Congratulations Class of 2011!

On Saturday evening, May 15th, 43 graduates of the UMSL College of Optometry celebrated this accomplishment in the splendor that is the Touhill Performing Arts Center. The lengthy journey that took them through the rigors of a very challenging curriculum, through hundreds of tests, through three National Board examinations, and through numerous clinical rotations and attending doctors ended with a simple walk across the stage. There they received the symbolic pot of gold at the end of the academic rainbow, the Doctor of Optometry degree in front of hundreds of family members and friends.

They were led to the stage by their Student Marshal, Jessica Carson. Their degree of optometry was confirmed by Chancellor Thomas George. Dr. Anne Ream (’84), a former member of the UMSL Board of Curators, reminded them of their obligations to the profession now that they are officially Doctors of Optometry.

A highlight of the evening was the keynote address by Dr. Dori Carlson, President-Elect of the American Optometric Association. With the theme of “Who Will You Be” she reminded the graduates of her journey through optometry which, in fact, was a very surprising one. “I live in North Dakota. It honestly wasn't one of the places I would have said I was going to reside 21 years ago. I was off to do my residency at American Lake VA in Tacoma, Washington. I was all set to start a position with a glaucoma specialist in Seattle………

And THEN one day the letter came. It was from a little town in
by those who served before us. The framework to maximize our personal impact upon optometry and eye care rests within the state and national volunteer associations like the MOA and AOA. As we celebrate with enthusiasm the academic achievements of our students and graduates, we look forward to their contributions to the future of eye care and optometry.

Best Regards,

Larry J. Davis, O.D.
Dean

Dr. Ed Bennett was recently elected to membership in the National Academies of Practice.

Lynn Herndon (‘84) was the author of an article entitled “An Eye for Design” in the March 2011 issue of Review of Optometry.

Dean Larry Davis was elected President of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry at the December 2010 Board of Directors Meeting. Dr. Davis joined the Board in 2006 and has previously served as Vice-President and Secretary/Treasurer. Also on the Board of Directors is UMSL College of Optometry graduate Christina Sorensen (‘85), currently Assistant Dean at the Arizona College of Optometry.

North Dakota who said their optometrist had retired and closed his doors. It read, ‘We noticed that you have a ND license. Would you be interested in looking at our little town and possibly opening a practice here?’ (Now I need to tell you I had recently married an optometrist. We met in Oregon at school and he just happened to be from ND.) So we started the dialogue.

Next thing you know this little town started sending us the weekly paper. They asked us if they could fly us out over Thanksgiving to take a look at their little town. They raffled off a four foot stuffed raccoon to pay for our airline tickets (no kidding - we read about it in the paper)! The Methodist pastor drove around in the back of the local plumber’s pickup in order to make a video of the town to send to us.” The rest, as they say, was history and her partner in optometry and in life, Dr. Mark Helgeson, was in attendance at the graduation ceremony. Dr. Carlson then communicated how she had to learn how to manage a practice and make a living. She became involved in the North Dakota Optometric Association, ultimately becoming President at a time when she had a five week old baby. She then defeated all of the odds by being elected from a very small (population) state to the AOA Board of Trustees. Periodically, while communicating her optometric journey, she would look directly at the graduates and say, “Who will you be?” It was a very inspirational talk to a very interested audience.

The Class of 2011 is one that the College of Optometry will always be proud of. They overcame not only the challenges of a rigorous program, but also the apprehensions associated with a lengthy delay in receiving NBEO results. They achieved well academically; they achieved excellence clinically. They served the College of Optometry via their service and leadership; they served the profession via their efforts nationally with the American Optometric Association, and in foreign countries via the Student Volunteers of Optometric Services to Humanity. They were a very close extended family who studied together and socialized together, including some innovative activities that brought the class even closer together.

The ceremony concluded with the awarding of special honors to individuals who had achieved excellence in areas such as pediatrics, low vision, contact lenses, and service to the College. However, for the Class of 2011, the most significant honor bestowed upon them this evening was the title of “Doctor of Optometry.” This was a well-deserved reward for an outstanding group of young optometrists.
In one of the nicest traditions of the College of Optometry, on Thursday afternoon, May 12th, 40 deserving individuals were honored with the formal presentation of their White Coat, signifying that they now have clinical privileges and can provide direct patient care. Second to their graduation in May, 2013, this is the most important accomplishment during their tenure in optometry school and is very worthy of this ceremony. No less than a few hundred family members, friends, faculty, and staff were in attendance as their names were called and they walked across the stage at the Millennium Student Center to receive their White Coat from Drs. Gary Bachman and Tim Wingerd.

