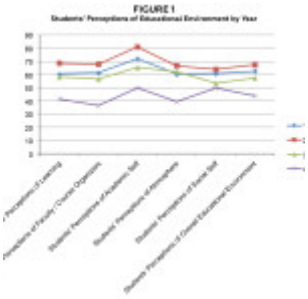

Figure 1: click to enlarge

In order to have a better understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of the educational environment at Isra School of Optometry, the median scores of the five domains and corresponding items of DREEM were also comparatively interpreted using the guide described by McAleer and Roff.[13] **Tables 2 and 3** show median scores for the five essential domains of the DREEM questionnaire according to the year of study.

The scores for all five domains of the first 2 years were better, indicating positive perceptions regarding all domains of the DREEM questionnaire, than the final-year scores, which gave negative perceptions of the educational environment. For year 3, the perceptions scores were positive for all the domains except

"students' perceptions of social self," which was only borderline positive, indicating room for improvement. Final-year students viewed teaching negatively (13-24) and perceived faculty to be "in need of some training" (12-22). Final-year students' academic self-perception was "feeling more on the positive side" (17-24), and "atmosphere" according to their perceptions "needed change as there are many issues" (13-24). Final-year students' "perception of social self" was "not too bad" (15-21). The difference in the scores in the five domains among the students in different years of study is evident in **Figure 1**. Some of the common areas identified as strengths or requiring improvement on the basis of the higher and lower median overall DREEM scores are presented in **Table 4**.

Discussion

This is the first study to report students' perceptions of the educational environment using a validated survey regarding an undergraduate optometry program. The students' perceptions about the educational environment at the institute were evaluated using the DREEM questionnaire. It is more focused to the environment, both classroom and clinical, experienced by students in medical and healthcare-related fields.

The overall response rate of 90% was very good for voluntary participation. This, on one hand, is a sign of students' confidence and trust of the survey methodology. On the other hand, it might be an indication of the students' desire to share their views about their educational environment in order to bring improvement.

The global score at Isra School of Optometry (123) using the DREEM, is similar to that reported from Nigerian medical schools.[6] Although there has been no established objective consensus on an acceptable DREEM score in the medical literature, our score is better than those reported from traditional medical schools in Saudi Arabia (102/200),[15] Srilanka (103/200)[16] and India (107.44)[17] and a nursing college in Malaysia,[5] suggesting a more positive educational environment. However, much effort is needed to achieve the standards of education as set by Roff et al. for Nepalese students (130/200),[6] and for students in a medical school in the United Kingdom (143/200),[18] which is the highest DREEM score reported so far, indicating an environment highly conducive to learning.

When the scores of the students in different years of education were compared, it was observed that the year 1 and 2 students had more positive perceptions of the educational environment than year 4 students. This difference was also true for every domain of the DREEM inventory. Reduction in scores in the final year of training is a finding that has previously been observed in medical[19] and nursing schools.[20] A number of reasons have been suggested for this tendency, including higher expectations[17] at the time of admission, gradual loss of interest over time, and increased stress secondary to involvement in clinical activities, often leading to depression.[21] Unsatisfactory or unpleasant clinical placement experiences, attitudes of placement staff, workload, students' perceived unpreparedness secondary to inadequate knowledge and skills expected, and lack of support in the care of patients have been factors identified as reasons for stress after involvement in clinical activities.[22] All of this may cause loss of interest among students and affect their academic achievement and ultimately their patient care, often resulting in dropout from semesters or programs. Different methods have been employed by institutes to enable students to handle stress. This may include provision of psychological support, counseling and sessions/workshops on stress management.[23] A formal mentorship program has also been shown to improve the academic achievement of students and decrease dropouts.[24] Reviewing the academic and clinical schedule of the students to ensure balance between clinical workload, formal teaching and time for recreational/extracurricular activities can also contribute to reduction in students' stress levels.[25] Program directors need to look into the matter more closely to ensure retention of students in the program and the discipline of optometry.

Only three areas were identified as strengths of the educational environment indicated by an itemized

score of 3.0 or more; one was related to the “students’ perceptions of teachers” and two were related to the “students’ perceptions of academic self” subscale. Most students perceived their teachers to be knowledgeable. They appreciated the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the profession of optometry and the fact that they learned empathy during the course.

An item-wise analysis of different domains of perceptions identified key areas requiring evaluation and modification. Twelve out of 50 items scored less than 2.0. The majority of these items were in the “students’ perceptions of teachers” (5 items out of 12) followed by “students’ perceptions of learning” (3 items out of 12), indicating dissatisfaction with the faculty and teaching and learning at the institute. Educational environment is not limited to the physical infrastructure. Faculty play an important role in developing an environment that is conducive to learning. Some simple steps can improve the faculty-learner interactions and thus build a trustful and respectful relationship required for optimal teaching and learning at the institute. Steps may include involving the students in setting of ground rules, using interactive teaching strategies, encouraging students to ask questions without fear of being humiliated for lack of knowledge, and maintaining the content and session time balance. Sharing of information related to learning objectives and type and time of assessments well in advance and creating student-related institutional policies can also minimize the distance between the faculty and the students. Students should be provided with regular, timely and focused feedback on performance in a manner that is respectful and constructive for the learner and serves as a learning strategy rather than a cause for demotivation. Students who are having difficulties in learning need to be identified early and provided additional support. The teaching and learning strategies should follow the principles of adult learning. Using strategies that are interactive and promote critical thinking will not only reduce boredom and stress among students but is also likely to produce more competent and confident optometrists.

Students’ initial experience with clinical practice can affect their approach to clinical situations as well as their desire to excel further in the discipline. The strikingly low score for the “students’ perceptions of the faculty” by the final year highlights the need for the training of faculty as clinical preceptors in order to enable them to meet the expectations of students while maintaining their clinical workloads.[26] Also, the management should ensure that the faculty are getting adequate breaks, are not overworked, and have a physical environment where they can relax and concentrate on work. This can help even faculty tempers and create a congenial environment both for the faculty and the students. The faculty should also know their role as teachers and as positive role models.[27] Conducting regular course evaluations can also serve as a tool for assessment of the course and that of the faculty members.

The study also identified the group of learners (final-year students with lowest overall median and subscale scores) that require maximum support and guidance for acquiring the required knowledge and skills and gaining confidence to practice independently.

The DREEM questionnaire was helpful in providing valuable insight into how optometry students at Isra School of Optometry perceive their educational environment. It is important to have this information because students’ perceptions of their educational environment significantly impacts their behavior, academic performance and sense of well-being. The study not only identified the strengths of the program but also helped greatly in identifying limitations or the areas of the educational climate at the institute that require improvement. Attempts should be made to identify causes of dissatisfaction among the students and design appropriate remedial measures for weak areas in order to enhance the educational experience. The effect of such remedial measures would be evident in the form of improved students’ perceptions regarding their educational environment. Introducing a system of periodic but regular evaluation of the educational environment (maybe by using the DREEM questionnaire) and devising remedial strategies incorporating students’ feedback could help program managers and organizers to raise and/or maintain the quality of the educational environment. Further studies are recommended to evaluate the relationship between educational strategies and educational environment and identification of factors causing stress in clinical years and at work.

