Message From the Dean

Adding Value to Our Community

Community—“We are committed to supportive and productive relationships within our college, campus, professional and surrounding communities.” (from College of Optometry Vision, Mission and Values)

Greetings Friends and Colleagues—

The defining characteristics of graduate and professional education include rigorous academic experiences that emphasize the scientific and technical acumen of the discipline. Another distinguishing factor that may come to mind is the expectation for ample learning opportunities within those rigorous programs to provide a culture that supports creative and active learning experiences for its students.

This issue of the EyeWire recognizes these essential characteristics and also acknowledges that there are important indicators of program quality that often go under the radar. These are the “value added” experiences not mandated by regulatory boards, accreditation councils or the curriculum. Nearly 100% student initiated and operated, the more than eleven organizations that

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UMSL Students Are Honored

Tonia Batts (‘11) photo above was awarded Grand Prize in the AOA photo competition in June.

In life, the rewards can be few; too often individuals who achieve excellence are not recognized for their efforts. Such has not been the case for UMSL College of Optometry students in 2009. As many of these awards resulted from a direct competition with other Colleges of Optometry, UMSL has a right to be proud of the excellence achieved by our students. These honors included the following: 1. Three of the five First Place Winners of the AOA Contact Lens and Cornea Section (CLCS) Student- Resident Essay Awards went to UMSL students or recent graduates and they were honored at the annual CLCS Business Luncheon in June. They included Brianne Hobbs (‘10: “Contemporary Management of Ocular Surface Disease”), Brett Sobiersalski (‘09: “Contemporary Management of Astigmatism”), and Melisa Hockett (‘10: “My Most Challenging Contact Lens Case”). 2. Tonia Batts (‘11) had the three top prizes at the AOA photo competition that occurred at the annual meeting in Washington DC in June. In a competition against both ODs and students, she took both the Grand Prize and 2nd place in the “Special Populations” category. These photos, including the above photo, were taken at an optometric mission trip in Jamaica. She also was awarded third place in the “Practice Settings” category.
Wikipedia defines friendship as: “The cooperative and supportive relationship between two or more people. In this sense, the term connotes a relationship which involves mutual knowledge, esteem, affection, and respect along with a degree of rendering service to friends in times of need or crisis.” Such a definition could easily pertain to every class of students who attend or have graduated from the UMSL College of Optometry. However, no class has bonded as early as the Class of 2013; no class has demonstrated the level of engagement in the program as early as this class.

Yet, in many ways they are similar to previous classes. There are 44 students (selected from 350 applicants) from 19 states as well as Canada. This includes several college athletes; several individuals who made career changes; a large number of students who have experience in optometric practices. However, in many ways this class is unique. Exhibiting a very high level of service engagement in their respective high schools and colleges, this has already been manifested by their involvement in both the UMSL American Optometric Student Association and a record number of members volunteering to be Student Ambassadors. This bodes well for future involvement and leadership in student organizations in which we have been accustomed to excellent student involvement and leadership. The diversity and talents of this class can be confirmed via the number of students who have a background in the performing arts, a few of whom performed very well at the recent NOSA talent show.

The UMSL College of Optometry two day new student orientation, which immediately precedes the beginning of classes, is typically the time when students become acquainted with their forthcoming four year “extended family”. However, well before many members of the class of 2013 had even been admitted, and continuing a tradition originally established by Jason Clark for the Class of 2012, Joshua Keil (’13) established a class Facebook group. This group communicated all spring and summer on topics such as housing, roommates, personal biographies and interests, potential social events, and class officer interest. In addition, a class mixer organized by Dr. Barb Brown - which has become an annual tradition - was held at University Meadows in April and attended by close to 90% of class members (or future members). Social activities resulted all weekend for class members, some of whom organized activities for the summer as well. Therefore, by the time of new student orientation, this class had already become a family. The orientation program included presentations by Missouri Optometric Association Executive Director Dr. Lee Ann Barrett (’85), St. Louis Optometric Society President Dr. Erin Cleary Sullivan (’03), Laurie Bergman from the American Optometric Association, and several faculty and student leaders. However, the emphasis of the program pertained to small group discussions which allowed the class to become even closer and more informed about their “extended family.” The result, as demonstrated by the accompanying quotes from class members, is a unified and engaged class who want to make a difference during their tenure at UMSL.
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“I truly believe the class of 2013 is a special class. I’m not sure if it was the fact that we knew we wouldn’t get through school without a good support system, but we instantly bonded. I know that it makes it a lot easier to come to class every day knowing I get to see people that have become some of my best friends in a few short weeks. Another unique thing about our class is that I don’t feel like I am just close with a small group of people. I feel like I could turn to any of my classmates if I ever needed anything and they would be there. That is some thing I feel makes us truly unique and will bond us for life.”
—Brigette Colley

