



# First Year In Practice

what to expect post optometry school

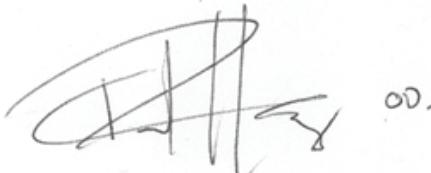




Dear optometry students,

In the following e-book I hope you will find much insight to the profession of optometry as you prepare for your future. In these discussions we will go over together what to expect post optometry school and what to do to become better prepared before you get there. Also, if you have any questions at all, please don't hesitate to ask.

There are a few ways that you may do so, one is by directly contacting me at [info@drpaulheeg.com](mailto:info@drpaulheeg.com) and the other is through [OptometryStudents.com](http://OptometryStudents.com)



Dr. Paul Heeg's handwritten signature is written in black ink. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the name "Dr. Paul Heeg" clearly legible. To the right of the signature, the letters "OD." are handwritten in a smaller, more formal font.

Sincerely,  
Dr. Paul Heeg

I have been friends with Paul for about 4 years and I have always known him to be not only an exceptional student and intern, but an amazing person. This man has his head on straight, determined to improve the state of optometry by being a leader in the profession and in his community. Whenever I had questions I went to Paul for help because not only does he know his stuff but he conveys it with enthusiasm. Get ready for some valuable advice.

Matthew Geller

Founder & Senior Editor of [OptometryStudents.com](http://OptometryStudents.com) || SUNY c/o 2013

## Dr. Paul Heeg's Biography:

Paul received his BS in Economics from the State University at Albany in 2006 and is a recent graduate of the State University of New York's College of Optometry in 2010. Paul has been actively involved in the AOA and NYSOA as a student and continues to keep active involvement in the AOA as he gives talks to optometry students, writes articles regarding optometry and is pushing forward social media advancements in the AOA. Paul is currently working at both a commercial and private office in East Texas.

# Choosing the best practice location

Welcome students to a 5 article series by 2010 SUNY Graduate Dr. Paul Heeg! These articles first appeared on [www.optometrystudents.com](http://www.optometrystudents.com)

Part I of V  
By Dr. Paul Heeg

Dear future colleagues,

It has been a good month since I last wrote an article for optometrystudents.com. This article is going to be Part one of a five series in that will appear on optometrystudents.com. First, I want to thank you for taking the time to stop by and take a look at this article. This is only the beginning of your success as an optometric professional as you are already investigating your future as

an optometrist.

Have you ever thought about where you want to practice?

Perhaps you want to live somewhere warm or maybe by the ocean. Perhaps both? Some might want to live by their family, where they grew up and made lifelong friends. Others may want to venture out the unknown and start a blank new page in their exciting new life.

Well, in my case, I had the opportunity to live internationally from growing up in Canada, being the son of two immigrants from Europe and living across the United States from New York to California, I can see that this land has certainly many options. Too many at times it may seem, but very exciting none the less. It is important in optometry school, even as a first year to start thinking

of where you would like to live and practice. Once determined, I would encourage you to start researching the communities in that area.



**WIKIPEDIA**  
*The Free Encyclopedia*

What sort of research should you do?

Well, for one, it is a great idea to look at the population demographics of an area. For example, if you want to specialize in pediatrics, obtain a good idea if that area has a large middle age/

family population before analyzing whether you should focus in that town. For example, where I am living in Texas, the town has a mean age that is older. However, where my brother is living in North Dallas, the demographics are much younger. Many young families live in North Dallas. When deciding to locate for example in either the community

where I live or where my brother lives may depend on what you want you would like to do. I find that I see many patients who are 50 years plus that I find a good number of ocular pathology cases. However, if pediatrics and refractive surgery management peaks you interest, perhaps a younger community would be a good match.

Where should you go for that data?

Well, believe it or not, but Wikipedia is great for obtaining a quick general synopsis. Another statistics that you will have to look at is the mean income and crime rate of an area. As much as I would love to say that every location is equal in quality and safety, they are not. If you plan on having a family, it is essential to find an area of the country that is safe and progressive. Many of the mean incomes and crime rates are available online either through Wikipedia or census.gov. I also contacted the local police department to see where

the lowest crime rate was just to double check.

Another key to your location success will be to think about growth potential.

