




Ivy Tech to Train Students in Optometric Technology and Therapeutic Massage

Responding to growing job market demands, Ivy Tech Community College Bloomington will provide new health care training opportunities for students in the fields of optometric technology and massage therapy beginning in January.

 The School of Health Sciences has developed academic programs in optometric technology and therapeutic massage. The optometric technology program is new to the statewide Ivy Tech Community College system. Students also can earn a two-year associate of applied science degree in optometric technology. The therapeutic massage certificate, already offered at four Ivy Tech campuses, is new to the Bloomington campus.

Ivy Tech officials here decided to create both programs after receiving numerous requests

from clinicians and employers who recognized the expanding need for workers with these skills. The optometric technology program will initially enroll up to 23 students, and the therapeutic massage program can enroll up to 16 students.

“Both of these programs will grow as the need grows,” says Larry G. Swafford, Ph.D., dean of the Ivy Tech School of Health Sciences in Bloomington. He says the programs represent Ivy Tech’s strong role in the community to better prepare residents to live and work in a diverse and competitive job environment.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, both job

markets show “much faster than average projected growth rates” nationwide. From 2014 to 2024, employment in the field of therapeutic massage is projected to grow 22 percent and the field of optometric technology is expected to expand by 24 percent.

For many years, Indiana University in Bloomington offered an associate degree program in optometric technology, but discontinued it in 2015. Since IU offered the only such program in the state, that loss created a void, says Swafford. Area clinicians who relied on the workforce created by the IU program encouraged Ivy Tech to establish its own

program, as did Joseph Bonanno, the IU dean of the School of Optometry, Swafford adds.

Ivy Tech’s optometric technology program was modeled after the one at IU, with some revisions to fit Ivy Tech’s instructional model. Students can earn an associate degree by earning 60 credits. “We worked very closely with IU. Our curriculum is very similar to IU’s,” Swafford says. The programs were approved by Ivy Tech’s Board of Trustees and the Indiana Commission for Higher Education.

Optometric technicians fill eyewear prescriptions by



(l-r) Darlene Hooten-Polley and Larry G. Swafford. Photos by Martin Boling

filling orders written by eye doctors, taking facial measurements, producing lenses with the correct prescriptions, and shaping lenses to fit frames. Their training includes learning to give various eye exams, such as color vision and depth perception tests. They assist in numerous contact lens procedures and teach patients to insert, remove, and care for lenses. Students also learn business procedures in order to help manage optical offices.

After graduating, optometric technicians are employed by optometrists, opticians, and ophthalmologists, and optical dispensaries and laboratories. The median pay of dispensing opticians was \$34,280 in 2014, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"The demand for skilled personnel in the ophthalmic field is very high now," says Swafford. "We have an aging population in the U.S., so that demand will only increase."

Ivy Tech's therapeutic massage program also will fill a local gap in training for certified massage therapists. Area businesses that utilize massage therapists, as well as potential students, have told Ivy Tech such a program would benefit them. The higher education commission sanctioned the program several years ago, and Ivy Tech Bloomington adopted the approved curriculum.

The 26-credit-hour program will focus on teaching massage methods to address

pain relief and medical issues such as chronic lower-back problems, but also will teach relaxation aspects of massage, says Darlene Hooten-Polley, health care specialist program chair in the School of Health Sciences.

"A lot of places are using therapeutic massages, including chiropractor offices, doctors' offices and spas," says Hooten-Polley. "There's just an increased attention to overall health and well-being, leading to people wanting these therapeutic massages. In some areas, extended care facilities or nursing homes offer them for the elderly."

Students can enroll in the therapeutic massage program starting in January and finish their certificates during the summer semester. Once they complete the certificate program, students must take the state certification exam before they can practice. Hooten-Polley says students who get this certificate also can go on to earn a health care specialist associate degree, so they can work as a certified nursing assistant or in extended care facilities with elderly patients, for example. "This makes the person more marketable," she says.

Classes for both programs begin on January 17, 2017. To enroll, visit ivytech.edu/applynow, call 812-330-6013, or stop by Ivy Tech Bloomington, located at 200 Daniels Way. •

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