Conclusion

The median DREEM score of students at Isra School of Optometry was comparable to other medical and nursing institutes'. The study identified the strong and the weak areas of the educational environment and indicated critical need for faculty training, improving teacher-student interaction, ensuring constructive feedback to students, rescheduling of timetable by redistribution of teaching and working hours, restructuring clinical experience, and developing a support system for the students. Program managers need to take steps to improve the quality of the educational environment and thus the program by addressing the areas identified.

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Appendix
Dundee Ready Education Environment Measure (DREEM)

1. I am encouraged to participate during teaching sessions
2. The course organizers/teachers are knowledgeable
3. There is a good support system for students who get stressed
4. I am too tired to enjoy the course
5. Learning strategies that worked for me before continue to work for me now
6. The course organizers/teachers adopt a patient-centered approach to consulting
7. The teaching is often stimulating
8. The course organizers/teachers ridicule the students
9. The course organizers/teachers are authoritarian
10. I am confident about passing this year
11. The atmosphere is relaxed during teaching
12. The course is well-timetabled
13. The teaching is student-centered
14. I am rarely bored on this course
15. I have good friends on this course
16. The teaching helps to develop my competence
17. Cheating is a problem on this course
18. The course organizers/faculty have good communication skills with patients
19. My social life is good
20. The teaching is well-focused
21. I feel I am being well-prepared for my profession
22. The teaching helps to develop my confidence
23. The atmosphere is relaxed during lecture
24. The teaching time is put to good use
25. The teaching over-emphasizes factual learning
26. Last year's work has been a good preparation for this year's work
27. I am able to memorize all I need
28. I seldom feel lonely
29. The course organizers/faculty are good at providing feedback to students
30. There are opportunities for me to develop interpersonal skills
31. I have learned a lot about empathy in my profession
32. The course organizers/faculty provide constructive criticism
33. I feel socially comfortable in teaching sessions
34. The atmosphere is relaxed during seminars/tutorials
35. I find the experience disappointing
36. I am able to concentrate well
37. The course organizers/faculty give clear examples
38. I am clear about the learning objectives of the course
39. The faculty get angry in teaching sessions
40. The faculty are well-prepared for their teaching sessions
41. My problem-solving skills are being developed here
42. The enjoyment outweighs the stress of the course
43. The atmosphere motivates me as a learner
44. The teaching encourages me to be an active learner
45. Much of what I have to learn seems relevant to a career in health care
46. My learning environment/classroom is pleasant
47. Long-term learning is emphasized over short-term learning
48. The teaching is too teacher-centered
49. I feel able to ask questions
50. The students irritate the course organizers/faculty

Dr. Riaz [qamar_riaz66@yahoo.com] is a Medical graduate and Masters in Community Eye Health. Currently she is working as Senior Instructor in the Department for Educational Development and the Department of Surgery at Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan. In her role she supports educational needs of busy surgeons and helps them align undergraduate and postgraduate teaching/learning with assessment to achieve graduate competencies. Previously she was involved in the development, implementation and teaching of curriculum and administration of the optometry program at Isra School of Optometry.

Dr. Sadaf is a dental graduate and has a Diploma in Medical Education from the University of Dundee, United Kingdom. She is also an alumnus of the Harvard Macy Institute's Program for Educators in Health Professions Education, offered at the Harvard Medical School in Boston. Dr Sadaf has to her credit 10 years of practical experience in the field of health professions education from her association with the College of Physicians, Surgeons Pakistan and the Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan.

Dr. Talpur, a Medical graduate and Masters in Community Eye Health, is working as the Director of Isra School of Optometry in Karachi, Pakistan. In this role, he has been involved in the development, implementation and teaching of the curriculum for the optometrist.

Concept Mapping as a Tool for Didactic Learning and Case Presentation in an Optometric Curriculum

Jean Pak, MSEd, Elaine Wells, MA, MLS, AHIP(D), David Libassi OD, Susan Schuettenberg, OD, and Kathryn Richdale, PhD, OD | Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)

Abstract

This pilot project aimed to explore the use of a concept mapping tool to support learning and integration in an optometry curriculum. Results suggest that faculty believe concept mapping can help students demonstrate their processing of information and ability to synthesize basic and clinical sciences. Student acceptance of the learning tool was mixed. Better acceptance by students may result if faculty incorporate the learning tool early and consistently throughout the curriculum and provide greater support and feedback to students. Further research is needed to understand any long-term benefits to student learning and clinical care.

Key Words: *concept map, mind map, optometric education, integration, critical thinking*

Introduction

Integrating theory and practice has long been a goal and necessity of medical training. Particularly in the past two decades, medicine has experienced exponential growth in the biomedical knowledge expected of students. Thus, it has become important to develop more systematic methods to integrate acquired knowledge with the aim of better applying it to practical scenarios. A “concept map” or “mind map” is a graphical tool for organizing and presenting knowledge. David Ausubel is widely credited as being the creator of the concept map.[1] His assimilation theory of learning, as presented in his 1968 work *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View* forms the basis upon which the concept map is built.

The effectiveness of concept maps as a teaching tool in healthcare education is equivocal. Maneval et al.[2] showed that nursing students taught skills using their traditional care-planning method scored significantly better on examinations than students taught with a concept mapping method. A review by Pudelko et al.[3] suggested that there was not sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis that mapping improved the acquisition of knowledge, memorization or recall. On the other hand, it has been shown that employing concept maps in problem-based learning tutorials is feasible, acceptable to both students and teachers, and can enhance learning and exam performance.[4-6] Specifically, Torre et al.[7] showed that the use of concept maps strengthened the connection between theoretical information and clinical practice, promoting a higher capacity for problem-solving and holistic thinking and improved recognition of patterns or trends in clinical care. It was thought that this facilitated the ability to form and evaluate differential diagnoses by medical students. Participants in this project indicated a sense of connection between learning styles and the perceived value of concept maps.[7] Similarly, nursing students who self-identified as visual learners reported feeling that concept maps were easier to master.[8] These findings suggest that mapping exercises may not support learning equally for all students.

In 2010 the curriculum at the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Optometry was revised. One of the goals of the revised curriculum was to improve the ability of students to integrate basic and clinical sciences. The purpose of the pilot projects presented here was to gauge the utility and acceptance of concept maps among select groups of optometry students, and to determine whether the

exercise improved their ability to integrate didactic knowledge and clinical care in a clear, cohesive way.

Methods

This pilot project was approved by the SUNY Optometry Institutional Review Board as exempt under educational settings (Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1)). The project was performed in three arms, with each arm utilizing the concept map software Mindomo (Mindomo, Expert Software Applications, Timisoara, Romania). Each arm of the project was performed successively, incorporating lessons learned from the prior projects. In each arm, the Academic Program Coordinator (JP) and Library Director (EW) provided demonstrations of the software to the course instructors and student participants.