What do I mean about that? Well, just because a community has a decent size population, it does not mean that it is the best choice for you. You need to make sure that it's an area that will continue to grow and expand as time progresses along. Make sure that the industries in the area are not going to close down. I have too often heard of smaller communities turning into ghost towns because the one industry sustaining the town was outsourced to Mexico, India or China. Be certain that if you are considering a smaller community that it has industries that will continue to grow and sustain the area with a strong economic climate.

Also, think about saturation.

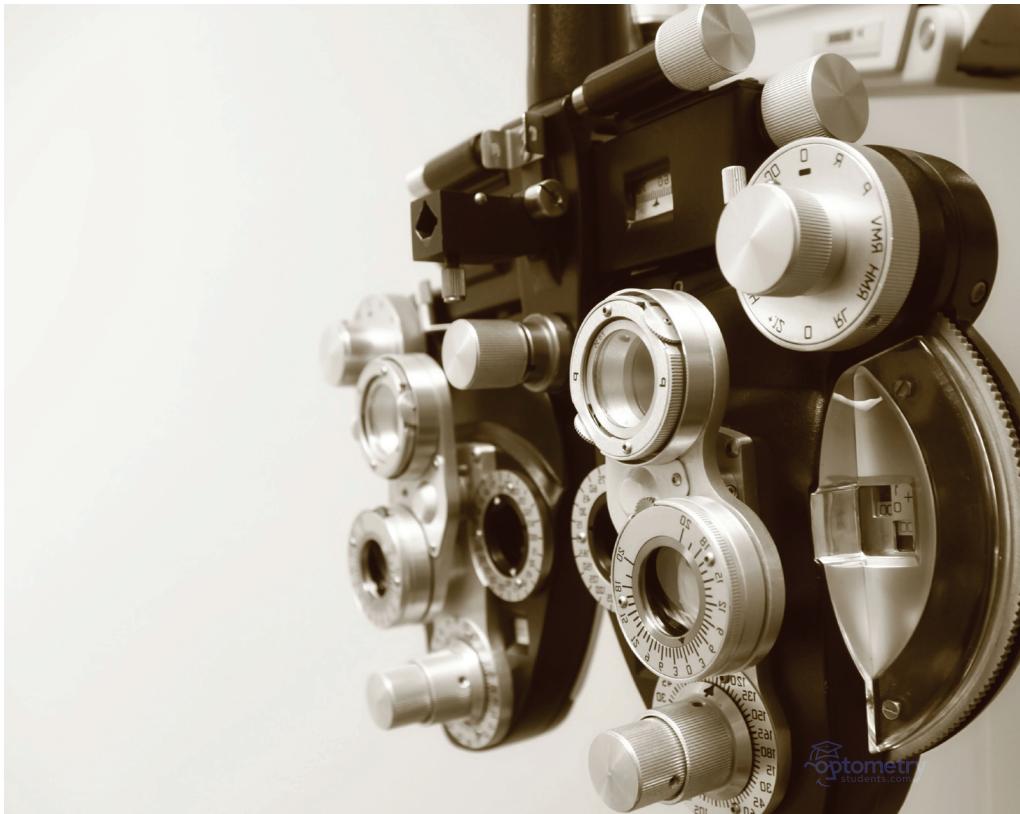
As much as I don't like to say it, saturation is important. Is there a

sustainable income for you if you locate in a community of 10 000 with 4 full time ODs? Unless you sub specialize in something that is not there, probably not. I always liked saying "there are never enough good doctors". That is true, but if all the doctors in the area are good... then you need to find something that sets you apart from the others in the community. According to "Business Aspects of Optometry,"<sup>1</sup> rural areas should have one optometrist for every 4,000 to 6,000 residents. Be sure that your community can support a full time doctor before you take the time and money to find out the hard way that you are unable to make financially what you need to pay off your student debt and jump start your future.

Wow, the list can certainly continue, there is a lot more that I can talk about in considering where to move to. When it came to my decision to move to Texas from New York, it had to do for financial reasons and

the warm winters. There is no state income tax in Texas and Optometry is practicing at a near full scope.

You will have to decide what is important to you in your choices and I hope that you will encounter much success in your future. Be sure to stay connected with the AOA as the AOA will build up your career making you the most successful OD you can possibly be.



# Student Debt

*Student Debt... The bottom line: What to know and what to do.*

*Part II of V*

*By Dr. Paul Heeg*

What do you think is the TOTAL amount of debt you will graduate Optometry School with?