The keynote speaker at this ceremony was Dr. Dori Carlson, President-Elect of the American Optometric Association. She looked at UMSL’s newest clinicians and provided them with some very important take home messages including: “Be confident.” “Be the first to say hello.” “Don’t be afraid to say ‘I don’t know’.” “Treat others as you would want to be treated.” “Strive for excellence, not perfection.”

Eric Jerde (‘12) former Class Representative of the Class of 2012 provided the student remarks. His comments were both sincere and humorous with the theme of how enjoyable it will be to see patients. Representative comments included: “When the patients thank you as they leave, that’s when its fun. When the patients realize that they can see the smallest letters after all, that’s when it’s fun.” His closing statement was “Remember, you are going to make mistakes, seek out knowledge, practice communication, and never say oops.”

The highlight of the afternoon, however, was the introduction of each honoree and the presentation of their White Coat. Dr. Ed Bennett, Assistant Dean for Student Services and Alumni Relations, provided the introductions. In his opening comments he complimented the class on how well they worked together as a team: “You have achieved well; you have great clinical potential; you have demonstrated very good leadership within and outside of the College of Optometry. You entered 21 months ago as one of the most diverse classes we have ever recruited with abilities in journalism, business, the performing arts, athletics, and with a collective personality and interpersonal communication skills to rival any class we have ever admitted. When we thought about a group that would mesh together and do wonders for the profession of optometry it is you. You have a collective personality to work together as a team, to care enough about the people around you to help them become more successful. I don’t believe any class has accomplished that better than you have.”

Jordan Jones (‘11) and Jessica Carson (‘11) were both featured in the 2010-11 American Academy of Optometry Membership Video.

Alison Carter Ramsey (‘01) published an article entitled “Vital Stains: What you really need to know” in the April, 2011 issue of Review of Cornea & Contact Lenses.

Katie (Hahn) Weeden (‘07) and Kyle Weeden (‘08) are the proud parents of Sadie Joy, born April 25th.

Seth Bachelier (‘13) and wife Erin are excited to announce the birth of their son, Graham, on May 4th.

Kim Layfield (OD ‘07; Cornea and Contact Lens Residency ‘08) and husband Matt welcomed the birth of Anna Carolynn on March 16th.

Dr. Jeff Schletzbaum (‘03) was the 2011 recipient of the Young Optometrist of the Year Award announced by the Kansas Optometric Association, April 29, 2011, at the organization’s 111th Annual Convention and Seminar at
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the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Wichita. Dr. Wayne Gilmore (’99) was the 2011 recipient of the Dr. William Carriger, Sr. Legislative Service Award. This award from the Kansas Optometric Association recognizes optometrists who have made outstanding contributions to the profession through involvement in the legislative process.

Dr. Gary Bachman presented a poster for the European Academy of Optometry in Prague, Chez Republic entitled Nanophthalmos in a Highway Patrol Applicant.

In a national competition including all of the Schools and Colleges of Optometry, Katie Robertson (’11) was awarded the first annual Dr. Harvey Yamamoto honorary award by the American Optometric Society at their annual meeting in Tampa, Florida on April 2nd. She was honored for her original essay highlighting plans of how she will give back to the profession as well as to the community upon graduation. She will receive transportation to attend the AOS Meeting, hotel room, a year’s paid membership in the American Optometric Society, and a certificate, in addition to a $1000 cash award.

Katie Robertson (’11) is shown receiving the Harvey Yamamoto Award from AOS President, Dr. Pam Miller.