Mindomo is a cloud-based software presentation program that allows real-time collaboration but can also support off-line use. The software integrates with Google Drive, Microsoft PowerPoint, Blackboard and Dropbox, and maps can be saved in multiple formats. To begin constructing a map in the program, the user chooses a template and assigns a title to the map. The user can then create a main topic and subtopics with further branches to expand areas of interest. Users can add photos and links to websites, journal articles or other points of reference.

The first arm of this project was a small (n = 5) focus group with third-year students in a Contact Lens II course. The goal was to allow students time to utilize the software with a given task and to provide feedback. Students volunteered to participate in a one-hour guided concept map instruction session. Topics for the concept maps were selected from the Contact Lens II curriculum by the Course Instructor (KR) to encourage incorporation of basic knowledge (e.g., ocular anatomy, optics) and clinical application (e.g., fitting of orthokeratology or multifocal contact lenses). Students selected from the list of potential topics and, after an in-person training session, were allowed to work with the software for the entire semester. They were asked to provide feedback to the Course Instructor, Academic Program Coordinator or Library Director.

In the second arm of the project, second-year students (n = 84) were invited to complete a concept map as part of the Contact Lens I course. The project was included in the syllabus as a graded assignment. The students were assigned to groups of six with individual grade-point averages taken into consideration to ensure a balance of academically strong students in each group. The Course Instructor (DL) provided general topics based on learning objectives in the curriculum, and each group selected one topic. Topics included how to identify appropriate contact lens candidates and how to decide which lenses and care systems are best for a patient. In addition to receiving instructions on how to use the software, the third-year Contact Lens II students were asked to present their concept maps to the rest of the class, both contact lens Course Instructors, the Academic Program Coordinator and the Library Director at the end of the term. Students were also asked to answer questions about their experience with the concept mapping exercise.

For the third and final arm of the project, the concept mapping tool was introduced to first-year students in the Integrative Seminar course (n = 93). The college's Integrative Seminar course incorporates observation in the college's clinical care facility to enable case-based learning using small-group discussions of real patient cases. For this arm of the project, each student was asked to create a map around a case he or she observed in clinic. The Instructor for Integrative Seminar (SS) was available throughout the term to assist students in selecting a case and creating their concept maps. Students were asked to submit their concept maps to their small-group discussion leader at the end of the term, and eight of the best concept maps were presented as part of a schoolwide grand rounds presentation. All students were also asked to complete a survey about their use of the concept mapping tool and to complete a Felder & Solomon Learning Style Inventory questionnaire.[9,10] This questionnaire is used to determine individual preference to "Active-Reflective, Sensing-Intuitive, Visual-Verbal and Sequential-

Global Thinking" learning styles. In general terms, Felder describes active learners as those who learn best by active discussion and engagement, whereas reflective learners do better with passive or solitary methods. Sensing learners prefer facts and established methods, while intuitive learners prefer discovery and broader inquiry. Visual learners prefer diagrams or flow charts, while verbal learners tend towards written or spoken explanations. Finally, sequential learners appreciate step-wise learning, while global learners grasp things better as a large picture or model. Many people can express or feel comfortable with some characteristics of each type of learning style, depending on the setting, topic or other factor.

A few volunteers from the Integrative Seminar course were asked to participate in a one-hour post-activity focus group (n = 10). Open-ended questions about their experience with the concept mapping exercise, including the impact on their learning, participation in Integrative Seminars and the relationship between learning style and the use of concept maps, were used to facilitate the discussion.

Results

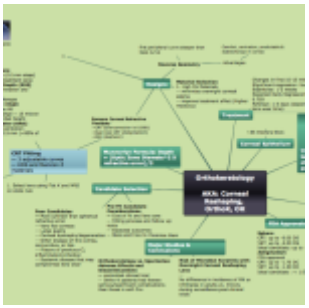

Image 1. A concept map for orthokeratology contact lenses.
Image 1: click to enlarge

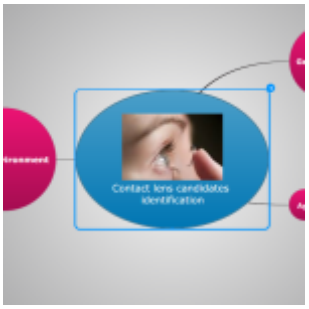

Image 2. A section of a concept map for selection of a good contact lens candidate. View the full map here.
Image 2: click to enlarge

An example of a concept map created in the Contact Lens II course by third-year students is shown in **Image 1**. The orthokeratology concept map demonstrates a student's integration and consideration of corneal anatomy, lens parameters, fitting considerations, and major research studies, among other things. The student also incorporated images she thought important to helping her understand the fitting of orthokeratology lenses.

General feedback from third-year students was that the tool required some explanation and practice to use. Some students found it helped to organize their thoughts, but others preferred their own study methods. The Course Instructor reported that it was a useful exercise to see which concepts the students thought to be key learning points and where there were gaps in understanding. She felt that it provided valuable insight into the breadth and depth of the students' grasp of the topic.

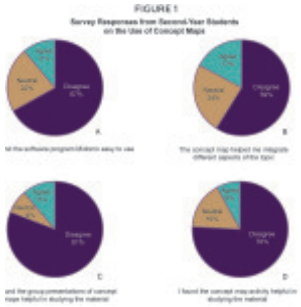

Figure 1: click to enlarge

An example concept map created in the Contact Lens I course is shown in **Image 2**. This concept map outlines potential contact lens candidates based on considerations such as systemic health, environment, age and ocular findings. The faculty members attending the concept map presentations were able to ask questions and give feedback directly to the student groups during their presentations. The faculty members felt that the concept map presentations were a good review of concepts and allowed them to clarify misinterpretations and questions prior to the final examination. They liked that it showed the students' ability to integrate and present course material in a way that is not typically done in a didactic course.

There was an 85% response rate to the second-year Contact Lens I student post-mapping survey (n = 71 of 84). Categories were collapsed into three from five categories (Agree/Strongly Agree, Neutral, and Disagree/Strongly Disagree) **(Figure 1)**. The majority of students in the class felt that Mindomo was not easy to use **(Figure 1A)** and that the concept maps did not help them integrate the material **(Figure 1B)**. They also did not find the group presentations helpful in reviewing the material **(Figure 1C)**. Only 8% said that the concept maps were helpful for studying **(Figure 1D)**. Open feedback from the students suggested that they were not open to new learning tools at this point in their education, suggesting that it might be better to introduce the tool during the first year of the curriculum. Faculty and student discussion raised questions as to whether learning style had an influence on student acceptance. This advice led to the third arm of the project and incorporation into a first-year course.