Well, if you are like anything like me and most optometry students, your schooling is expensive and is your responsibility. How will that affect you? Well, you will have to devote a good amount of your focus and financial planning post optometry school paying off those wonderful loans.

In 2010, most sources conclude that the average student debt with medical students is over \$150,000<sup>1</sup>. Schooling has become much more expensive than ever before. If one is not careful, this figure may

haunt you for many years. But be encouraged, the following article discusses ways for students like you to minimize and improve their financial horizons.

There are three elements of success I would like to have stick with you after you read this article; they are modesty, advocacy and perseverance.

It's very easy to look at your potential loan amounts each year and feel that "it's your time to live it up" and take out many loans. I knew of classmates who took out their maximum loan amount of \$45,000 or more each year and lived very well. My word of advice is to ignore such temptation. Modesty is key to success. You will not regret living a lifestyle that will only set you up for financial freedom down the line. There is more to just the loans you are taking out today, you are framing your mind for wise financial decision making down the road.

In taking out your loans, remember that many loans you may have are unsubsidized loans that are accruing interest even while you are in optometry school. What is even worse is that the government recently made a motion to set the interest rate of Stafford loans at 6.8% to buffer good times vs. poor economic times.

The fact of the matter is however that today most mortgages are cheaper than that high student loan rate that we find ourselves experiencing. In my personal finances, throughout my optometry schooling, I have paid my financial institution \$12,000 in interest alone over the past 4 years.

How to live modestly? There are few tips I would like to share:

Keep rent cheaper: move in with a few roommates. It's a great way to get to know people and you may find the company is a refreshing way to pass the long days of constant

studying and difficult supervisors of optometry school.

Get extra cash: If you have time on the weekend, try to get a part time job at an optometric practice... at the very least, you will obtain a better view of real world optometry while gaining some grocery funds.

Free money: Apply for scholarships; let it be through your state association, your school or optometric companies, there are sources of untapped funds out there for optometry students. Apply early and often. Never get discouraged if you do not get a scholarship one year, reapply and show your determination.

Advocacy! The next key characteristic I would like to encourage you with is to become involved in your optometry school through student council and student organizations. Unite and represent yourselves together as a student body. You have more

pull and power than you realize! Without you, optometry schools would cease to exist. You are the fuel for the future. When your school considers a tuition hike, I would challenge you to become actively involved and determine if a tuition hike is really necessary. Analyze the spending trends of your school and see if there could be cut backs or restructuring of funds elsewhere before your school raises your tuition. Schools across many professions are businesses, the product is knowledge. In addition to making the most of your education, be sure to bargain with the supplier (your school) to guarantee that you are receiving the fairest price.

This skill of advocacy will guarantee success in your future as you will face many hard decisions in your career such as negotiating prices with land lords, staff wages, medical goods and devices. In addition, our profession needs to be highly engaged in advocacy as a

whole when it comes to receiving fair payments for our services through large government insurance plans like Medicaid and Medicare, private insurances and vision riders. You will not receive your proper reimbursement without your advocacy and representation in the profession through the AOA and local state societies. Speak out when you feel it is necessary to do so, do not be a door mat and keep both your career and your profession strong.

