

Precision Optics Manufacturing Technician Apprenticeship

In 2015, Optimax began work on creating a registered apprenticeship for Precision Optics Manufacturing Technicians. At that time, there were no occupation titles in the federal databases that accurately described the manufacturing of precision optics. If one searched for Precision Optics in the O-Net database, they'd be directed to a description of an ophthalmic or a photonics technician. The new definition can be found at this link: <https://occupationalinfo.org/onet/89917a.html>. It still includes some references to the old ophthalmic technician, but it's much better than what was there. There is also a description in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (D.O.T.) CODE 716.382-018. Both of these could use improvement, but the occupation was deemed apprenticeable on March 1, 2016.

Next we began working with NYS to draft an outline for the trade. The program is three years, or 6000 hours of hands on experience, plus 144 hours per year of class room training. The related instruction for this program includes in house, on-line, and community college courses. The hands on experience at Optimax takes the apprentices through all aspects of the organization, with most time spent in the manufacturing roles. Our first apprentice began the program in July of 2016, and was registered with NYS in January 2017. Because everything was in place, they earned retroactive credit for the previous 6 months of work they had done. At the moment we have 7 registered apprentices, and intend to start a new apprentice each quarter.

The trade outline prescribes the number of hours required for each of seven, broadly defined Work Processes. Optimax also has created competency expectations for each segment of the program. Based on this, the apprentices receive compensation reviews every 6 months as required in a registered apprenticeship. Each company that sponsors the trade has the ability to set the wage progression for their apprentices, and determine how the apprentice training will take place in their facility. Optimax apprentices have become in-demand resources for responding to bottlenecks and shifting loads in different departments, based on their growing experience.

If you would like to learn more about this apprenticeship, or have questions about how it might work in your facility, please contact Jim VanKouwenberg at jvank@optimaxsi.com or 585-217-0721.