Image 3. A section of a concept map for ocular manifestation of Down Syndrome. View the full map here.
Image 3: click to enlarge

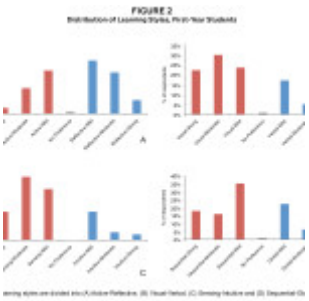

Figure 2: click to enlarge

The final arm of the project with first-year students incorporated both hands-on and written instruction in concept map building, as well as instruction on how to find and utilize didactic and clinical information to review and present a clinical case. **Image 3** shows a sample concept map that was created for the first-year Integrative Seminar course. This map is a review of ocular associations with Down Syndrome and it demonstrates a first-year student's incorporation and broad understanding of the many clinical manifestations he/she may come across during an examination. The signs and symptoms are elaborated upon with references, photo and video documentation and further explanation. The Course Instructor found the mapping exercise a good way to assess students' ability to cohesively integrate and present multiple aspects of clinical cases.

The distribution of learning styles in the first-year class as determined by the Felder & Solomon questionnaire is shown in **Figure 2**. Overall, there was a tendency toward more reflective, visual, sensing and sequential learners; however, there was a wide range of learning styles in the class.

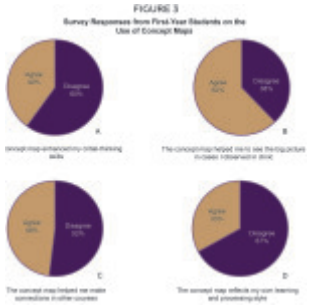

Figure 3: click to enlarge

Table 1: click to enlarge

The post-activity survey from the third arm of the project demonstrated that the majority of students preferred to visualize or outline their map in the initial design **(Table 1)**. More than half wanted to get just a brief introduction before exploring the software on their own, and 51% would be likely to create new maps similar to what they had done previously. When asked about the utility of concept mapping, about half saw no utility, but the other half found it useful for bringing together concepts or understanding clinical cases better. Approximately 40% of students felt that the concept map enhanced their critical-thinking skills **(Figure 3A)**. In addition, 62% of the respondents indicated that the concept map helped them see the big picture in their clinical case presentations **(Figure 3B)**. About half of the students indicated that the concept map helped them make connections to other courses **(Figure 3C)**. But only one-third thought that the concept mapping exercise reflected their individual learning style **(Figure 3D)**.

The first-year focus group further demonstrated that the experience and impact on learning among participants varied. Some students indicated that the concept maps helped them to see the bigger picture and organize information and thought that it could be of benefit if the exercise were integrated as a continuous project throughout the program. Some continued to use the software in other courses in the

curriculum. However, many students cited concerns over the time it took to complete the maps and questioned the utility compared to other methods of study. Many students also felt that, despite the additional training, they still needed more instruction on the technical aspects of the software. Some students reported that they felt other types of presentation software were easier to use.

Discussion

A review of the literature on concept mapping in medical education reveals that there are many factors that can influence its acceptance and viability as a learning tool. Harrison and Gibbons[8] noted that students expressed negative feelings about concept mapping when they did not fully understand the reason for creating the maps and when they felt that this new learning strategy was imposed upon them. Students at the SUNY College of Optometry echoed this sentiment when concept mapping was introduced in the second and third years of their optometric studies. Student feedback demonstrated that by this point in the curriculum, they had developed their own methods of studying and many objected to having to learn and use a new study tool. This was even the case for some first-year optometry students who likely developed study methods during their undergraduate work. Many graduate level students simply may not be open to trying new study methods without solid proof of efficacy.

Contradicting many students' lack of enthusiasm for the learning tool, faculty reported that it was a useful tool to demonstrate student knowledge, ability to organize and present thoughts, and to integrate key concepts of a course or clinical case. That there is a discrepancy between student and faculty experiences with concept maps is not entirely surprising. From the first to the third arm of this pilot project, the authors learned that making the exercise part of the course was important, as was thorough and continued support for use of the software. It is likely that continued use across multiple courses would improve students' comfort and efficiency with the tool. This would likely also influence their thoughts on the utility of the learning tool. It is important that instructors utilizing non-traditional learning and assessment methods clearly share with students how the exercise can benefit their learning above and beyond typical written examinations or case presentations. These kinds of tools can serve as a future reference beyond any single course, for example, to review for board exams or as a quick reference in clinic. Another example is that a glaucoma map could be created as a single point of reference for diagnostic criteria, pharmaceutical dosing information, corneal thickness and intraocular pressure lookup tables, etc.

Previous literature suggested that learning style may have an effect on the utility and adoption of concept maps.[4] The SUNY first-year students tended to be more visual, sequential, sensing and reflective learners. The skew toward reflective and sensing learners may also partially explain why many of the students didn't embrace the active, broader, more global view of concept mapping.

There are many different platforms for creating concept maps including Inspiration, MindMap, Creately, Prezi, and others. Some are free and others, like Mindomo, require a license for expanded features. The costs generally vary with the number of users. Mindomo was selected for this pilot project population based on a personal recommendation and the software's sharing, storing and collaboration features. The cost for the SUNY student class size was reasonable ($90 for a six month license plus $250 for six months for 100 users). Some advantages of these concept mapping systems include features that allow a user to zoom in and "drill down" for more information and make presentations more dynamic and interactive with animation. These systems readily allow the addition of links to external photos, videos or other reference materials.

There are some limitations to this pilot project. The sample sizes of the focus groups were small and may not fully represent all students. This project was done in three iterations using learning from each arm to modify the next project. While this allowed us to improve the implementation each time, the same data points were not collected for all classes and thus the data cannot be compared across classes.

Finally, these were all cross-sectional projects with only one map done per student/group, and there is no information about the acceptance and utility of continued implementation of concept maps throughout the curriculum or over time. In the future, a study could randomize half of a first-year optometry class to use a new learning tool throughout their four years of study and compare performance in the courses, in clinic or on National Board Exams. There is limited information on the ability of learning tools to improve short- or long-term knowledge in a clinical setting. In an undergraduate setting, Burdo and O'Dwyer[11] compared concept mapping to retrieval (self or small-group repeated recall testing) and showed that retrieval practice did improve performance on standardized exams. The idea behind retrieval practice is that the more learners actively practice using (retrieving) information, the better they retain the information. Clinical practice involves broader thinking and integration across multiple courses and longer retention of material than any single standardized course exam, thus larger, longitudinal studies would be required to fully assess the impact of any new learning method on clinical training.

Despite these limitations, the pilot projects presented here provide useful baseline information on how concept mapping might be utilized in an optometry curriculum. Based on the pilot projects and student feedback, we recommend the following to schools or instructors interested in incorporating concept maps into their curricula:

- introduce concept mapping early in the curriculum before students have formalized their study habits and methods
- weave the concept mapping exercise throughout the learning experience and across multiple courses in the didactic and clinical curriculum to increase student comfort with the tool
- ensure that students have sufficient training to utilize the software via tutorials, written reference materials and continued technical support
- provide direct feedback to students and emphasize the benefits of concept mapping exercises in their ability to allow students to demonstrate their depth and breadth of knowledge, ability to highlight key concepts, etc.