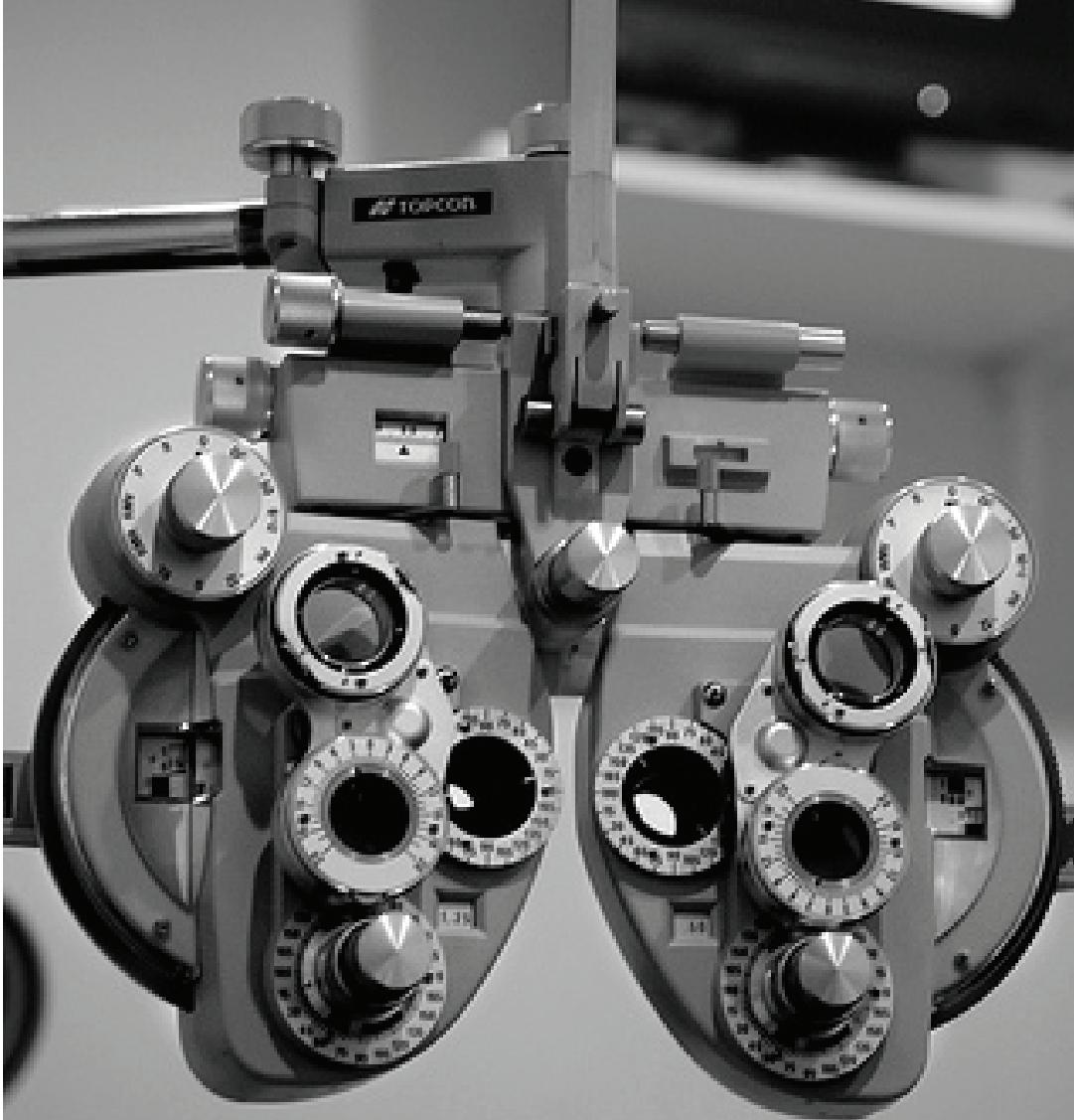
Finally, persevere! I do not want to make you feel intimidated or overwhelmed with the debt you will incur. Sometimes if you think about your student debt it can make you go nuts! Know that the debt you are incurring will be able to be overcome, just persevere through optometry school and a potential residency. The time for financial success will eventually come. The key elements for your success will be cultivated with your active pursuit

and persevere toward your degree picking up as many skills as you can.

If you are curious in how much debt you currently have from the government, please visit:  
[www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)

I would encourage you to obtain a realistic picture of how much debt you will have in the future and deal with it accordingly already now. Do not be shy to talk to your student aid representative at your school. It is better to know what is in the unknown before your first day out of school.

Prepare for the next article:  
Choosing your ideal optometric setting.



# Choosing Your Ideal Optometric Setting

*Part III of V*  
By Dr. Paul Heeg

Okay, you're a third or fourth year optometry student and you see a ton of choices in front of you... you may ask: where to go from here? My advice would be not to get intimidated from all the choices, there certainly are quite a few! Research each one and see where you see yourself in. In the following discussion, I am going to briefly talk about the main choices that we may find ourselves pondering quite often.

First is residency! Well, if you have not heard that there are residencies available in optometry, you may not be in the right decade. Yes,

for over thirty years, optometry has been expanding our residency programs. Why would you consider a residency? Well, it's becoming quite apparent that we are in a new age of eye care that has a rich and diverse knowledge bank that we can tap into. Optometry school can only teach us so much in four years, there is so much more that we can learn and become proficient in. Let that be Ocular disease, binocular vision, pediatrics, or contact lens. My advice to you is if you are considering a residency, research early and visit your potential site. Your application will be comprised of two major attributes, academic performance and personality. Personality may be the most important element to a residency position. Personality will entail extracurricular activities and passion for your field. You will have to click well with the staff you will be working with and without visiting a site, you may never know for sure. It's great for the doctors on staff to see an enthusiastic doctor,

they will be fairly impressed.