**UMSL Students Play a Prominent Role at the 2011 AOA Congressional Congress**

A record number of students— including 13 UMSL College of Optometry students—participated in the 2011 American Optometric Association (AOA) Congressional Advocacy Congress, held April 3 - 5 in Washington D.C. According to UMSL’s premier student lobbyist, Tonia Batts (’11), it was a very good experience. “The congressional advocacy conference saw record numbers of students this year with UMSL leading the pack. Students from across the country stormed Capitol Hill to ensure that we leave our mark on the profession. Students sat through ‘lobbying 101’, a class that taught them about government, the bills, and how to speak to a member of Congress. We attended a Congressional Reception where several members attended to show their support. On the last day students split up and went with their state delegation to meet with members of Congress and hill staffers.” UMSL AOSA Trustee Jennifer Sidun (’13) agreed. “It was one of the best experiences I have had in optometry school. Our students lobbied with many different states as well since we are from all over the country. I lobbied with both Ohio and Kentucky which was very interesting because of the new laws passed. A big plus for the students who attend is the networking opportunities. The environment is much more inviting than most conferences for students since it is a smaller number of people and we are all there for the same reasons. Most events for the doctors and the students are combined so it give everyone an opportunity to mingle. It is also helpful because the students are able to meet doctors who are involved in their state organizations and they can spend time with them.”

Of course, an important part of the meeting was the opportunity to assist on important legislation. According to Tonia Batts: “It was a successful meeting; we were able to obtain several co-sponsors on our bills and educate Capitol Hill about the importance of Optometry.” Jennifer Sidun also observed the legislative benefits, especially as it pertained to students; “One of the bills that we are trying to get passed is relevant mostly to the students. It is the health service care bill which would allow loan forgiveness to students who choose to work in under-privileged areas. The doctors understood how important this is for the students so many of them let the students explain the bill to the legislators. This made everyone feel like we were really making a difference which I know was important and rewarding to everyone in attendance.”

These efforts did not go unnoticed by AOA President-Elect Dr. Dori Carlson. “The students were so instrumental in our messaging on the Hill and what an incredibly dedicated group. Great job! I have one request - I want to see even MORE students next year.”

AOA President Dr. Joe Ellis is shown with UMSL students Steve Branstetter (’13), Tonia Batts (’11) and Kevin Hoang (’13) at the AOA Congressional Advocacy Congress.
President-Elect of the AOA, Dr. Dori Carlson Meets with UMSL Students and Faculty

The UMSL College of Optometry proudly welcomed Dori Carlson, O.D., President-Elect of the American Optometric Association (AOA) for a three day whirlwind visit in which she spoke to the entire student body, met the faculty of the College and provided the keynote addresses, both at the White Coat ceremony on Thursday afternoon, May 12th, and commencement, held Saturday evening, May 14th. UMSL was the 9th stop on her very ambitious and unprecedented 20 stops in 20 months tour of every School and College of Optometry in the United States.

Her meeting with the College of Optometry faculty on Thursday evening was very impressive. For nearly 90 minutes she addressed critical issues facing optometry today and how they are (or will be) addressed while answering a large number of questions posed to her by the faculty. It was quite evident that few people have their finger on the pulse of the optometric profession as well as Dr. Dori Carlson.

Her lunchtime powerpoint presentation on Thursday, May 12th, to the entire student body, entitled “Life’s Little Lessons of Optometry”, was both inspirational and motivational. It had a very positive beginning as the students held up a “U-M-S-L <Heart> Dori” banner as she initiated her talk. She complimented the students for their involvement politically with the AOA at the recent Washington meeting as well as UMSL’s impressive registration for the upcoming Salt Lake City meeting. However, she emphasized the importance of converting AOAs membership into AOA membership after graduation and why. With her visits to all Schools and Colleges of Optometry it is likely that a significant increase in this conversion will be observed not long after her tenure as President has concluded. To do so, she recommended that the new graduates contact the affiliated state optometric association in which their principal practice is located. However, a new graduate who is not licensed may continue student membership for up to 18 months following graduation by contacting the AOA Members Records department at memberrecords@aoa.org. Dr. Duane Thompson, President of the Missouri Optometric Association (MOA), was in attendance for both the student and faculty meetings on Thursday and he generously offered the support of the MOA in helping them transition to AOA membership even if they do not plan on being Missouri residents.

In her presentation Dr. Carlson presented many of “life’s lessons” and how they can be applied to exhibiting excellence in optometry. These included the Golden Rule: “Treat others as you would like to be treated” and “Leave everything a little better than you found it.” She also emphasized the importance of communication. She stated, “Let me give you the best marketing tip for your future practice: ‘Word of mouth.’ We have done all sorts of marketing initiatives over the years but when we track them in our office and ask people why they came to see us ... it’s word of mouth. It doesn’t matter where you live or practice. You will receive new patients based on the experience of your current ones. If they can go back and tell their family and friends how impressed they were with the way you listened to their problems and showed genuine concern, they will come back and they will refer others to you.”