Conclusions

The success of incorporating new learning tools into any curriculum depends on many factors, but especially instructor support and student engagement. While it is clear that faculty see learning benefits of concept mapping exercises, such benefits must be translated back to students for them to embrace the tool. Further research is needed to fully assess the utility of concept mapping in healthcare education.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank Dr. Richard Madonna, Dr. David Troilo, Dr. Cecilia Chao and Dr. Suresh Viswanathan, for their support of this project. The project was funded by a grant from the American Optometric Foundation (KR).

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Jean Pak [jean.pak@gmail.com] is the Academic Program Coordinator at the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Optometry. She has a master's degree in higher education student affairs administration from the University of Vermont.

Elaine Wells is the Director of the Harold Kohn Vision Science Library at SUNY College of Optometry. She has a master's degree in Library Science from Rutgers University and is a distinguished member of the Academy of Health Information Professionals.

Dr. Richdale is an Assistant Professor and Director of the Clinical Vision Research Center at the SUNY College of Optometry. She teaches and conducts research in the areas of cornea and contact lenses and accommodation and presbyopia.

Dr. Libassi is an Assistant Clinical Professor and Supervisor of the Cornea and Contact Lens Residency at the SUNY College of Optometry. He teaches contact lens fitting and care in the classroom and in the University Eye Center clinic.

Dr. Schuettenberg is an Associate Clinical Professor and the Primary Eye Care Residency Supervisor at SUNY College of Optometry. She lectures to the first-year class and has been teaching interns and residents in the University Eye Center clinic for 25 years.

Features

Announcement

Research Teams Receive 2016 ASCO Educational Starter Grants

Desiree Ifft | Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)

The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry is pleased to announce the recipients of its 2016 Educational Starter Grants, which are dedicated to supporting educational research. *A generous donation from Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Inc. has provided funding for this year's grants.* We applaud all faculty who submitted grant applications this year.

The recipients are:

- Patricia Cisarik, OD, PhD, and Kristina Haworth, OD, PhD, FAAO (Southern College of Optometry) for "Development of a Digital Training Module for the Systematic Optic Disc Evaluation"
- Crystal Lewandowski, BS, OD, and Thomas Andrea, BS, OD (New England College of Optometry) for "The New England College of Optometry Student Perception of Cultural Competence"
- Valerie Wren, OD (Western University of Health Sciences College of Optometry) for "Development of Educator Consensus on Entry-Level Competencies in Brain Injury Visual Rehabilitation"

Industry News

Invitation to Particpiate

Upcoming Theme Edition Will Focus on Diversity, Cultural and Linguistic Competence

Desiree Ifft | *Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)*

A future edition of *Optometric Education* will focus on the theme of diversity and cultural and linguistic competence. The edition will focus on diversity of our students, faculty and profession and all aspects of cultural and linguistic competence, including professional, organizational and individual responsibility.

The deadline to submit manuscripts is Dec. 31, 2016. Submit a cover letter and intact and blind copies of the manuscript with original figures electronically to submissions@opted.org. Please identify in the cover letter that the manuscript is intended for the diversity theme edition of the journal.

For additional information on the theme edition, please contact Gary Chu, OD, MPH, FAAO, or Aurora Denial, OD, FAAO.

Industry News

Invitation to Participate

Upcoming Theme Edition Will Focus on International Optometric Education: Global Expansion and Transformation

Desiree Ifft | Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)

Over the past 20 years, the profession of optometry has undergone dramatic global changes: expanding scope of practice, increasing quality assurance expectations, significant diversification of students, and the accelerating impact of information technology. Underpinning these changes has been the critical role of international optometric education in supporting and catalyzing this transformation. The same global forces that are driving the transformation of the profession are also creating challenges and opportunities for optometric educational institutions. Student, faculty, patient and institutional expectations are converging and greater accountability is expected. This includes such areas as clinical competency, professional ethics, interprofessional collaboration and curricular innovation.

This theme issue builds on the work of the ASCO International Optometric Education Committee and International Optometric Educators Special Interest Group (SIG).

Authors are invited to submit scholarly articles that address this theme and underscore innovation and the impact educational institutions are having on their students, the profession and the communities they serve. We encourage scholarly articles that are translational and promote global dissemination. **Please submit manuscripts by March 1, 2017.** Submit a cover letter and intact and blind copies of the manuscript with original figures electronically to submissions@opted.org. Please identify in the cover letter that the manuscript is intended for the international theme edition of the journal.

We are pleased to have Anthony F. Di Stefano, OD, MEd, MPH, Salus University, serve as the Guest Editor of this issue. For more information, please e-mail journal Editor Aurora Denial, OD, FAAO.

Industry News

Don't Miss It

Coming in December

Desiree Ifft | Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)

Stay tuned to your Inbox for the announcement that the Winter 2016 issue of *Eye on Education* — the online newsletter from the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO) — is available.

In the issue, you can read about the recent appearance of ASCO President Karla Zadnik, OD, PhD, on *All Sides with Ann Fisher*, a public affairs talk show broadcast by WOSU 89.7 NPR News in Ohio. The discussion with Dr. Zadnik coincided with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Contacts Lens Health Week.

Also: Visit ASCO's website to take advantage of a variety of resources, including the recently posted "Career Opportunities for ODs in Academia: Teaching & Research Needs," a PowerPoint module that explores the need for increasing the faculty ranks at optometric institutions.

Industry News

Industry News

Desiree Ifft | Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)

Industry News

Students Can Participate in Clinic Trip to Tanzania

Luxottica and OneSight, a global non-profit organization, are inviting optometry students to assist in providing the gift of sight for people who need it most. Students can apply to participate in a new week-long clinic in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, working under the supervision of licensed optometrists performing comprehensive eye exams and supporting a team of Luxottica volunteers in the manufacturing and dispensing of eyewear. The clinic was designed in partnership with the American Optometric Student Association (AOSA) and the International Medical and Technological University in Tanzania. It will take place May 5-13, 2017, and serve more than 3,000 patients in Dar Es Salaam.

“We’re excited to welcome the AOSA and OD students to the Luxottica and OneSight families. I want to commend AOSA President Erick Henderson and the AOSA Board, who have really helped craft this experience for their fellow students,” says Dr. Jason Singh, Luxottica’s Chief Medical Officer. Commenting on the opportunity, Henderson says, “I’m excited about the partnership with OneSight and Luxottica. I know many optometry students who are passionate about helping the world see and eager to utilize their skills as future ODs by working with Luxottica doctors in this very special clinic.”

Students can apply online from Dec. 1-14, 2016, to be part of the clinic. Clinic teams will be announced in February 2017. For those selected, Luxottica will pay for the airfare, accommodations and meals associated with the clinic.

OneSight was founded in 1988. Its mission is to eradicate the global problem of 1.1 billion, 1 in 7, people not having access to vision care.

