

Alumni in Focus: Profile, scientific production, and career of graduates from the postgraduate program in ophthalmology at UNIFESP

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ABSTRACT | Purpose: To evaluate the academic and professional trajectories of graduates from the Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the *Escola Paulista de Medicina, Universidade Federal de São Paulo*, including geographic distribution, occupational characteristics, and scientific productivity. **Methods:** This descriptive, retrospective, quantitative study included 498 alumni who completed the program between 1979 and 2021. Data were obtained from institutional records and supplemented by public databases (Google Scholar, Lattes Platform, and LinkedIn). The analyzed variables included demographic characteristics, academic background, current professional role, and bibliometric indicators (citation count and h-index). Statistical analyses comprised nonparametric tests and linear regression, with a significance level set at 5%. **Results:** Most alumni were Brazilian (96.6%) and physicians (90.7%), predominantly located in the Southeast region (66.9%). Doctoral training was completed by 80.5% of participants. Alumni with current institutional ties to *Universidade Federal de São Paulo* or *Hospital São Paulo* demonstrated significantly higher citation counts and h-index values. No significant correlation was observed between time since graduation and citation count ($p=0.185$). Alumni engaged in academic roles or with postdoctoral training showed greater scientific productivity. **Conclusions:** The findings highlight the strong academic performance and professional integration of alumni from *Universidade Federal de São Paulo*, particularly

within public institutions and the Southeast region of Brazil. Doctoral training and institutional affiliation were associated with higher scientific productivity. Alumni tracking provides valuable insights into the impact of postgraduate programs and informs strategic planning and development.

Keywords: Factual databases; Program evaluation; Medical education; Graduate education; Ophthalmology; Linear models

INTRODUCTION

Graduate education in Brazil emerged in the mid-20th century as part of a national strategy to develop highly qualified professionals capable of advancing scientific, technological, and economic progress⁽¹⁾. The establishment of the Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES) in 1951 marked a key milestone in structuring postgraduate programs and defining quality standards. Since then, the postgraduate sector has evolved substantially and now represents one of the primary drivers of Brazil's National System for Science, Technology, and Innovation^(2,3).

In recent decades, CAPES has increasingly emphasized evidence-based evaluations of postgraduate programs. Although faculty productivity has traditionally been a central criterion, more recent assessment frameworks have incorporated alumni outcomes—such as professional integration, scientific output, and institutional impact—as key indicators of program effectiveness^(4,5). This shift aligns with international trends that recognize alumni tracking as an essential tool for strategic planning and accountability in higher education^(6,7).

Ophthalmology is a highly specialized and research-intensive medical field. The Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the *Escola Paulista de Medicina, Universidade Federal de São Paulo (EPM/UNIFESP)*, accredited by CAPES in 1979, is among the oldest and most productive programs of its kind in Latin

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Data Availability Statement:

The datasets generated and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request and subject to justified conditions.

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America. The program operates within a setting of high clinical demand, interdisciplinary collaboration, and strong academic infrastructure. Despite its long-standing academic excellence, systematic evaluations of alumni trajectories in ophthalmology postgraduate programs remain scarce in Brazil and internationally. The recent integration of scientometric indicators into graduate program evaluations has further underscored the need to quantify the academic impact of alumni^(5,8). Metrics such as citation counts and the h-index, although not without limitations, are widely used to assess individual and institutional scientific productivity⁽⁹⁾. These indicators inform decisions related to funding allocation, academic promotion, and program accreditation⁽¹⁰⁾. However, the longitudinal relationship between time since graduation and scientific productivity remains poorly characterized, particularly within medical subspecialties⁽¹¹⁾.

The present study addresses this gap by analyzing the academic and professional profiles of 498 alumni from the EPM/UNIFESP Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences who completed their training between 1979 and 2021. Specifically, we examined geographic distribution, institutional affiliations, and scientometric indicators, including citation counts and h-index values derived from Google Scholar. In addition, linear regression models were applied to evaluate whether time since completion of the highest academic degree was associated with citation metrics. This study contributes to the literature by presenting a replicable methodology for postgraduate program evaluation and by providing a publicly accessible, anonymized dataset to support transparency and reproducibility.