With that said, residency is certainly not for everyone. Do not feel you have to apply for a residency if you are in top of your class. There are other just as many meaningful post graduation options for us. I did not do a residency. Do I regret it? Not really, I feel as though my current situation is broadening my horizon and I am learning a lot being out on my own.

The second option we will discuss together is private practice which will include both group and sole practice. Granted, group practice may be the most popular right now because of the reduction in cost for running the office between all the doctors and the higher volume per chair time is impressive, sole practice has its advantages is that you are the only doctor delivering care and you can practice exactly how you wish. You will have to research this as you enter in your profession. A private

group practice is ultimately my goal, but working into a group practice will take money and time. Plus, you will have to pretty sure that you will want to be in an area if you start investing into a practice.

The third option is corporate. This is where you work next to a retail giant like Lenscrafters.

Now, there are some financial advantages from the start to this set up, however long term, this may not be the most lucrative option. Make sure you have an exit strategy if you plan on being in this setting but want to do private practice. If you do corporate, make sure you are able to control the type of care you give. Never allow another manager to dictate how you as a doctor will deliver care. When done right, corporate has many



advantages. I am in a corporate setting right now. It is a great stepping stone to where I want to be.

There is the research / academic route to optometry as well. Perhaps you would like to become your favorite professor at your soon to be alumni. This is always a feasible option. You would first have to complete a residency though. A nice thing about academia is that you

will have great benefits, good vacation time and eager bright eyed student eager to learn from you. In retrospect, this is exciting for me to still think about, I love teaching.

In closing, there are a ton of career paths for you in optometry. This article only touches upon the tip of the iceberg. Feel free to contact me about any of the ideas mentioned in this article.

Next article's topic: How will I stand out from other graduating ODs?

# How to Stand Out From Other Graduating ODs

*Part 4 of 5*

*By: Dr. Paul Heeg*

At this point in time, do you feel that YOU stand out amongst other optometry students?

I can imagine most of you reading this right now thinking to yourself: “Why should I care about this just yet? I am just trying to survive optometry school!” Well, I think you have good point but you are missing out on potential opportunities by not thinking about the future. There is a lot to think about in your post optometry school world. I am only going to scratch the surface with ideas to get you plugged in

and enthusiastic about your post optometry schooling life.

First, shadow offices you may want to work in someday. What, shadow? You may say “I thought I am done with that? “ Nope, shadowing is one of the best things that you can do! Especially if you think that a practice may need an additional OD down the line. The best way to figure that out is to shadow an office and see firsthand how the climate is. Even as a doctor, I love seeing how other offices coordinate together to create a successful office environment. I would encourage you to see a multitude of different offices and pick up little things.

Second, make a list of “goals” or “must haves”. On this must haves list, put things that you want to have in your office or an office you will work in after you graduate. On my list, I put a few major goals; one was an independent atmosphere, second was where I could set my own hours

and third was in an area where my services were demanded. Be careful not to make your list unrealistic, but keep what is very important to you. Even right now, I am modifying my list.

Volunteer! Okay, I am trying not to make this too repetitive to any of my previous articles, but this is a huge part to your optometry student experience and it will set you up for success as an optometrist. How is that? Well, it places you in a healthy mindset of what you really are doing. You may volunteer at many levels; let that be through one of many charitable organizations or through organized optometry through the AOA. Plus, you are helping out others, which is really the whole point. Any office that may be interested in you will look at this as something that will put your application apart from others. GPA only will go so far. The really important thing is how you are as a doctor, not how you

did in bio-chemistry in first year optometry school. The bigger question is will you be able to connect to the patients? Will you show compassion and interest in every new person that walks in your door? Volunteering will show some of those much needed qualities.

Talk to as many established ODs out there. Please, do not feel intimidated about talking to other ODs. Why is that? Well, they are the ones that have done so much before you... by picking their brains, you are able to really get a grasp of what you will want to do post optometry school. Also, understand, many ODs will have variable opinions about the profession and what was best for me. I have met many ODs that love solo practice. I have also met just as many that love group practice. Each have their merit and strong points. I am glad that I have had the chance to listen to both sides to that element to optometry. There are so much more potential topics though!