She also discussed tools available from the AOA to help students and young optometrists to be successful. These included

1) Professional networking: at your state association meeting and by joining AOAConnect, the online social networking website.

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For Some Members of the Class of 2011, The Doctor of Optometry is Especially Meaningful

The admissions process for the UMSL College of Optometry is always challenging. To determine the 44 most qualified future optometrists requires more than what is present in an application. How can they communicate? How much will they be engaged with their class and with the College? Do they have potential as a leader? Do they have characteristics or talents that would benefit the profession after graduation? The four members of the Class of 2011 profiled in this feature are outstanding examples of individuals who have qualities that far exceed a written application. Their contributions to the College have been noteworthy; however, more important is what they can potentially contribute to the profession as a result of the gifts they uniquely possess. As you will see in the fascinating stories of these four graduates, they intend to do exactly that.

THE TRAILBLAZING POLITICAL LEADER

The profession of optometry greatly benefits from the passion of its membership... whether this passion is toward the management of ocular disease, toward working with children, toward working with the community... or toward becoming very involved politically to help the profession grow and become stronger. The latter would be very commendable for a busy practicing optometrist... and it would be unheard of for someone who hasn’t even entered a College of Optometry. Meet Tonia Batts, O.D. She became involved politically in Washington DC before initiating her optometric training. During optometry school she made several return trips to Washington DC on behalf of optometry, often in her role as student National Liaison to the American Optometric Association (AOA) Political Action Committee (PAC). She lectured to optometry students at several colleges on the benefits of becoming involved politically and the steps they needed to take to accomplish this task. How did this passion develop? “After being accepted to optometry school, I decided with much deliberation to defer school for a year. My husband was working in Washington DC and was really enjoying his time there. I worked as an assistant/office manager for a Member of Congress. Being there every day made me look at how politics really worked. Its not always what you see on CNN or Fox news, there is much, much more. Working on the Hill every day lit a fire in me. I began to really find a passion for healthcare issues, focusing mainly on my future job, Optometry. I interned with the American Optometric Association Washington DC office to better enhance my knowledge of the focused politics. I became the AOA-Political Action Committee student National Liaison to better help my classmates and future colleagues understand how they can make a difference. I’ve made at least two trips to DC annually to either work with the AOA-PAC, meet with Members of Congress or attend fundraiser breakfasts.”

Dr. Tonia Batts

The UMSL College of Optometry greatly benefited from Tonia’s leadership, not only politically but also with the many social activities she planned. This is especially true since she arrived at UMSL after transferring from another institution. Ordinarily this can be a difficult adjustment, taking much time to adjust to a new college, to a new class. Tonia, however, had an immediate and positive impact at UMSL. “I started my optometry journey at Nova Southeastern University, and just like UMSL it was a great school. During my first couple of weeks I was asked to speak about current events in Optometry class. The topic was politics; boy was I in luck. It was the beginning of my search to find more ways to speak about my political passion. A few days later the vote for class president began and I found my name on the ballot. I was so excited to be elected my class president. After moving to UMSL, I knew what I wanted to do. The best part about being president at NOVA was the party planning... so it was an easy choice for me to run as the class social chair. I'm still not sure how I won, considering none of my class knew who I was! I found myself planning all kind of events, including the first annual Eye Scream Halloween party, the Post Boards Party and Six Flags Day. I also found myself becoming involved with SVOSH, AOSA as Vice President, as well as staying involved in the AOA-PAC.”

And what are her future plans now that she that she has graduated from the UMSL College of Optometry? “I will be joining a private practice in Mayfield, Kentucky called Eye Care Associates of Kentucky as an associate with the intent of a partnership in the future. I plan on maintaining my volunteer roles for the AOA and staying involved politically.” Don’t be surprised if her future also includes becoming President of the American Optometric Association.

THE PERFORMING ARTIST

An integral component in the admissions process for the College of Optometry is diversity; diversity in culture; diversity in race; diversity in background and interests.