Paper Evaluates Utility of Ultra-Widefield Retinal Imaging

A paper recently published in the journal *Retina* explains the basic principles of ultra-widefield fundus imaging and describes its clinical utility for a variety of retinal and choroidal disorders [Nagiel A, Lalane RA, Sadda SR, Schwartz SD. Ultra-widefield fundus imaging: a review of clinical applications and future

trends. Retina. 2016;36(4):660-78]. The authors of the paper conducted a systematic review of the literature using the search terms Optos, optomap, panoramic, ultra-widefield, wide-angle and ellipsoid mirror, which yielded 128 publications they deemed relevant.

Among their conclusions, the authors state that Optos ultra-widefield imaging has become an essential tool for identifying peripheral retinal and vascular pathology and is providing new insights into many disorders both in the periphery and posterior pole. While citing some "hurdles to more widespread use," they also state that the technology "is evolving to become the standard-of-care imaging modality for many diseases" and enabling new applications in screening and telemedicine. For more information about the ultra-widefield product portfolio, visit the Optos website.

Fundus Camera/OCT Instrument Provides Automation, Versatility

With its 3D OCT-1 Maestro System, which combines a high resolution color non-mydriatic retinal camera with the latest Spectral Domain OCT technology, Topcon Medical Systems aims to set a new standard in clinical utility. Among the features of the 3D OCT-1 Maestro are a rotating touch panel, fully automated alignment, focus and capture, PinPoint Registration that indicates the location of the OCT image within the fundus image, and automated segmentation including retinal nerve fiber layer (RNFL), total retina, ganglion cell layer (GCL) + inner plexiform layer (IPL), and GCL + IPL + RNFL.

The 3D OCT-1 Maestro has been cleared by the FDA and is available through several U.S. Topcon distributors. For more information about the system, visit the Topcon website.

New Daily Contact Lens for Presbyopes

Now available from Alcon are Dailies Total1 Multifocal contact lenses, which are daily disposable lenses designed for people with presbyopia. The advanced features of Dailies Total1 Multifocal aim to address the specific vision needs of presbyopes, including end-of-day dryness. The optical design of the lenses is Alcon's multifocal Precision Profile technology, which is designed to offer a smooth progression of power for seamless transitions between distant, intermediate and near vision. Alcon has also launched a rebate program to help eyecare professionals provide more of their patients with access to daily disposable contact lenses.

Also: Alcon appointed JeanMarie Davis, OD, FAAO, to the position of Director of Professional Relations & Practitioner Partnerships as part of the U.S. Vision Care Professional Affairs team.

Mills is Organization's New CEO

Following the retirement of Mike Daley, Ashley Mills is the new CEO of The Vision Council. According to the organization, Mills brings more than 20 years of progressive trade association management, marketing and leadership experience to the position. She joined The Vision Council as Vice President of Tradeshows & Meetings in January 2016 after serving as Director of Communications for the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation.

"I am thrilled to have the opportunity to lead The Vision Council forward," Mills said. "Thanks to Mike Daley's careful stewardship of the association, the great work of the team of professionals who serve our membership, and the commitment and high level of engagement among our volunteer leadership, the organization is poised to be even more effective and impactful in delivering on our mission to grow the marketplace and ensure the success of our members."

Also: The Vision Council plans to contribute $3 million to the Think About Your Eyes campaign in 2017, an increase from its 2016 contribution of $500,000, in response to the success of the campaign in educating consumers about the importance of eye exams.

Annual Student Scholarship Competition Returns

It's time to start thinking about the 2016-2017 Walmart and Sam's Club Health and Wellness optometry scholarship competition, Project Foresight. Project Foresight is a national student competition that highlights the vision of Walmart and Sam's Club Health and Wellness to provide quality, affordable, accessible health care for everyone. This year's contestants will present on how they envision the future of the Walmart/optometry partnership.

Project Foresight is open to all students at ASCO member institutions who are first- through third-year students during the 2016-2017 academic year. Via a process that begins soon, eight two-member teams are selected to compete in the final round of the contest, which will take place during Optometry's Meeting in Washington, D.C., in June 2017. Each team selected for the final round receives a team scholarship of $1,500 and a $1,500 grant for traveling to the competition. The winner of the national contest receives a $15,000 team scholarship and traveling trophy. The runner-up receives a $5,000 team scholarship.

To request an entry form, e-mail Regional Talent Specialist Dr. Ramon Yalldo.

Actress Featured in Dry Eye Awareness Campaign

Actress Marisa Tomei has partnered with Allergan to raise awareness and help to educate consumers about chronic dry eye disease. Tomei was recently diagnosed with dry eye and hopes that by sharing her story she can help others learn more about the disease and encourage them to speak with their eye doctors.

“At first I didn’t give my dry eyes much thought, but after a while they began bothering me throughout the day, causing me to take frequent breaks from filming to reapply over-the-counter eye drops,” Tomei said. “After examining my eyes, my eye doctor told me I have a type of chronic dry eye disease.” Tomei was prescribed Restasis (cyclosporine ophthalmic emulsion 0.05%) to improve her eyes’ natural ability to produce tears.

Patients can learn more about Tomei’s story and take a Dry Eye Quiz at Restasis.com. For every Dry Eye Quiz taken through Dec. 31, 2016, Allergan will donate $1 to Guide Dogs for the Blind (minimum donation $50,000 and maximum donation $100,000), a charitable organization that empowers the lives of the visually impaired by fostering exceptional partnerships between people, dogs and communities.

Company Opposes Deregulation of Contact Lens Industry

Johnson & Johnson Vision Care Inc. announced its renewed and continued commitment to advocate for the doctor-patient relationship and against legislation that threatens to undermine patient health and deregulate the contact lens industry. To support its advocacy efforts, the company has discontinued its Unilateral Pricing Policy and is replacing it with new programs to ensure broad access and support the needs of patients, doctors and customers.

“The patient comes first,” said Millicent Knight OD, Vice President of Professional Affairs. “We believe that it is in the best interest of the patient to see an eye doctor on a regular basis, and we will continue to advocate state by state to protect that relationship.” Proponents of deregulation advocate for online

prescribing of contact lenses and extending contact lens prescription expiration limits.

The company's new approach includes category growth initiatives and a rewards program that allows patients to submit for savings before they leave their eye care professional's office.

Also: As of September 2016, Johnson & Johnson had entered into a definitive agreement to acquire Abbott Medical Optics, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Abbott Laboratories. The acquisition is expected to include ophthalmic products in three business segments: cataract surgery, laser refractive surgery and consumer eye health.

Online CL Rebate Program Undergoes Improvements

BAUSCH + LOMB
See better. Live better.

Bausch + Lomb updated its rebate website for its portfolio of contact lenses to offer patients and eyecare professionals a more streamlined experience and timely redemptions. The newly designed program also makes it possible for patients to use a portion of their rebate to directly support Optometry Giving Sight, a global foundation dedicated to preventing blindness and impaired vision. The rebate site is designed to work seamlessly on digital devices, including smartphones and tablets. It features an intuitive scan and upload functionality that enables submission of rebate forms online or printing them for mail rebate submissions.