METHODS

This retrospective, descriptive, cross-sectional study analyzed the academic and professional trajectories of 498 alumni who graduated from the Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at the Escola Paulista de Medicina, Universidade Federal de São Paulo (EPM/UNIFESP), between 1979 and 2021. The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of UNIFESP (approval no. 1.480.825; amendment no. 2.621.509).

Alumni identification and graduation records were obtained from the official database of the UNIFESP Graduate Office. Bibliometric data were collected between October and December 2022 from Google

Scholar and cross-validated using the Lattes Platform and LinkedIn to ensure consistency of academic profiles and institutional affiliations. Supplementary information was retrieved from publicly available sources, including Google Scholar, the Lattes Curriculum Platform (maintained by the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development), and LinkedIn⁽¹²⁾.

The following variables were collected:

- Demographic data: age, sex, nationality, region of birth, and type of undergraduate institution (public or private).
- Academic data: postgraduate degree(s) obtained (Master's degree, PhD, and postdoctoral fellowship), year of graduation, academic background (medical or non-medical), citation count, and h-index (Google Scholar)⁽¹³⁾.
- Professional data: sector of employment (public, private, or both), work location (Brazil or abroad), institutional affiliation (UNIFESP or *Hospital São Paulo*), and type of professional activity (clinical practice, teaching/research, or combined).

The study cohort included all individuals who obtained a Master's or PhD degree from the program during the study period. Records with incomplete information, duplicate entries, or degrees not formally conferred were excluded. For alumni who completed both a Master's and a PhD degree, only the highest academic degree was included in the analysis.

Name disambiguation was performed through manual verification of publication lists, institutional affiliations, and ORCID identifiers when available. Twelve ambiguous profiles (2.4%) that could not be reliably confirmed were excluded from bibliometric analyses.

Scientific productivity was quantified using total citation counts and h-index scores retrieved from Google Scholar. Geographic location was categorized according to Brazil's five official regions, with an additional category for alumni working abroad. Alumni were also classified based on their highest academic qualification and current professional role. Missing data were minimal (<5% per variable) and were addressed using a complete-case analysis. A flow diagram summarizing alumni identification, exclusion, and inclusion is presented in Figure 2.

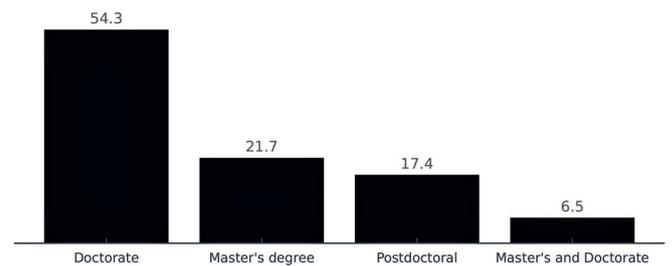
Statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 25.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

Continuous variables were assessed for normality using the Shapiro–Wilk test and were presented as medians and interquartile ranges (IQR) due to non-normal distributions⁽¹⁴⁾. Citation counts and h-index values showed significant deviation from normality ($p < 0.001$) and were therefore analyzed using nonparametric methods. Comparisons between two groups were conducted using the Mann–Whitney U test, while comparisons among three or more groups were conducted using the Kruskal–Wallis test with Bonferroni-adjusted post hoc analyses⁽¹⁵⁾. Categorical variables were summarized as frequencies and percentages and compared using the chi-square test. Correlations between continuous nonparametric variables were assessed using Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient. A simple linear regression model was applied to evaluate whether time since the completion of the highest academic degree predicted citation count. Model assumptions of linearity, normality of residuals, and homoscedasticity were verified. Regression coefficients were reported with 95% confidence intervals (CIs) and corresponding p-values.