Hanna Kim’s background was not unheard of for someone who hasn’t even entered a College of Optometry. Meet Tonia Batts, O.D. She became involved politically in Washington DC before initiating her optometric training. During optometry school she made several return trips to Washington DC on behalf of optometry, often in her role as student National Liaison to the American Optometric Association (AOA) Political Action Committee (PAC). She lectured to optometry students at several colleges on the benefits of becoming involved politically and the steps they needed to take to accomplish this task. How did this passion develop? “After being accepted to optometry school, I decided with much deliberation to defer school for a year. My husband was working in Washington DC and was really enjoying his time there. I worked as an assistant/office manager for a Member of Congress. Being there every day made me look at how politics really worked. Its not always what you see on CNN or Fox news, there is much, much more. Working on the Hill every day lit a fire in me. I began to really find a passion for healthcare issues, focusing mainly on my future job, Optometry. I interned with the American Optometric Association Washington DC office to better enhance my knowledge of the focused politics. I became the AOA-Political Action Committee student National Liaison to better help my classmates and future colleagues understand how they can make a difference. I’ve made at least two trips to DC annually to either work with the AOA-PAC, meet with Members of Congress or attend fundraiser breakfasts.”

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Hanna Kim’s background was not
allowed her to travel all around the world. This also resulted in an individual who has a remarkably positive attitude toward life; someone who could be a very supportive member of a team which, of course, she was. How did her journey begin?

“Music has been a huge part of my childhood and family life. My sisters and I grew up giving impromptu concerts for our family and friends. I started playing the piano when I was 5 and the violin when I was 9. It’s such an intimate and special feeling to be a part of a unit producing one sound. I joined a private orchestra in high school that toured all around the world giving benefit concerts. Through this opportunity, I was able to travel to over 30 countries. It made my world so much larger, being able to see different lands and experience different cultures. For that, I will be forever grateful. I continued to play violin in college and spent just as much time in the fine arts building as I did in the Biology department. It was there that I discovered theatre. Using my body and voice instead of my violin was such a new and refreshing way to express myself. There’s no better high than feeling the audience’s eyes on you during a performance. Even through the rigor of the optometric curriculum, I was able to participate in some of the smaller productions UMSL had during my first and second year. I definitely feel like my background in violin and theatre helped shape how I live my life. In an orchestra, every instrument has a different part. When playing a part by itself, it can seem dissonant and random in some places, but when everyone plays together, the result is a symphony of harmonies that has the power to make your heart soar. In theatre, timing is everything. It’s so amazing to see how the same line in a script can either bring the house down with laughter or illicit no reaction at all from the audience depending on the delivery. Life is like that too. Everyone has their own part, and time they are needed. You have to trust that the other people in your life are ready to play their part, and have faith that when you look around at the world you made for yourself, it can only be described as a masterpiece.”

Hanna became a very integral part of the College of Optometry. She was an outstanding Student Ambassador and was honored at the graduation ceremony. As President of the Student Volunteers of Optometric Services to Humanity (SVOSH), she created numerous opportunities for students to travel on mission trips to underserved countries to provide vision to those in need and, in fact, helped make the UMSL SVOSH organization one of the finest in the country. She was one of a core group of five individuals in her class living at Eye, Live & Learn (Optometry Villa) that helped make applicants to the College feel at home by picking them up at the airport, dining with them, and then providing a room for them at this on-campus housing facility. And she enjoyed every minute of it. “My experience at UMSL has been unbelievable. When you’re surrounded by great people, it’s almost impossible to have a negative experience. I know everyone says this, but I know mine is true: We had the best class in the history of UMSL. The bond that our class has is something that I will cherish and look back on fondly after graduation. We started out as 44 strangers and left 44 life-long friends. It sounds cheesy but no one, not our spouse, parents, siblings, significant other, REALLY knows what we went through except our classmates. We can try to explain to our loved ones until we’re blue in the face, but they’ll never REALLY understand. Life post graduation doesn’t seem that scary because I know I have 43 people who have my back; people that will encourage me, support me, and be on my side. The same goes for the faculty. When our professors told us 1st year that we’ll end up colleagues in 4 years, the idea seemed absurd. Today, I can honestly say that I wouldn’t hesitate to call up any of them if I had a question or concern. I came to St. Louis without knowing a single soul. During my time here, I made some great friends, got an awesome education, had the opportunity to serve in leadership positions, went on two vision mission trips overseas, and gained a purpose and mission for the course of my life. To sum it all up, it was the best 4 years of my life so far and I am grateful to UMSL and everyone who shared this experience with me.”

