

Optometry school will train residents*

To get better instructors for its clinics, the University of Waterloo's optometry school will start a new program in September to train recent graduates how to teach.

The program, called an optometric residency, provides clinical teaching education and training in a special area of the field. About 10 students are expected to enrol this fall.

The two-year full-time program will also allow students to produce clinical research of "high quality," says a report outlining the program's structure and goals.

"The need for trained clinical teaching personnel is acute within the (UW) optometry program," the report says.

"The school of optometry is currently meeting a considerable part of its clinical teaching by the employment of graduates with less than three years' experience in clinical practice and with little or no teaching experience.

"The nature of their employment provides neither time nor opportunity for on-the-job training in teaching and research methodology."

Dr. Emerson Woodruff, optometry school director, said that of the 35 part-time clinical supervisors, 23 have "too little experience" in teaching undergraduate students. But they are "all good people," Dr. Woodruff noted, adding that they must have been in the "upper third

of their (graduating) class to be employed."

It's just that they have "minimal experience" in teaching students as they don't have an overview of all aspects of optometry, the director said.

He said the aim of the program is to train "someone with a depth of experience in an area and a broad outlook on the optometry field—we are not creating specialists."

Dr. Woodruff said the program will provide its graduates with clinical practice and teaching experience as well as an opportunity to do research by using the school's library, laboratories and "advanced instrumentation." In fact, to receive the "diploma of residency," a student must produce two papers showing research into clinical aspects he or she found interesting during the training years.

One reason why the school finds it hard to hire people with enough experience in clinical teaching and research is that it can't match the salaries optometry graduates can get when they open their practices, Dr. Woodruff said.

"Lots of grads go out to practice—they can command a starting salary of \$23,000. And about a third of the class go to other provinces." (UW's optometry school is the only English-speaking one in the country.) He said the nine full-time clinical supervisors are fully qualified to do their work since they have "enough

experience" in the clinical field.

To upgrade the teaching and research skills of current part-time supervisors, the school offers another special program—provided they can find time to take it.

The school's graduate studies officer, Dr. Ross Beauchamp, said the residency program is aimed at recent graduates since it would be unfeasible for an optometrist to leave a practice to take the full-time course.

The current supervisors would also have to leave that job if they wanted to take the program.

The program will allow students to specialize in areas such as binocular vision, community health and environmental vision, contact lens practice, low vision and ocular health.

"The first year of the residency will provide a broad experience in several clinical areas and participation in didactic and laboratory activities," says the program's report.

"The second year will provide clinical courses and experience exclusively in the areas of the residency."

Students may be required to take courses in clinical teaching, depending on their background in the optometry field.

The official goal of the program is to "provide persons skilled in specialized optometric services and produce teachers with research capability."

*Reprinted from the U.W. Gazette

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