RESULTS

A total of 498 alumni from the Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at EPM/UNIFESP, who obtained a Master’s or PhD degree between 1979 and 2021, were included in the analysis. Of these, 285 (57.2%) and 213 (42.8%) held a Master’s and a PhD degree, respectively. The median age at the time of data collection was 47 years (interquartile range [IQR], 40–56), with a slight predominance of female participants (54.4%). Most alumni were born in the Southeast region of Brazil (67.1%), and the majority had completed their undergraduate education at public universities (71.5%, Table 1).

Regarding geographic distribution, 77.5% of alumni were working in Brazil at the time of data collection, predominantly in the Southeast region (60.1%). Approximately 22.5% were working abroad, mainly in North America and Europe (Figure 1). Most alumni were employed in the public sector (51.6%) or in both public and private sectors (35.7%), whereas a smaller proportion (12.7%) reported exclusive employment in the private sector. Professional roles were categorized as clinical (46.4%), academic (31.2%), or mixed clinical–academic (22.5%, Table 2).



Percentages represent the proportion of alumni working in each Brazilian region or abroad.

Figure 1. Geographic distribution of current professional activity among alumni of the Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at UNIFESP.

Table 1. Demographic and academic characteristics of graduates from the Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences (1979–2021)

Category	Quantity (%)
Total graduates	498 (100)
Physicians	451 (90.7)
Non-physicians	46 (9.3)
Brazilians	481 (96.6)
Foreigners	17 (3.4)
Female	219 (44)
Male	279 (56)
Only Master’s degree	76 (15.3)
Master’s + Doctorate	93 (18.7)
Only Doctorate	283 (56.8)
Only Post-doctorate	21 (4.2)
Doctorate + Post-doctorate	22 (4.4)
Master’s + Doctorate + Post-doctorate	3 (0.6)

Data presented as frequency (n) and percentage (%).

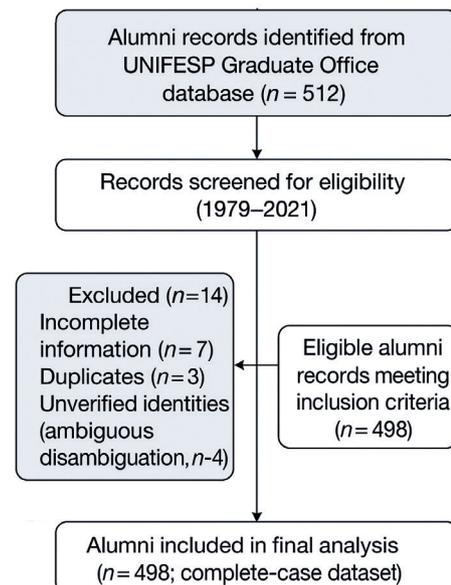


Figure 2. Flow diagram illustrating the identification, exclusion, and inclusion of alumni records from the UNIFESP Graduate Office database (1979–2021). A total of 512 records were screened; 14 were excluded (seven incomplete records, three duplicates, and four ambiguous profiles), resulting in 498 alumni included in the final analysis.

Table 2. Professional practice profile of graduates according to sector and location

Type of Practice	Graduates (n)	Percentage (%)	Details
Only in Private Practice/ Clinic	276	55.4	- 268 in Brazil - 8 abroad
Only in Teaching/Research	37	7.4	- 21 in Brazil - 16 abroad
Practice in Both Categories (Clinic and Teaching/ Research)	177	35.6	- 172 in Brazil - 4 abroad
Professional Practice Not Available	8	1.6	- 7 in Brazil - 1 abroad

Data presented as frequency (n) and percentage (%).

Table 3. Scientific productivity expressed by the h-index according to the highest academic degree obtained in the postgraduate program

	H-index (median (IQR))
Master's (a)	2.4 (3.8)
Doctorate (b)	4.7 (4.2)
Master's and Doctorate (b)	7.8 (8)
Postdoctorate (b)	6.4 (4.9)
Doctorate and Postdoctorate (b)	8.6 (11.2)
Master's, Doctorate, and Postdoctorate (a,b)	9.7 (8.7)

Data presented as median (IQR). Kruskal-Wallis test applied; different letters indicate statistically significant differences between groups (p<0.05).

