Greetings Friends and Colleagues--

The month of May is my favorite time of year in the life of the College of Optometry. It is a season when our students observe the real benefits of their labors; when they look forward with great anticipation to the next phase of their career; when they pause with the faculty, staff, colleagues and loved ones in order to celebrate their achievements.

Students completing their second professional year, having recently obtained initial clinical privileges, now transition into their clinical training with both excitement and anxiety: their sense of new responsibility is accompanied by an appreciation that they are not left to themselves in the clinics. These new student clinicians have completed approximately 50% of their training but will soon realize heretofore unknown challenges as they transition fully into their clinical experience.

We also have the privilege of sharing in the definitive achievement of our fourth year students: the culmination of their many years of education when our graduates commence into their professional careers. Like just two years earlier, feelings of excitement and anxiety and a sense of responsibility and appreciation abound among these new doctors.

Our new graduates can take comfort knowing that over one thousand individuals before them have made such

Life should be a celebration and when it pertains to the seminal professional accomplishment for 44 graduates of the College of Optometry, the splendor that is the Touhill Performing Arts Center came alive on Saturday night, May 16th in celebration. Family, friends, and loved ones filled this magnificent venue nearly to capacity. It is evident that Shakespeare's words “all the world's a stage” were quite prophetic as all eyes were turned toward the celebration occurring at center stage of this theatre. With a platform party that included both the Chancellor Thomas George and Provost Glen Cope of the University of Missouri-St. Louis, the stage was set for an exciting evening.

Dean Larry Davis introduced the commencement speaker, David Ekin, who currently serves as President and Chief Executive Officer of the St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SLSBVI). In his introduction Dean Davis commented on Mr. Ekin's contributions to society, to the SLSBVI and to the College of Optometry. “For fifteen years, David has helped the Society to continue a tradition of excellence in caring for the blind and visually impaired by holding high the banner ‘Let the Light Remain.’ He has overseen significant expansion of the services provided and clients served by the Society.” . . . “Collaboration between the College of Optometry and The St. Louis Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired provides for the delivery of low vision services for numerous patients throughout the St. Louis community.
Two posters were presented at the Vision Sciences Society annual meeting in Naples, Florida, May 8-13, 2009: “Dichoptic and Monoptic Spatial Integration of Second-Order Contrast” by Erwin Wong and Jenna Kryder (‘12), and “Reduced Second-Order Contrast Discrimination Under Dichoptic Viewing” by Gayathri Srinivasan and Erwin Wong. Gayathri will graduate with an MS in Vision Science in August 2009. Gayathri’s poster was also presented at the UMSL Graduate Research Fair in April and tied for first place in the Master’s Division.


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successful transitions as fellow alumnis of our College. This year we also stepped out onto new ground with the recognition of the 25th anniversary class. It was an honor and a sincere pleasure to recognize the accomplishments of that first graduating class. Several members of the Class of 1984 returned to participate in the graduation procession of our newest Doctors of Optometry.

So in closing I congratulate our new student clinicians in the Class of 2011, our new graduates in the Class of 2009, and I recognize the contributions and exemplary service of the Class of 1984—all with excitement and appreciation. To the classes of 2012, 2010 and 1985…it is your turn next year!

All the best,

Larry

Larry J. Davis, Dean

and imparts practical experience upon our students as they learn to care for special populations. David has provided visionary leadership and consistent dedication to that relationship which we hold in high regard.”

In his commencement address and congratulatory comments to the graduates, Mr. Ekin emphasized the importance of continually striving for excellence, both in optometric practice and in life—as professionals, as family members, and as vital members of society.

Missouri Optometric Foundation President, Rex Newcomb (Class of ’84) once again delivered an informative and entertaining overview of the important role the Class of 2009 will have in society with the profession of optometry and, ultimately, in giving back to make optometry even stronger in the years ahead.

In an evening dedicated to honoring members of this class, the highlight of the evening was providing them with their highest honor, conferring upon them the degree of Doctor of Optometry (O.D.). With the honors being provided by Chancellor George and Dean Davis, these 44 doctors each received their hood and some well deserved handshakes and hugs.

What will be the legacy of the Class of 2009? Although they set a very high bar for future classes to aspire to with their performance on Part One of the NBEO examinations—including having the highest individual score in the country—and despite exhibiting excellent clinical skills and receiving numerous compliments from the faculty, the Class of 2009 will always be remembered for something else. It is very appropriate that they shared the stage with the Class of 1984 because the Class of 2009 will always be remembered for the closeness they exhibited as a class. They celebrated their accomplishments together; they were always there for their classmates in difficult times.

