

The Hadassah Academic College Department of Optometry

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Keywords: Academic College Department of Optometry, Israeli optometry

The Department of Optometry in Hadassah College Jerusalem, which was established in 1995, is one of only two such departments in the country. Students spend four years in full time study before receiving their degree in optometry: BOptom. This degree entitles them to take the licensing examination of the Ministry of Health.

The faculty consists of PhD scientists in various fields, and experienced optometrists who have trained in United States, England, Australia and South Africa, and ophthalmologists. This brings a unique diversity to the department, by exposing the students to several different approaches to the art and practice of optometry.

The student body is made up of Jews, Muslims and Christians, with both native Israelis and immigrants from the United States, Canada, Russia, and the Ukraine, as well as France, Great Britain, Ethiopia and South Africa. The average class size has doubled from 30 to 60 since the college's inception.

In addition to treating vision problems with spectacles, contact lenses and low vision aids, the students are trained to detect disease, diagnose and treat binocular vision dysfunctions, monitor pediatric and geriatric vision disorders, fit contact lenses for

cosmetic and medically indicated conditions including keratoconus and orthokeratology, and assess the role of vision at work, at leisure and for sport.

As part of their training, the students examine patients both within and outside of the Hadassah College. Within the college is a general clinic, contact lens clinic, a vision therapy clinic, and a dispensary clinic. Upwards of 250 patients are seen each week. In addition, the students see patients at the Hadassah Low Vision Clinic, various homes for the aged, and in schools in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas. The students also spend time observing at the ophthalmology clinics of Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital.

The clinics and laboratories within the department are fully equipped with up to date instruments, including slit lamps with digital recording, fundus cameras, computerized visual field testers, corneal topographers, autorefractors and autokeratometers. The level of technology is ever expanding as witnessed by a recently acquired wave front aberrometer.

Cooperation with family doctors, ophthalmologists, social workers and teachers is an important function of the clinics and enables the Department of Optometry to provide a much needed vision care service. Donations ensure that spectacles are made available to all those who are in need through a joint project with the welfare department of the Municipality of Jerusalem.

The Optometry Department has graduated eleven classes of students and several graduates have gone onto higher degrees. In April 2008, we saw our first graduate receive her doctorate in neuroscience. Other graduates have joined the department as clinical supervisors.

The Vision Therapy Clinic at Hadassah College was founded in 1997. The clinic has grown over the years and we presently have 10 clinic sessions each week. The staff consists of 5 optometrists, two graduates of SUNY State College of Optometry and three locally trained Optometrists (all of whom

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Paritzky D, Gordon-Shaag A, Eichler R. The Hadassah Academic College Department of Optometry. *Optom Vis Dev* 2010;41(1):22-23.

also have private practices dedicated to Vision Therapy), supervising the students providing group and individual therapy. All fourth year students are required to attend at least two clinic sessions per week. On average there are 80 patients a week who are treated in the clinic.

Our patient population is varied and includes those with binocular vision anomalies and visual perceptual disorders. Each patient is required to go through a comprehensive visual examination in the general clinics in order to be referred to the Vision Therapy Clinic. Once referred, further visual skills and perceptual testing is performed. The clinic also serves those students enrolled in other programs within the college. The clinic is equipped with state of the art equipment. Cheirosopes, aperture rules, stereograms, Cooper/Groffman Computer VTS, vectograms and the Marsden ball include a partial list of the equipment used daily.

There is something special about the population seen here in Jerusalem. The people in the clinic are from a wide range of cultures, as is the Israeli society. At any one moment you may have an American trained supervisor overlooking a French born student treating a Russian speaking child, or an Arabic student treating a Hassidic boy. The interactions and relationships formed between student and patient are filled with care and concern. Each individual patient gives the student an opportunity to give professional service and support.

In February 2007 Hadassah opened the first Israeli Masters degree in Optometry and Vision Science. The goal was to broaden the knowledge base of optometrists in Israel and give them the skills they would need to carry out optometric research. In addition, we wanted to expose them to techniques and ideas not taught in our undergraduate program.

The program entails 4 semesters with over 25 courses in optometry, ophthalmology, vision science and scientific methodology. These are taught by a staff of Israeli research scientists, ophthalmologists from the Hadassah University Medical Hospital and local optometrists. Giving our students a broad and diverse perspective in optometry is essential, so guest lecturers are invited from other countries to teach several courses.

Creating a basis for optometric research in Israel is one of our goals. To this end the students are required to carry out a research project to complete the degree. So far, the students have participated in

several diverse and interesting projects, a number of which are published in this very issue of *OVD*. Several students have carried out research at Ophthalmology departments in Israel while others are studying the epidemiology of various refractive errors in Israel. In addition, we are collaborating with Soflex, a local optometric company involved in the research and development of contact lenses. We have received a grant from the Horowitz Foundation to build a vision science teaching laboratory for the program and also used that grant to create a state of the art lab to study phototransduction in drosophila using ERG. The excellence we see in the students and the quality of their research projects shows that we are already meeting our goal of raising the academic level of optometry in Israel.

Our hopes for the future are to expand the department, increase patient capacity within the clinics, continue and expand research projects and increase our contacts and cooperation with other schools of optometry around the world.

APPLY NOW for a 2010 Research Grant

Applications for COVID 2010 Research Grants for optometrists, optometric educators, and other vision scientists are now available on the COVID website or by contacting the COVID office.

Grants of up to \$5,000 are available to support research related to oculomotor, binocular vision, visual information processing and learning-related vision problems and vision therapy. Grants can be used to initiate new research or support continuing active research programs.

Funding will be provided beginning July 31 for research to be conducted during the 2010-2011 academic year. All applications are reviewed by the COVID Research Committee, which makes recommendations to the Board of Directors for the selection of grant recipients.

Questions regarding the grant application process can be directed to the COVID office at info@covd.org.

**Deadline for receipt of grant applications
is April 12, 2010**