“My experience here has been completely amazing. My class mates encourage me everyday. I really can’t imagine what optometry school would be like without this group of people.”
—Chris Wooldridge

“I’ve only known my class for a little over a month, and they already feel like my closest family. Even now, I would walk through fire to help any of them, and I know that they would do the same for me. It’s truly amazing how strong the bonds are between us after only a short time. I feel like we are going to need to start optometry class reunions after we graduate because I can’t imagine losing touch with anyone. I know we will all make it through these next four years with flying colors because we have the love and support of each other.”
—Brooke Grah

“The thing I’m overly impressed with thus far is our class’s motivation and desire to be highly involved in the multiple organizations the college has. We have 100% voluntary enrollment for AOSA, many taking time to raise money for World Sight Day, and I could go on and on. It’s great to see that already this early on in our Optometric careers, we all want to see the profession of Optometry increase in honor and influence through the giving of our time, finances, and effort.”
—Jake Hayward

“I am absolutely honored to be in the Class of 2013, and I could not imagine having better classmates. Even though we’ve only known each other for 6 short weeks, I feel as though I’ve known them for years. Everyone in the class is absolutely amazing. We all add our own little spice to the class dynamic and it just works. Our class not only gets along, we’re already family. There’s no pressure of competition, because we all want to graduate together.”
—Angel Husher

“I consider it a privilege to be surrounded by such a well rounded group of people focused on the same goal. When they tell you your class will be like your family for the next four years it’s really no joke. It’s awesome to see how well the class socializes together, but also takes care of business. I’m excited to see what the future holds for everyone.”
—Rob Ensley, First Year Class Representative

NEWS & NOTES

Dr. Edward Bennett received the Lester Janoff Memorial Award on June 4, 2009. The Lester Janoff Memorial Award was established to honor the memory of an exceptional optometric educator, administrator, CL clinician and researcher.

Dr. GA Franzel was recognized for 25 years service and Linda Stein as the September 2008 Employee of the month –Excellent Teamwork, during the Chancellor’s State of the University address event held on September 30, 2009. Congratulations!

Drs. Vinita Henry and Ed Bennett - as a result of a grant from Vistakon to the Association of Optometric Contact Lens Educators (AOCLE) - conducted a book signing at the AOCE Annual Meeting, June, 2009 in Houston. All participants received a copy of their third edition of “Clinical Manual of Contact Lenses.”

Dr. Barbara Brown (’88) was recognized as one of the 2009 Most Influential Women in Optical in the July, 2009 edition of Vision Monday. She was specifically recognized in the area of “Mentors: women who are team builders and developers of talent”. She was also recognized for this award in the September, 2009 edition of Women in Optometry.

The Missouri Optometric Association Auxiliary Scholarship recipient for 2009 is Alicia Triplett. Alicia also received the Missouri Optometric Student Association leadership award funded by Missouri Optometric Foundation.

Dr. John Eigenbrodt (’88) was recognized for his innovations in eye care in the July 8, 2009 edition of the Edwardsville, IL newspaper, “The Telegraph.”
NEWS & NOTES

Drs. Gary Bachman, Ed Bennett, Tim Wingert and Erwin Wong are prominently featured in the Gateway for Greatness video presented during the Chancellor’s Report to the Community. Well done!

Dr. Mark Curtis (’96) was featured in the May 18, 2009 edition of the AOA News as part of his efforts on behalf of the Missouri Optometric Association to conduct seminars to educate school districts about the recently implemented Children’s Eye Exam Law. He was also honored as the “Missouri OD of the Year”

Dr. Chad Klein (’05) was awarded the honor of “Young OD of the Year” from the Iowa Optometric Association.