Stephanie Erker (‘09) remembers how it began. “I can recall during Orientation 2005...Dr. Bennett told our entering class to look around the room. Even though hardly any of us knew each other he said "some of the closest friendships you form in life are going to be with those students sitting around you." I really did not realize how true that statement was until I was standing in line, getting ready to walk down to the stage for graduation. You look at each of your classmates and memories come flooding to mind.” Classmate Kevin Biermann concurs. “The class of 2009 is filled with many unique personalities. This collection of personalities all seemed to mesh and flow together and made getting through the curriculum much easier. We were all on the same page and we all had the same goals in mind. My time at the UMSL College of Optometry has allowed me to meet friends that I will have for the rest of my life. No matter where life takes us we will have the past four years of countless memories. I truly cherish the friends I have made.”

Congratulations to the Class of 2009. Thank you for all you have contributed to make the UMSL College of Optometry a better program for future students. May your future be rewarding, both personally and professionally.

Dr. Ed Bennett with 2009 honorees, Kevin Biermann and Stephanie Erker.
Class of 2011 White Coat Ceremony

The journey toward a career in optometry has several significant milestones. The culmination of this journey, of course, occurs at the Touhill Performing Arts Center. However, an important and essential step in the process is the awarding of the white coat, signifying the granting of clinical privileges and the ability to provide direct patient care.

During the initial admissions interviews at the UMSL College of Optometry, a very common response to the question: “Why do you want to be an optometrist” was, “I want to help people.” On May 14th, 43 student-clinicians were awarded that privilege. The formal act of receiving a white coat occurred after hundreds of hours of practice. In the minds of the Class of 2011, class rank was not the foremost concern; they knew the awarding of a white coat was not simply a formality but, instead, would occur after much anticipation and apprehension and the completion of a nearly two hour comprehensive examination under the careful scrutiny of a clinical faculty member.

The ceremony itself occurred in front of a capacity crowd of loved ones at the Millennium Student Center. The Class of 2011 was described as one of the most active and engaged classes in the history of this program, having - as a group - an enormous number of leadership positions, not only within the College, but also in terms of future leadership within the American Optometric Association. For one student the journey was even more eventful and special. Nine days prior, Laura Longnecker (‘11) became the proud mother of Layla. Not only did Laura drive herself to final examinations later that week but in the audience observing the white coat ceremony was Layla Jill Longnecker. Her presence - as well as her mother’s - put the exclamation point on the importance of this special ceremony.

Annual Optometry Academe
Sunday, October 25, 2009
8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m., 8 COPE/CEE hrs.
Location: JC Penney Conference Center,
UM-St. Louis North Campus
Information:Lis Ellerbusch at (314) 516-5615

NEWS & NOTES

Congratulations to Karen Rosen (’84) who was recently chosen as one of the St. Louis Business Journal’s Most Influential Business Women for 2009.

Yolanda Flanigan, Administrative Assistant in the Dean’s Office, graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminology from the College of Arts and Sciences. Congratulations!

Dr. Ed Bennett was a member of the Editorial Panel for the 20th Edition of Ophthalmic Drug Facts® and contributed a chapter to this text.

Dr. Ed Bennett gave an invited paper on multifocal GP lenses at the 33rd Annual Conference and Exhibition of the British Contact Lens Association, May, 2009, Manchester, U.K.

The UMSL College of Optometry has a facebook group. Join “UMSL OPTOMETRY STUDENTS AND ALUMNI” and keep up with classmates and friends.

Justin Crowe (‘10) is the proud father of a baby boy, Samuel Peter, born on May 5th.
The Class of 1984: A Deserving Tribute

They were admitted into the program without an interview. There was no clinic, little equipment, very few faculty, much campus ambivalence on why a School of Optometry had been created, and the use of a converted dormitory for nuns as a facility. That said, they became perhaps the closest knit class in UMSL Optometry history. 25 years after graduation, their history of leadership and involvement has resulted in a bar set so high, that it may never be surpassed by subsequent classes. On May 16th, they were honored, both with a reception at the Touhill Performing Arts Center immediately prior to graduation ceremonies for the Class of 2009, and by being invited—in full academic attire—to be part of the platform party and procession. One of the members present, Mike Klopping, traveled all the way from California to be a part of this special evening. This was followed by a post-graduation reception at the home of Drs. Karen and Steve Rosen.

The 31 members of Class of 1984 produced numerous leaders, including several graduates who have served in the leadership of the Missouri Optometric Association, a member of the University of Missouri Board of Curators (Anne Ream) and a graduate who later obtained his law degree and has since distinguished himself, both in his regular contributions to the literature on the subject of optometric jurisprudence, and also as one of the leading amateur golfers in the country (Craig Steinberg).