The great thing about life is that there is no set path. You have the bulls by the horn! It is your time to steer it in the right direction, my objection in this article is to both motivate and encourage you about your world that is soon to open up. All the best in your goal setting and adventures in achieving them!

Next article's topic: Social Media and my electronic self. How will it affect my optometric career?



# Social Media and my electronic self: How will it affect my optometric career?

*Part V of V*

*By Dr. Paul Heeg*

Over the past five weeks I have had the privilege to discuss ways in which you may become better prepared in your optometric profession. As a closing article, I would like us to do a little exercise, flashback to about 50 years ago.

Think of how optometry was in the 1960s. How did you get to know about the latest and cutting edge concepts in the profession? Most of it was through other leading

optometric professionals in the country in the form of textbooks, articles and local optometry meetings. Imagine if that was the only way that we could obtain insights to our profession today? That would be pretty limited and dull. My challenge is how are you engaging in the various ways in which resources are available today? In the following article, I would like to take a moment and talk about all the different channels of information that we have at our fingertips.

## Online Social Demographics

We live in an excellent age where we don't have to spend a half a day in a library researching census information or going through many outdated yellow pages to see where we might want to practice. In less than 10 seconds we can obtain both the size and the number of offices in a town via an online search engine like Google. This type of detailed analysis is priceless and to think

that at one time we did not have as easy access as we do today is mind boggling. My goal in this article is to motivate you that this electronic presence will not only help you find a practice or area to locate in, but it will drive patients in your door. How will you be able to do that? Well, if you sign up for a web hosting media platform, it will create a virtual self for patients to see. That will be a very good start to get your name out in the community. There are many elements to this virtual self, but this could be a whole article in itself. To keep it simple, make sure you develop a electronic profile through either a webhosting company or the practice that you work for. You will not regret it!

## Your Online Profile

Well, many of you may just have exited your undergraduate glory years where you have some pretty interesting photos that may not be

the most professional. My advice will be to get rid of them. Any photo that your parents, spiritual leader, professor or grandparents would not want to see you in should not be online for view. Why?

Well, very simple, a picture tells



a thousand words. Do you want a complete stranger coming to a completely wrong conclusion about who you are? Especially if you are going to be a leader in the eye health industry. It would not surprise me if optometry schools

will start screening applicants using Google. This will be a great way for optometry schools to see what type of character an applicant is.

Also, keep in mind that we are becoming more digitally minded as the years pass. Whenever a patient will want to look you up, your profile information may come up. Most Facebook photos require a "friend" to view your photos, but that certainly can change! Any photo on Facebook is subject to Facebook's sharing policies. You never know what the future holds, make it a bright one.

Be Actively Engaged Online!

Remember my comparison to the 1960s in the start of this article? Well, just as there are many more resources out there for you to use, there are many more virtual worlds for you to become connected and engaged online. Some great examples for optometry students are AOA connect, Facebook, Twitter

and LinkedIn. Let me go through each very briefly:

First is AOA connect, a great platform for Optometry professionals to be engaged in topics concerning anything from board certification to residency programs. The more you learn from the doctors with experience, the sharper you will become. The big difference between this and Facebook is that this is a unique community just for us. We also have the ability to custom tailor this social media platform to our most efficient use. What thing do you like about AOA connect? Anything that you would like to see different about AOA connect? Please be sure to actively participate in your professional online presence.

Second is Facebook. Most of all you know this social media tool. This has expanded by leaps and bounds over the past decade. From being solely for college students to where

it is today for businesses and professional organizations has really taken the site off. Keep in mind, as this site has changed, consider changing your profile to reflect the new reach and focus of Facebook. The great thing about Facebook is that the updates that you receive from clubs, organizations and friends is always fast, current and easy to access.

Third would be twitter. Twitter is good to let people know what you are doing and where you are doing it. Many businesses will post sales or promotions on twitter, as a business, the online presence is fantastic. Keep this platform in mind for the future.

Lastly, LinkedIn is a great site



for your resume and to keep professional contacts current and up to date. Want to contact your fourth year ophthalmic neurology professor? Now you can much easier. Want to post your resume to doctors in the area you want to live? LinkedIn is the answer for you. Before Facebook became more business friendly, LinkedIn held a monopoly in this element of social media.

Eventually with active participation in social media, you will meet new people and obtain greater insights in areas that you would never have thought you would be able to. Be encouraged and motivated with all the virtual opportunities. We are only going to become better connected from here on out!

It was great writing these five topics to ask any questions regarding any of the topics brought up.



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