Hanna’s future looks bright as well. “I start my residency in July at the Northport VA Hospital in New York. It will focus on Vision Rehabilitation for victims of Head Trauma. I will use my training during residency as an optometrist in the US Army to better provide for those serving our country. Patients who are experiencing visual issues due to TBI/ABI are a growing and underserved population and I am excited at the prospect of using my education to make a difference in someone’s life . . . life will always throw curveballs, but leaving yourself open to embrace new opportunities and changes will end up leading you to an even better place than you could’ve possibly imagined. I can’t wait to see what the next 4 years will bring!” In life all that can be asked is that you leave a place better than you found it. The UMSL College of Optometry is a better institution because of Hanna Kim.

THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY

Imagine growing up in a foreign country with no knowledge of the English language. After high school you make the decision that you want to study in the United States . . . a dream that is not shared by your family.

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You not only learn how to write and speak the language, you graduate from college with honors and then are promptly admitted into the UMSL College of Optometry. That is the remarkable journey of Kim Nguyen. “I was born and grew up in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. I graduated from Le Hong Phong High School for the Gifted in 2002. I decided to come to the United States of America in January 2003 as an international student at Maryville University, Saint Louis, Missouri despite my parents’ objections. They worried that with my very little English and the fact that I have no immediate relatives to guide me in the USA, I won’t be able to make it through school and end up wasting my time. Fortunately, after much discussion, they finally agreed to give me a chance. At Maryville University, I took English as a Secondary Language (ESL) courses to learn how to read, write, listen, and speak in English for 6 months. After passing the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), I was then able to enroll into college-level courses. I stayed at Maryville University for one semester and took basic college courses to familiarize myself with the real classroom environment and also to improve my listening and note taking skills. I then transferred to UMSL in 2004 and declared my major in Biology. I graduated with Summa Cum Laude in Biology in 2007 and was admitted to UMSL College of Optometry prior to my graduation.

Nevertheless, she was faced with a very daunting task: completing a very rigorous and challenging doctoral level program while still essentially learning the English language. However, for Kim Nguyen nothing is impossible and it was merely a matter of staying focused on her goal and utilizing her incredible work ethic. “Getting through Optometry school was not easy for me at all. I honestly don’t think that I would make it without enormous support from my family, my friends, as well as many professors at school. My biggest challenge in optometry school was communicating with the patients due to my language barrier. It was difficult for me to learn to communicate well enough for my patients to understand me, to comply with my instructions, and to trust me as a doctor. Since patient communication is the key to a successful practice, I have to be good at it. So, I prepared scripts for common ocular conditions and pathologies and practiced them over and over again. So far, this method has been working well for me as I now feel more comfortable communicating with my patients.”

Her optometry “family” also made this difficult transition easier. “I had a great and unique experience at the UMSL College of Optometry. I spent so much time with my classmates that we became good friends who understood and supported each other enough to share joys and tears together. With the faculty I could easily say that whenever I needed them, they were there for me, every single time. My heart is filled with appreciation when I think about what they have done for me.”

What does the future hold for Kim Nguyen? “I have decided to keep my mind wide open for any opportunity that comes to me. I would also strive for American Academy of Optometry Fellowship as it represents professional excellence and competence. Additionally, I have planned to do at least one missionary trip to Vietnam to provide free eye exams to underserved areas where eye care access is limited. Eventually, I would want to open my own private practice in Northern California where my husband and I want to raise our little family. I am very excited and ready to conquer the world, knowing that there are still many challenges to come.” For all the obstacles and challenges that Kim Nguyen, O.D., has had to endure and ultimately manage successfully, it’s evident that the profession is gaining a remarkable young lady whose attitude, determination, and work ethic will make her a very good optometrist.

THE TALENTED COMMUNICATOR

Accomplishing all of the goals that result in that beautiful ceremony in May at the Touhill Performing Arts Center is very notable and worthy of celebration. However, the next goal presented to our young eye doctors is how they will best utilize their talents for the betterment of their patients. Stephen Purdy, O.D., has such a talent. He is bilingual and fully intends to serve both the English and Spanish-speaking populations. “My parents both spoke Spanish and all of us (he is the youngest of seven) were encouraged to learn a foreign language. As the youngest, I saw that many of my older siblings ended up living abroad and studied foreign languages: Spanish, French, and Japanese. I graduated from the University of Missouri (Mizzou) in 2003. My degree was ‘Interdisciplinary Studies’ with areas of concentration including Information Science and Learning Technologies, Communications, and Spanish. I had been to Spain, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Panama. However, I didn’t feel that I was fluent in Spanish, which was a goal in my life. I decided to find a job in a foreign speaking country and live there for at least a year. I ended up in South America in a large city called

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For Some Members of the Class of 2011 (cont.)