"Being first, although fraught with challenges, offers many opportunities for those willing to take the risk. As our first graduates, members of the Class of 1984 served that role of being first with courage and distinction," stated Dean Larry Davis. There were certainly challenges and those will be described in more detail later in this article by the person who was there to meet the challenges, founding Dean, Dr. Jerry Christensen. However, were there benefits of being the first class to graduate from the (then) UMSL School of Optometry? "Clearly the biggest benefits were from the close relationships between the classmates, and between us and the faculty and administration, that were allowed to develop as we were all working toward a common goal of creating or helping to create a successful program," states Craig

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In over forty years of teaching, the UMSL class of 1984 holds a unique place in my heart—something akin to what a parent feels for a first born. In every sense the members of that first graduating class were pioneers. After I was appointed Dean Designate (meaning I would be dean if the program actually started) in April of 1980, no money could be spent and no students accepted into the program until the official start date of June 1. Applications had been sent to all those taking the Optometry College Admission Test, so there were an adequate number of potential students. Beginning in June, students were accepted into the program sight unseen. Needless to say, the first morning of orientation generated great anticipation—what would the class be like? I was reassured when they arrived looking like all other classes I had experienced, with the possible exception that there may have been a few more slightly older students than usual. Some in the class had waited around a year or two hoping for the advent of a Missouri optometry program. This dedication and maturity was to be an important steadying characteristic of this class.

One reason the members of the Class of 1984 were pioneers is because, given the tight time frame (equipment ordered in June and classes starting the third week in August) many of the courses suffered from a lack of equipment. The class demonstrated great forbearance as over and over they heard that a piece of equipment had been ordered . . . but then the would be completed before the students reached the third-year of their program.

In addition, the class was subjected to a brand-new curriculum, taught by brand-new faculty members, with the whole works headed by a brand-new dean. The staff, an essential element of the orderly day-to-day operation of the program, was also new. If that weren't enough, optometry was the first professional-degree program that UMSL ever had, so there were also growing pains at the campus level. Over-riding all of this was the concern that the program was not yet accredited by the Council on Optometric Education. Without first achieving provisional accreditation and later full accreditation, our students would not be able to become licensed and permitted to practice optometry.

All right, with the stage set in this minimal, nonpromising fashion, the Class of 1984 began their professional studies. How did they respond to these seemingly overwhelming challenges? The answer in a word is “magnificently”. The class set about their studies with seriousness and determination. They were a delight to teach (with only three faculty members, and only one of those part-time, I taught four courses the first two years). However, they were also fun and

Members of the Class of 84" enjoying the 25 year reunion reception: (from left): Todd Lucas, Karen Rosen, Mike Klopping, Rex Newcomb, Joe Stroetker, Anne Ream, and Steve Barnett.
The Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation today announced that Dr. Dan Obermark of Missouri Lions District M-I was elected to the Foundation's Board of Directors. Dr. Obermark was first appointed to the Foundation's Sight Committee by District Governor Vern Griffith in 2006, and in his new role will help oversee the activities of the organization and develop strategies for further growth.

Raised in Union, Mo., Dr. Obermark attended Oklahoma State University and the University of Missouri St. Louis College of Optometry, graduating with his Doctor of Optometry degree in 1990. After practicing for six years with Group Health Plan in St. Louis, Dr. Obermark started his own practice, Eye Health Care, in Sikeston and Poplar Bluff, Mo.

Dr. Obermark and his wife Annette have four children: Cassidy, in her first year of the University of Missouri St. Louis College of Optometry; Jon, a senior at University of Arkansas; Katie, a senior at Notre Dame High School; and Jim, a junior at Notre Dame High School.

The Missouri Lions Eye Research Foundation is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit corpora-
tion based out of Columbia, Mo. The Foundation is dedicated to the preservation and restoration of sight through its vision programs including: Amblyopia Prevention Screening, Glaucoma Detection Screening, Eyeglass Recycling, Eye Care Assistance, the Heartland Lions Eye Banks and the support of ocular research. For more information on these programs, please visit www.mlerf.org

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Dr. Dan Obermark

My high opinion of the class of 1984 has only grown since their graduation. Members of that class have gone on to become, not only excellent practitioners, but have been elected to prestigious positions within the profession. They have become state board members, state association presidents, and in one case, a curator of the University of Missouri.