The updated rebate site's launch coincides with a mail-in rebate offer. After receiving an eye exam, patients can use the mail-in rebate offer, which is valid until Dec. 31, 2016, to save up to $130 on select Bausch + Lomb contact lenses.

Specialty Lenses Added to Fitting Aid

VOLK®

Volk Optical integrated Bausch + Lomb Specialty Vision Products custom specialty lens designs into the Best Fit Analysis Report of its Volk Eye Check portable ophthalmic exam tool. Capable of a number of key measurements, the Volk Eye Check's CL Mode captures and fully automates the analysis and display of ocular characteristics for contact lens fitting, saving time and increasing first-time fit rates.

The Eye Check's CL Mode provides precise measurements to aid in contact lens fitting, including horizontal visible iris diameter, pupil diameter and sagittal depth. The Best Fit Analysis generates a patient-specific report recommending the most appropriate lenses by brand and type.

All current Volk Eye Check users will automatically have access to the newly integrated information. To

learn more about the Eye Check Best Fit Analysis Report or to request a free trial, visit Volk's website or call (800) 345-8655.

Applications Being Accepted for Best Practices Contest

CooperVision Inc. is again searching nationwide for honorees for its Best Practices initiative. Best Practices seeks to recognize U.S. eyecare professionals who have found unique ways to make their businesses thrive and can share a refreshing perspective with the entire profession. "Best Practices is about bringing to light the innovative things that eyecare practitioners do every day to grow their practices and provide the best possible care to their patients," said Michele Andrews, OD, Director of Professional Affairs, North America.

Candidates can choose to submit their stories via written responses or video at EyeCareBestPractices.com. Applications will be accepted through Nov. 27, 2016. The 2016 Best Practices will be announced in early 2017. For more information visit the Best Practices initiative website.

Also: CooperVision Inc. is the exclusive sponsor of an e-book that is a companion to the PBS documentary "SIGHT: The Story of Vision." The one-hour documentary, produced by Koenig Films, premiered on World Sight Day in October, but is being distributed worldwide through other partners. Visit the "SIGHT: The Story of Vision" website for more information and to download the e-book.

Donated Equipment Crucial for Mission Trip

A team from the New England College of Optometry (NECO) recently used equipment donated by Keeler Instruments during a charitable mission trip to the Stann Creek District in Southeastern Belize. Members of NECO's Fellowship of Christian Optometrists partnered with His Servants Ministries to provide eye care in the underserved region.

Led by Lee Peplinski, OD, and Nathaniel Pelsor, OD, the team of 13 students and a support staff of three spent five days conducting exams, dispensing medications, providing protective and prescriptive eyewear, and referring patients for follow-up care. The team conducted eye exams for nearly 1,000 people.

According to team leader Jessica Hahm, "Without the Keeler Vantage Plus BIO, it would have been impossible for us to conduct dilated fundus examinations. The optics allowed us to easily obtain clear views of the periphery and posterior pole of the retina, cutting down on our exam time and allowing us to

diagnose diseases and conditions with greater accuracy. Additionally, the Keeler PSL portable slit lamps allowed us to check the anterior segment of the eyes, and to assess whether or not it was safe to dilate patients. The slit lamps were crucial in helping us see the microscopic details of the cornea to get a proper diagnosis."

Practice Excellence Scholarship Winners Announced

VSP Global and the American Optometric Foundation (AOF) announced the recipients of the 2016 Practice Excellence Scholarships. Nearly $200,000 was distributed among the top-performing fourth-year optometry students in the United States, Puerto Rico and Canada. Two students from each school or college of optometry were selected by nomination of their individual institutions to receive the scholarships, which are funded through VSP Global's Eyes of Hope Global Charitable Fund in collaboration with FYi Doctors in Canada and administered through the AOF. Criteria for selecting the scholarship recipients include commitment to enter the independent practice of optometry and clinical and academic performance.

The winners:

- Jamie Blavat and Emily Hutchins, Illinois College of Optometry
- Brittany Foerg and Tyler Vermeer, Indiana University School of Optometry
- Sai Ka Oscar Tsang and Dominic D'Orazio, Inter American University of Puerto School of Optometry
- Detlef (Hans) Sleichter and Anna Liew, MCPHS School of Optometry
- Gabrielle Smiley and Hannah Rillema, Michigan College of Optometryat Ferris State University
- Dianne Settlage and Desiree Vanderstar, Midwestern University Arizona College of Optometry
- Avani Dave and Michael Merritt, New England College of Optometry
- Pamela Martin and Laura Langford, Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry
- Kaily Tschantz and Justin Chelette, NOVA Southeastern University College of Optometry
- Taylor McGann and Nicole Mikels, The Ohio State University College of Optometry
- Kelsey Elrod and Paul Nefedov, Pacific University College of Optometry
- Carly J. Grodin and Jenna Roney, Salus University Pennsylvania College of Optometry
- Kirsti Ramirez and William Reid Cluff, University of the Incarnate Word Rosenberg School of Optometry
- Michael Tran and Emma Ly, Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University
- Tyler Boone and Ben Roach, Southern College of Optometry
- Karen Levy and Drake R. Devos, State University of New York College of Optometry
- Ellen Prewitt and Kelly Cleary, University of Alabama at Birmingham School of Optometry
- Sloan Rajadhyksha and Annie Lee, University of California-Berkeley School of Optometry
- Elisabeth Hottel and Michael O'Neal, University of Houston College of Optometry
- Peter Bako and Elias Toubia, University of Missouri at St. Louis College of Optometry
- Annie-Pier and Solange LaCroix, University of Montreal School of Optometry

- Victoria Lomax and Karin Lypka, University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science
- Katherine Ha and Victoria Chan, Western University of Health Sciences College of Optometry

New Product Reference Cards Available

Transitions Optical Inc. released two new Family of Brands Product Reference Cards that eyecare professionals can use as an easy reference tool when discussing Transitions lenses with patients. An English card, which also includes answers to commonly asked questions on the back, or a bilingual English/Spanish card are available. The cards feature information on the three Transitions everyday lens options: Transitions Signature VII lenses, Transitions XTRActive lenses and Transitions Vantage lenses. Additionally, the cards feature new photography and provide details on color availability and key product benefits.

Order the new cards free of charge online in the Patient Education Resources section under the My Practice tab, at the POS site, or by calling (800) 848-1506.

Device Streamlines Slit Lamp Imaging

Now available from Marco is the Ion Imaging System, an all-in-one anterior segment imaging device that combines an intra-optics beam-splitter/camera adapter with the computing and imaging power of the latest Apple technology to create a highly sophisticated “mainstream” imaging system that emphasizes image quality, simplicity and efficiency. The Ion combines all of the components (digital camera, adapter, computer, monitor, multiple cables, keyboard, mouse, etc.) of the traditional photo slit lamp into one

streamlined device.

Marco says the Ion enables eye doctors to “capture, integrate and educate” with every diagnosis. It includes an app dedicated to anterior segment imaging that consists of patient demographics, pre-set photography modes for maximizing various lighting techniques for video or still images, and auto storage to the Cloud or to a local network for EMR or PACS integration. Find more information online.