Barranquilla in the country of Colombia. There I met my lovely wife, Karina, and we had our first child, a girl we named Sophia.”

The UMSL College of Optometry was also helpful in Stephen’s desire to utilize his bilingual abilities. “I have had a very positive experience in the UMSL College of Optometry. It certainly was difficult to balance family life, study, school activities and part-time jobs. My second child, a boy we named Nathan, was born right in the middle of finals at the end of fall semester my second year. I have kept fluent at Spanish in the home, which has come in quite useful in a few of the (UMSL clinical) rotations. Many Spanish speakers were seen in Grace Hill and East Saint Louis. I went on a great SVOSH mission to Mexico where Spanish was extremely useful. Finally, I went to a rotation in South America which was an excellent experience. In all of these experiences with Spanish speakers in the clinic, I learned phrases and vocabulary that aren't usually used in casual speech or ordinary conversations. This will be useful in my career as a bilingual optometrist.”

And Stephen does, in fact, intend to use these abilities now that he has graduated from UMSL. “After graduation I will be moving to El Paso, Texas. There, I will be working with an ophthalmologist in a private practice where 50% of the patients prefer to speak Spanish instead of English. This is a great opportunity to expand my knowledge and experience in optometry, as well as continue working with two languages. I have been fortunate to have these opportunities, and my hope is to provide opportunities of equal value to my own family.”

An Exceptional Graduate and Proud Aunt

He entered the UMSL College of Optometry in August, 2007 with a secret few individuals in the College ever discovered, including many of his classmates. His aunt was a member of the faculty. For her nephew, Dr. Chris Boschen (‘11), Dr. Vinita Henry (‘85), Director of Clinic Operations, would not want it any other way. “I was thrilled when he told me that he wanted to pursue optometry. I was not surprised that he chose a healthcare profession as his father is a veterinarian and his mother, a speech pathologist. It’s been really special to see him learn and proceed through the program. I wasn’t worried about his performance, but I did approach it all with a great deal of caution. I did not want to negatively affect his education by my presence or put any undue pressure on him. My father was the Superintendent of my school during my childhood and I knew that some will credit achievements to the relationship rather than abilities. I wanted to make sure that Chris was admitted and completed the program on his own merits, so no one could feel like I had unfairly affected his achievements. Chris has made that easy to do, both academically and by being a nice guy.”

For Dr. Chris Boschen, who graduated with honors, it was wonderful having a relative and friend to help him through this challenging process. “Dr. Henry played a role after I had done some independent research into optometry as a career. Once I had decided to pursue optometry she was very helpful throughout the application process. She also answered any questions that I had about the profession.”

“It was always nice to see a familiar face around school, and having a family member living close is always a great situation. She did a wonderful job of balancing the student/professor relationship as well as the nephew/aunt relationship.”

Interestingly enough, whether he realizes it or not, the inspiration for Chris to pursue optometry may have occurred at a very young age. Dr. Henry relates: “Chris was 3 months old when I graduated from the College of Optometry in 1985. He attended my graduation with his parents, Scott and Sara Boschen, in the Mark Twain building. After graduation, I babysat him for 3 weeks while studying for boards and before starting my residency. His mother had to return to work for 3 weeks after her maternity leave. Now I wonder if I read board study material to him that affected his future decision to pursue optometry!”