Dr. Neha Amin (’99) received the “Young OD of the Year Award” from the Arizona Optometric Association. Dr. Amin is also the President of the Arizona Optometric Association.

Nick Dodd (’10) and wife Kimberly brought into this world “Nixon Daniel Dodd” on April 14th. Daniel only weighed 1 lb 14oz at birth but as the photo shows, he is doing well.

3. Whitney Coleman (’10) was awarded a 2009 American Optometric Foundation (AOF) Carl Zeiss Vision Fellowship in the amount of $5,000 as well as a travel grant to the 2009 American Academy of Optometry meeting in Orlando in which she will be honored at the AOF business luncheon.

4. Tim Hougland (’11) and Alicia Tripplett (’11) both awarded a travel to Optometry’s Meeting from Allergan for their respective essays pertaining to the topic of dry eye. Tim was awarded an additional grant as his essay placed in the top three nationally.

5. Jessica Carson (’11) and Brett Sobieralski (’09) were awarded travel grants to Optometry’s Meeting from Vistakon in recognition of their respective papers on the topic: “When should you prescribe contact lenses for children?”

6. Renee Newman (’12) was selected as one of the recipients of the 2009 Transitions Students of Vision Scholarship Award. Her paper was determined to be an excellent example of the “Understanding Healthy Sight” theme.

7. Deanne Wehner (’09) was among the recipients of the Annual Varilux Student Grant Program.

8. Remi Miljavac was awarded a travel grant from the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) for her essay on the subject of “vision care in the disabled population.”

A team is only as successful as its individual players. The UMSL College of Optometry is very fortunate to have students who strive to achieve excellence in a very competitive national environment.

Upcoming Continuing Education Programs

April 17 & 18, 2010 - Nutrition and the Eye Symposium III
May 11, 2010 - Coding Update
Governor Visits Optometry

Missouri Governor Jeremiah W. (Jay) Nixon received a warm welcome upon his arrival to the College of Optometry on Wednesday October 14, 2009. His visit began with a brief tour of the College and informal conversation with Deans Larry Davis and Juliann Sebastian (College of Nursing), Provost Glen Cope, and students and faculty in the College of Optometry. A brief press conference followed, where Governor Nixon highlighted recent developments of "Caring for Missourians". The Governor was joined by members of the Missouri General Assembly as he shared his commitment and passion to ensure that graduates are available for high-need careers which provide jobs upon graduation. He pointed out that a majority of counties in the state are designated as areas with shortages of health professionals. Governor Nixon is an enthusiastic champion of "Caring for Missourians" which will help to train at least 471 future health professionals at four-year institutions throughout Missouri including an additional 16 optometrists and 31 nurses at the University of Missouri St. Louis over the next four years. Speaking on behalf of the students, faculty and staff of the College, Dean Larry Davis was honored to co-host the Governor. "I congratulate Gov. Nixon and members of the Missouri General Assembly for recognizing the impact that health professionals have on economic development and the quality of life for Missourians. This initiative is a critical first step that will begin to address the current and future shortage of health care providers." The portion allocated to the College of Optometry will help pay for scholarships, new technology in labs and clinics and more faculty teaching time.

NEWS & NOTES

Dr. Julie DeKinder, Clinical Assistant Professor, and her husband Matt became the proud parents of Philip Wayne DeKinder, born June 17th weighing in at 9lbs 4 ozs, 22 inches long.

Dr. Fannie Coleman (’09) and her husband Larry are the proud parents of Lorenzo Jibril Coleman, born August 19th and weighed in at 8 lbs, 15 oz, and was 22” long. Congratulations!

Dustin Wiles (’12) and his wife Steph’Annie are the proud parents of Annie Sue Wiles, born August 31, 2009.

Dr. Brad Borello (’09) and his wife Shannon are the proud parents of twins, Isabella Ann and Boston Robert, born October 1.
NOSA HITS A HOME RUN WITH 1st ANNUAL ARTISTIC VISION TALENT SHOWCASE

The Cardinals may have been down 2-0 to the Dodgers on the evening of October 9th, but the UMSL College of Optometry's National Student Optometric Association (NOSA) won over the crowd with consistently outstanding performances at their first annual Artistic Vision Talent Showcase.