Table 4. Association between employment relationship (UNIFESP/Hospital São Paulo) and indicators of scientific productivity (citation count and h-index)

	They work at UNIFESP or HSP		p-value*
	No	Yes	
Number of citations (n=498)	162 (313)	907 (1718)	p<0.0001
H-index (n=485)	4.5 (4.4)	12 (11)	p<0.0001

Data presented as median (IQR). Mann-Whitney U test applied.

Table 5. Association between the type of professional activity and the academic degree obtained in the postgraduate program

Course taken at PPG	Professional activity category				p-value*
	PPC	TR	TRPPC	AB	
Doctorate	171 (63.8) _a	14 (70) _{a, b}	75 (42.6) _b	18 (66.7) _{a, b}	p<0.0001
Doctorate and Postdoctoral training	4 (1.5) _a	0 (0) _{a, b}	18 (10.2) _b	0 (0) _{a, b}	
Master's degree	52 (19.4) _a	0 (0) _a	20 (11.4) _a	2 (7.4) _a	
Master's degree and Doctorate	33 (12.3) _a	3 (15) _{a, b}	52 (29.5) _b	5 (18.5) _{a, b}	
Master's degree, Doctorate, and Postdoctoral training	0 (0) _a	0 (0) _a	3 (1.7) _a	0 (0) _a	
Postdoctoral training	8 (3) _a	3 (15) _b	8 (4.5) _{a, b}	2 (7.4) _{a, b}	

*Chi-square test. Different letters indicate statistically different proportions in the row.

Data presented as frequency (n) and percentage (%). PPC = Private Practice and Clinic; TR = Teaching and Research; TRPPC = Teaching, Research, Private Practice and Clinic; AB = Abroad.

Analysis of academic background showed that most alumni (87.6%) held a medical degree, while 12.4% held degrees in other health-related or biological sciences. The number of alumni completing doctoral degrees increased steadily over the decades, with the highest number of PhD completions occurring between 2010 and 2020.

Scientific productivity was assessed using citation counts and h-index values obtained from Google Scholar. The median citation count and h-index were 112 (IQR, 26–389) and 5 (IQR, 2–10), respectively. PhD graduates demonstrated significantly higher median citation counts (233 vs. 42) and h-index values (8 vs. 3) than Master's graduates (p<0.001 for both comparisons, Table 3).

Nonparametric analyses revealed that alumni currently affiliated with UNIFESP or Hospital São Paulo had significantly higher citation counts and h-index values than those without academic affiliation (Table 4). Scientific productivity also varied according to professional activity, with higher median values observed among alumni engaged in teaching and research (Table 5).

Spearman's correlation analysis showed a moderate positive association between the number of years since degree completion and citation count (ρ=0.49, p<0.001). A simple linear regression model confirmed that time since the completion of the highest academic degree was a significant predictor of citation count (β=18.7, p<0.001, R²=0.24, Table 6).

DISCUSSION

This study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the academic and professional trajectories of alumni from

Table 6. Linear regression model assessing the relationship between time since last academic degree and citation count (Google Scholar 2022)

	Coefficient	T	p-value	IC 95%	
Constant	171.9	3.140	0.002	64.35	279.48
Last title time	4.0	1.328	0.185	-1.91	9.89

Dependent variable: Number of citations by Google Scholar (2022)

Coefficients reported with 95% confidence intervals. Dependent variable: total citations; $\beta=4.0$ (95% CI, -1.91 to 9.89), $p=0.185$.

the Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at EPM/UNIFESP, highlighting geographic distribution, professional engagement, and scientific productivity. Our findings indicate that most alumni are physicians (90.7%) and are predominantly engaged in clinical practice within Brazil's Southeast region, reflecting a pattern of regional concentration consistent with previous studies on the retention of medical graduates⁽¹⁶⁾.