What is certain is how proud she is of her nephew. “It’s been a pleasure to have faculty make positive comments about Chris, not knowing that I was the proud aunt!” Chris, in turn, recognized that he had a very good role model nearby during his optometric training. “I feel very lucky to have a family member who has done as much as she has for our profession.”
Dr. Bernard “Bernie” Dolan, President-Elect of the American Academy of Optometry (AAO), visited the UMSL College of Optometry on April 14th and gave an inspirational talk on the benefits of both being a student member of the AAO and ultimately becoming a Fellow. He emphasized that most Academy Fellows are, in fact, optometrists in private practice and that a guiding principle for the American Academy of Optometry is for its members to be “optometrists who are committed to the highest standard in patient care and to lifelong learning.” He also emphasized for one low fee ($30) students can be student members of the Academy throughout their years in optometry school as well as (if applicable) during their residency. Student benefits include all of the Academy publications - including *Optometry and Vision Science* - and the opportunity to attend the Annual Meeting of the AAO at a very low fee with discounted student housing available as well. In addition, a large number of student travel grants are available (go to www.aaopt.org). This meeting provides the most outstanding optometric education in the world via lectures, workshops, grand rounds presentations, and scientific posters pertaining to every possible contemporary clinical topic. He encouraged all of the students to consider coming to a future annual meeting. The 2011 meeting will be held in Boston from October 12th - 15th. The 2012 meeting will be held from October 24th-27th in Phoenix. The Academy of Optometry generously sponsored a lunch for approximately 70 students who attended the lecture. Dr. Dolan’s lecture also coincided with the launching of the UMSL student chapter of the AAO. Recently approved by the Academy’s Board of Directors, the UMSL Student Chapter was initiated by Ashley Gezella (‘14) and Jenna Nelson (‘14) under the direction of AAO faculty liaison, Dr. Ed Bennett. A large number of students have signed up to be charter members of this organization with many seminars (some in conjunction with the Student Association for Independent Optometry) and fund-raisers planned for 2011-12.

### NOSA’s Annual Easter Egg Hunt for the Visually Impaired is a Big Business

A very important point of pride for the UMSL College of Optometry is the their chapter of the National Optometry Student Association. In fact, UMSL may have the most active and productive NOSA chapter in the country. Most recently, they conducted their annual Easter Egg Hunt for the Visually Impaired, held on the morning of April 9th adjacent to the Thomas Jefferson Library on the UMSL campus. Under the direction of President Vanessa Braimah (‘13), seventeen UMSL NOSA members, in addition to faculty advisor Dr. Alex Harris and, of course, the Easter Bunny, entertained many children visiting from the Missouri School of the Blind.
2) Optometry’s Career Center®: National online career matching service and resource center. It’s the Monster.com of optometry. Free to AOA & AOSA members, it’s features include:
   - detailed opportunity listings
   - ability to post your resume
   - advanced search features
   - e-mail alerts
To take advantage of these resources, Dr. Carlson emphasized to simply visit the website: www.optometryscareercenter.org.

3) Career Central at Optometry’s Meeting - NEW! Comprehensive career-related programming at Optometry’s Meeting to help students and new graduates find opportunities and plan their careers. “Career Central” will be a designated area within the main exhibit hall where they can connect with potential employers, practice sellers, and attend one of many career related courses with topics include resume writing, interviewing, and starting a practice.

4) Career Advocate - An AOA program presented at each school of optometry, usually to 3rd and 4th-year students by renowned practice management/marketing consultant, Dr. Brad Williams. Covers skills and areas of knowledge essential to success: finding a practice location; managing finances; coping with the day-to-day operations of a practice.

5) New in Practice Series - A series of courses presented at Optometry’s Meeting, designed specifically for those in practice 1-10 years.

6) AOA Practice Transitions - An excellent seminar for new ODs interested in buying into a practice or purchasing a practice from a “senior” doc. This comprehensive one-day course covers the fundamental steps to successful practice transition.

And Dr. Carlson enjoyed her visit to UMSL. “I had a great visit. I was really touched by the sign the students held up when I began my presentation and loved how welcomed I felt throughout the weekend. . . . Hopefully I have made a difference.” If her visit to UMSL was any indication of her abilities, it is very evident that the optometric profession will be guided by an outstanding and dynamic leader when she accepts the position of President of the AOA this June at Optometry’s Meeting in Salt Lake City.

In recognition of her dedication and tremendous commitment to visit each of the schools and colleges of optometry, Dean Larry Davis presented Dr. Carlson with the UMSL College of Optometry Dean’s Award for Meritorious Service.
A very worthy group of graduates including the “Fab Five” from Eye, Live & Learn: (left to right): Dinita Bockhold, Hanna Kim, Tim Hougland, Natalie Santelli, Alicia Triplett, and Sarah Burgett