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Optometric/Ophthalmic Technician

Marcia Holstad

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Optometric/Ophthalmic Technician

The Optometric/Ophthalmic Technician program enrolled its first class of six students in the fall of 2009. This one-year diploma program prepares student for positions as optometric/ophthalmic technicians, who provide quality vision care services to patients. Technicians conduct unique eye-testing procedures and implement individual patient instruction. Technicians may work in optometry practices, ophthalmology practices or medical clinics, optical dispensaries, optical laboratories, medical and optical equipment businesses, lens, frame or contact lens companies, pharmaceutical companies, research laboratories or in academia. The mission of the program is to prepare students for work in the variety of vision care settings by providing quality, student-centered education to a diverse student population of all ages while recognizing the changing health care environment.

The need for an Optometric/Ophthalmic Technician Diploma Program was first identified after optometrists in the DMACC area suggested the need for the program. In 2007 the college formed an exploratory group as the Optometric/Ophthalmic Technician Advisory Committee, which was composed of practitioners of optometry, ophthalmology and optician. These occupational groups expressed a need for the program, which was later confirmed by a college survey of professionals in the DMACC service area. It also revealed the absence of a program in Iowa for training techs in the Ophthalmology specialty, and that technicians were being recruited from out-of-state training programs to fulfill this need.

Previously, a similar program was offered at North Iowa Area Community college (NIACC) in Mason City and later at Hawkeye Tech in Waterloo, which was discontinued in the spring of 2009. The committee concluded that the other programs were not preparing a sufficient number of graduates to supply the Des Moines metro area's need for trained technicians. The program at Hawkeye Tech was discontinued in spring 2009. In 2015 DMACC offers the only program in the state.

Most programs in the country train either Optometric Techs or Ophthalmic Techs but not both in the same program. The advisory committee recommended a program incorporating both specialties was both needed by the specialties and would increase the options and opportunities for graduates.

Development of this program relied heavily on an involved advisory committee made up of optometrists, ophthalmologists, opticians and technicians in the field, in order to address all the needs of these different but highly intertwined specialties. In 2015 there are ten active committee members, many of whom were members of the original exploratory group. Several recently appointed members are employed as technicians. The committee usually meets twice a year and discussions focus on changes in the curriculum that reflect practices in the work place.

Marcia Holstad, O.D was the original program chair and continues in that position. Other adjunct faculty of the program included Pamela Young, O.D., Jim Schroder, O.D. and Todd Pietig, O.D.

Instruction to students is accomplished through didactic (classroom) instruction, laboratory exercises and practical experience both in campus labs and external clinical sites. Classes are offered on the Ankeny campus with several program classes in a Web-blended format in an effort to help accommodate student demand in outlying areas where the program is unavailable. Optometry and ophthalmology offices throughout the state have provided sites for external clinical rotations for student and have been integral to student success in the program.

The program can admit 24 students. Approximately 80% of these students complete the program. In the first few years of this program, the number of graduates fluctuated between six and fifteen. Usually all graduates are offered employment upon graduation. The demand for graduates continues to exceed the number of graduates. Although the majority of students are Iowa residents, the program also attracts out-of state students, based on its uniqueness in preparing graduates to work in both optometric and ophthalmic specialties.

In the future the faculty plans to seek program accreditation from the Center for Paraoptometric Certification and Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthalmology.

Created August 2015 in celebration of DMACC's 50th Anniversary.