$5,000 Grant Opportunity

National Vision Inc. is offering third- and fourth-year optometry students from across the United States the chance to compete for a $5,000 grand prize through 2016-2017 grant program. Applicants must write a 500-word essay or create a short video that shares their perspective on the impact of technology on the field of optometry in the past and how it will influence their future careers as optometrists.

More information about the grant program is available online. Questions regarding the program should be e-mailed to Carly Schenck. The deadline for submissions is Jan. 31, 2017.

College Utilizing Cloud-Based EHR

RevolutionEHR has partnered with Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry, which now uses the company’s cloud-based electronic health record (EHR) and practice management software in its 11 community clinics and the classroom.

“RevolutionEHR’s cloud-based software is ideal for the multiple locations and clinics within the NSU Oklahoma College of Optometry,” said Nathan Lighthizer, OD, FAAO, the college’s Assistant Dean of Clinical Care. “With one platform for both EHR and practice management, we can efficiently manage all clinics from any location. RevolutionEHR was also able to adapt their software to meet the needs and desires of the Oklahoma College of Optometry and our partner, Cherokee Nation.”

Instrument Combines Biomechanical and Tomographic Data

Oculus has introduced the Corvis ST, which provides both biomechanical response and corneal thickness data in one report that's easy to read and to interpret. With a single automatically performed measurement, the instrument enables safe and efficient refractive surgery screening. The Corvis ST also calculates a biomechanically corrected IOP and allows accurate keratoconus detection based on the Corvis Biomechanical Index.

The Corvis ST is not yet available in the United States. For more information about the technology, visit the Oculus website.

Series of Papers a Resource for Independent Practices

Hoya Vision Care launched what will be a series of papers for independent practices with "Putting Laboratory Programs in Play at Your Practice," written by Anne-Marie Lahr, OD, Director of Education for HOYA Vision Care NA, and Thomas Gosling, OD, a member of HOYA's advisory panel. The paper is designed to help independent practices implement the tools offered by their laboratory.

According to Dr. Gosling, "As a practice owner I really appreciate the programs HOYA offers independent practices, though I do struggle with getting myself and my staff on the same page. I wanted to contribute to a practice tool that offered specific actionable advice. I think we achieved that, and it is a quick read too. From the technology perspective it is difficult to get single vision patients to understand and appreciate the value of free form single vision lens designs with premium AR. The program and this paper will help close the gap for practices as well differentiate their offerings for patients from mass retailers and the Internet."

Practices who would like a copy of the paper and details about the Super Single Vision program it supports can contact their local HOYA Territory Sales Manager.

Editorial

Beware of Predatory Publishing

Aurora Denial, OD, FAAO | Optometric Education: Volume 42 Number 1 (Fall 2016)

Aurora Denial, OD, FAAO

I recently invited New England College of Optometry librarians to speak to my class about critically evaluating resources. During the presentation, they talked about “predatory publishing.” Several students had never heard the term, and when I asked some faculty members whether they were familiar with it, many said they were not. However, after hearing a description of predatory practices, almost all of them realized they had a recent experience with a predatory journal or publisher.

The ease and speed of disseminating information via the Internet has been beneficial for researchers, librarians, faculty and anyone seeking information, and has led to the availability of open access journals. Most open access journals have the same quality attributes as print journals, including a rigorous peer-review process. However, unfortunately, many do not. Many exist for profit only and engage in unethical and unprofessional practices.[1] They are sham entities that do not provide a rigorous peer-review process or disseminate information appropriately.[2] These predatory journals and their publishers have become more prevalent. From 2010-2014, their publication volume increased from an estimated 53,000 to 420,000 articles, published by 8,000 active journals.[3] These entities are characterized by spam e-mails used to solicit submissions, no peer review or a poor quality peer-review process, a quick turnaround time from submission to publication, fake impact factors, listing of academics as members of the editorial board without the academics’ consent, listing article processing fees (APF) only after copyright has been relinquished, and not belonging to a database for dissemination.[1-4] (Article processing fees can be assessed by legitimate journals but are always disclosed in publication guidelines with transparency.)

Distinguishing the Good from the Bad

Jeffrey Beall, a librarian at the University of Colorado, Denver, developed and oversees a list of “potential, possible or probable” predatory journals. His list and criteria can be found at his blog, Scholarly Open Access. While Beall’s list has met with some criticism, it represents a starting point. He has included new, start-up journals and legitimate journals that were created in developing countries. Additionally, although the list is updated regularly, it may not be comprehensive. The skills and disposition to critically review resources should be used by all information-seekers as well as people

interested in publishing a manuscript.

The Grand Valley State University Libraries' Scholarly Communications Advisory Committee (SCAC) has developed a set of indicators that can be used to evaluate publishers or journals.[1] The committee identified both positive and negative indicators:

Positive indicators

- scope of the journal is well-defined and clearly stated
- journal's primary audience is researcher/practitioners
- editor, editorial board are recognized experts in the field
- journal is affiliated with or sponsored by an established scholarly society or academic institution
- articles are within the scope of the journal and meet the standards of the discipline
- any fees or charges for publishing in the journal are easily found on the journal website and are clearly explained
- articles have DOIs (Digital Object Identifier, e.g., doi:10.1111/j1742-9544.2011.00054.x)
- journal clearly indicates rights for use and reuse of content at article level (e.g., Creative Commons CC by license)
- journal has an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number, e.g., 1234-5678)
- publisher is a member of Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association
- journal is registered in Ulrichsweb, Global Serials Directory
- journal is listed in the Directory of Open Access Journals
- journal is included in subject database and/or indexes

Negative indicators

- journal website is difficult to locate or identify
- publisher "About" information is absent on the journal's website
- publisher direct marketing (i.e., spamming) or other advertising is obtuse
- instructions to authors are not available
- information on peer review and copyright is absent or unclear on the journal website
- journal scope statement is absent or extremely vague
- no information is provided about the publisher or the information provided does not clearly indicate relationship to a mission to disseminate research content
- repeat lead authors in the same issue
- publisher has a negative reputation (e.g., documented examples in Chronicle of Higher Education, list-servs, etc.)

SCAC also advocates that journals be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with no single criterion indicating high or low quality.[1]

Don't Be Fooled

Scholarly publications are an expectation for most faculty members. Research with dissemination is a key component of promotion and tenure evaluations. Promotion and tenure committees often review faculty who have publications in journals that are unfamiliar to the members of the review committee. Faculty, review committees and anyone seeking information must be proactive in evaluating journals to ensure high-quality publications. Predatory journals can look like legitimate journals and very often have titles that are similar to existing journals. Faculty should be on alert for journals with unethical or unprofessional characteristics.

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Dr. Denial, Editor of *Optometric Education*, is a Professor and Chair of the Department of Primary Care at the New England College of Optometry and a Clinical Instructor at a community health center in Boston.

Industry News