Jerry L. Christensen, O.D., Ph.D.
Dean Emeritus and
Professor Emeritus

Dr. Jerry L. Christensen
The Class of 2009: A Family in More Ways Than One

The Class of 2009, in many ways, was like a family. Close friendships were established; social gatherings were frequent; a support system was always present during times of stress and sorrow. The Class of 2009 also reflected a trend in which individuals decide to pursue optometry as a career change; a change that history will show is almost always a rewarding and successful one. Two such individuals are among those profiled here.

Two Is Always Better Than One

Imagine growing up in the 1980s where you might hear Hall and Oates or John Mellencamp on the radio or perhaps go to the movies and see any one of the trilogy of Indiana Jones movies. However, at age 6 your competition and Cheryl Davidson to discuss how to relate vision therapy service to occupational therapy, and ultimately taking evening classes to complete prerequisites for optometry school while also caring for her father. It was now time to apply to the UMSL College of Optometry. She was not alone.

Deanne Wehner, her sister, became interested in optometry the summer before her senior year in high school, worked part-time several years for Rosen Optometry, and applied for admission after completing only three years of undergraduate training. They were different in so many ways but they shared a common career goal, the same email address, and a first for the College of Optometry. “We applied simultaneously with the intention of being admitted together. We were both really excited to receive a joint e-mail from Dr. Bennett informing us that we were being admitted to UMSL’s Optometry Program.”

What was it like being sisters and attending UMSL together? “The greatest benefit was being able to commute together from Southern Jefferson County. We were always lab partners throughout school and would sit by one another in classes. At times it was helpful to discuss coursework with one another, but in general we did not study together. During optometry school, it was entertaining how different our given strengths & weaknesses were (Laura was strong in English; Deanne in the sciences). We would always joke about how great it would be if we could combine our strengths during examinations; we would be unstoppable!”

Drs. Laura Bequette and Deanne Wehner intend to practice close to home. Don’t be surprised if they ultimately practice together. They are united as family; they are united in their work ethic and exceptional attitude; they will be united as compassionate and dedicated optometrists.

Military, Music and Optometry

Every year 40+ students enter the UMSL College of Optometry. Typically fresh from their graduation celebrations occurring after the completion of their last final examinations a few months prior, they are excited—perhaps somewhat apprehensive—but blessed with knowledge that they have been in the test-taking mode for many years. Imagine being 20 years removed from this environment before entering optometry school. That was the challenge presented to Dr. Dave Ernst when he entered the UMSL College of Optometry in August, 2005. His journey began as a computer/communications systems officer in the Air Force with assignments at Hickam Air Force Base, Hawaii, and Robins Air Force Base, Georgia as well as participation in Desert Storm and deployment to Saudi Arabia. Eventually he entered the Air Force Reserve and was trained in the optometric technician career field after being assigned to Scott Air Force Base in Illinois. It was there that his true calling became clear. “There I met my greatest friend and mentor Colonel (Doctor) Joseph Grasso, now retired from the military, but still very active in Optometry in Southern Illinois. With his encouragement, I went back to

Drs. Deanne Wehner and Laura Bequette

Dr. David Ernst
The Class of 2009 continued from page 7

school at 37 years old to complete my prerequisites and at 40 was accepted to optometry school.”

Dave would be the first to admit this was a significant adjustment. A single parent attempting to successfully master a rigorous curriculum, it was not to occur immediately, “The first year of optometry school was very challenging. I needed to stop working completely and had to learn to swallow living on borrowed money for the first time in my life. I can’t say each year necessarily got ‘easier,’ but I certainly adjusted to the student lifestyle and was able to attain not perfect, but respectable grades.”

Dave has also been quite pleased with his experience at UMSL. “It is amazing how a close-knit class becomes a family. I developed so many friendships that are certain to last a lifetime. I was able to develop relationships with faculty and staff, several of who I know I can count on to be mentors long beyond leaving the halls of UMSL and personal friends as well.”

Dave is also an accomplished singer who performs regularly at his church, and recently before 600 people at “Stand Up,” a production of Comedy & Song hosted by his church. His long-term plans are consistent with his background and his principles. “I plan to work in the private practice setting, first as an associate with plans for partnership/ownership in the future. After 25 years in the Air Force, I hope to continue serving in the Reserve as a commissioned officer and optometrist. I plan to stay in the Southern Illinois area, watch my family grow, and praise our God by singing in the praise and worship team at Shiloh United Methodist church. It's been a great ride, and it's just beginning!”

The EYewire is published by the Office of the Dean at the University of Missouri-St. Louis College of Optometry.

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If you have missed a previous issue of the EyeWire you can locate the archive page as well as the current issue at:

http://optometry.umsl.edu/news/EyeWireArchives.html