The high proportion of doctoral degree holders (80.5%) observed in this cohort aligns with national trends demonstrating substantial expansion of doctoral programs relative to Master's programs in Brazil^(17,18). Alumni with PhD degrees exhibited significantly greater scientific productivity than Master's graduates, reinforcing evidence that doctoral training is a key determinant of sustained research output^(17,18).

A significant association was identified between scientific productivity—measured by citation counts and h-index values—and ongoing affiliation with academic institutions, particularly UNIFESP and *Hospital São Paulo*. This finding supports prior research indicating that institutional affiliation facilitates continued scholarly output through access to research infrastructure, mentorship, and collaborative networks^(19,20). The median h-index (5) and citation count (112) observed in this study were comparable to the values reported for biomedical postgraduate programs at other major Brazilian institutions, such as Fiocruz and the *Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*, where median h-index values range from 4 to 7^(21,22). These benchmarks place the UNIFESP program within the expected range of high-impact national postgraduate programs.

Time since degree completion showed a moderate positive correlation with citation count, and regression analysis confirmed the cumulative nature of scholarly impact over time⁽⁹⁾. However, the moderate strength of this association suggests that factors such as professional role, institutional affiliation, and sustained research engagement might exert a stronger influence on productivity than elapsed time alone^(23,24).

Although most alumni remained primarily in clinical roles, nearly half were involved in academic and research activities, underscoring the program's contribution to training physician-scientists. Nevertheless, approximately 55% of alumni were not directly engaged in teaching or research, which might reflect limited academic employment opportunities within Brazil's public institutions or individual career preferences favoring clinical practice^(25,26). Institutional characteristics, including structured mentorship, access to research infrastructure, and exposure to funding mechanisms during training, likely played a role in sustaining long-term productivity. These findings highlight the importance of integrating formal mentorship programs and research management training into postgraduate curricula.

This study had limitations inherent to its retrospective design, including incomplete or outdated online profiles for some alumni, which may have introduced information bias⁽²⁷⁾. Future longitudinal and qualitative studies incorporating alumni interviews could provide deeper insights into factors influencing career trajectories and research productivity^(28,29). Overall, this study underscores the importance of systematic alumni tracking to inform strategic planning and highlights opportunities for curricular enhancement and alumni support, particularly in fostering broader geographic diversity and interdisciplinary collaboration⁽³⁰⁾. Additionally, as this study was conducted at a single Brazilian institution, caution is warranted when generalizing the findings to other postgraduate contexts, given potential differences in institutional structure, funding, and career pathways.

In conclusion, alumni from the Graduate Program in Ophthalmology and Visual Sciences at EPM/UNIFESP demonstrate diverse academic and professional trajectories, with most engaged in clinical practice in Brazil. PhD holders exhibited significantly greater scientific productivity than Master's graduates, and academic affiliation with UNIFESP or *Hospital São Paulo* was associated with higher productivity. The number of citations increased proportionally with time since graduation, reflecting the cumulative nature of scholarly impact. Together, these findings support the program's effectiveness in developing physician-scientists and provide a useful framework for evaluating the outcomes of postgraduate training.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Significant contribution to conception and design: Rosângela Demetrio, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri.

Data acquisition: Rosângela Demetrio, Adriano Cypriano Faneli, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri. **Data analysis and interpretation:** Rosângela Demetrio, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri. **Manuscript drafting:** Rosângela Demetrio, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri, Adriano Cypriano Faneli, Denise de Freitas. **Significant intellectual content revision of the manuscript:** Denise de Freitas, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri. **Final approval of the submitted manuscript:** Rosângela Demetrio, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri, Adriano Cypriano Faneli, Denise de Freitas. **Statistical analysis:** Rosângela Demetrio, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri. **Obtaining funding:** not applicable. **Supervision of administrative, technical, or material support:** Denise de Freitas, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri. **Research group leadership:** Denise de Freitas, Caio Vinicius Saito Regatieri.

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