Held at the millennium Student Center Pilot House in front of a packed house consisting primarily of students of optometry, it was quite evident that many of the current students have, in fact, a considerable amount of talent.

The evening began with a video tribute to the National Optometric Association (NOA) - an organization that emphasizes professionalism, dedication, and diversity - which featured UMSL’s own Dr. Carol Merritt (’89). After an introduction recognizing the sponsorship of CooperVision by UMSL NOSA President Allison Coleman, who was instrumental in organizing this event, the microphone was presented to Eric Jerde (’12) who did an exceptional job of entertaining the audience throughout the program in his role as Master of Ceremonies. This was followed by a series of 10 outstanding performances, including five by optometry students, that reflected both talent and diversity. The Class of 2011 displayed its musical talent in the likes of Hanna Kim and Natalie Cothers, both of whom have performed in productions at the Touhill Performing Arts Center during their optometry school training. Natalie showed her acting and vocal abilities in a popular song that she renamed “Optometry” complete with lyrics that every UMSL optometry student could identify with. Hanna, who in a past life was a singer, actor and choreographer and has performed in over 30 countries, showed another talent - as a violinist - and her spellbinding performance was awarded 2nd place in the competition. Perhaps the most unique performance was by Bryan Hoke (’12) who performed ‘pai spinning’ and his rendition resulted in one of the most positive audience responses of the evening. Several non-optometry performances were also featured in the event, included the duo “9pm” who entertained the audience with their comedic rendition of two songs resulting in being awarded 3rd place in the competition.

Two first year students performed in this event. Jake Hayward (’13) demonstrated his vocal and guitar abilities with his original composition entitled “Still Worth It.” The highlight of the evening, and the 1st place award recipient, was Angel Husher (’13) who absolutely electrified the audience with a voice that echoed off of the heavens with her rendition of the classic song “At Last.” Her performance, the last one of the evening, put the exclamation point on a very entertaining evening that showcased the multitalented individuals within the College of Optometry and all but ensured that this event will be a well anticipated annual tradition.
Fechner Day 2009 - Illusions and Illusionists: How to Fool the Brain With Magic and Other Tricks

How is Aristotle associated with the famous Las Vegas illusion act Penn & Teller? That and many other questions were answered by renown neuroscientist, Susana Martinez-Conde, PhD at a wonderful annual event attended by students and faculty, Fechner Day. Entitled “Illusions and Illusionists: How to Fool the Brain with Magic and Other Tricks,” Dr. Martinez-Conde provided a very entertaining and informative presentation to convince the audience that, in fact, everything can be an illusion. She then proceeded to support her theory with incredible imagery as she showed how the visual system processes information and then related it to how famous illusionists can successfully fool their respective audiences with visual illusions. She amazed the audience with dynamic examples of illusions often used successfully by magicians. She has learned from and collaborated with numerous famous magicians and illusionists including —in Scientific American— Penn and Teller. She also emphasized that the first visual illusion was actually documented by Aristotle.

Fechner Day was once again organized by Carl Bassi, PhD, who also introduced the keynote speaker. Susana is codirector - with Stephen Macknik - of the Barrow Neurological Institute (BNI) in Phoenix, Arizona, where they study various aspects of visual, sensory and cognitive neuroscience. Their research and outreach activities have been written up in hundreds of media stories including many that have appeared in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Chicago Tribune, The Boston Globe, National Public Radio, New Scientist and Wired magazine. Both are monthly columnists for ScientificAmerican.com. Their shared column on the neuroscience of illusions gets hundreds of thousands of hits every month. One of their recent column contributions is the most downloaded article in sci.am.com history.

UMSL College of Optometry Graduates Sport Many Interests

One of the great quotes about friendship is that “a friend is someone who reaches out for your hand . . . and touches your heart.” One of the great and unexpected benefits of the College of Optometry program - as described in the article about the Class of 2013 - is the closeness that develops among the students. It is, in fact, not uncommon for relationships to develop resulting in marriage. In the case of Kyle Weeden (’08) and Katie Hahn Weeden (’07), their marriage in Kapalua Bay, Maui, Hawaii was the culmination of a friendship that originated during their optometric training. Upon graduation Kyle completed the Primary Care and Geriatric Optometry Residency program at the Robert J. Dole Veterans Administration Medical Center in Wichita, Kansas. This program is affiliated with the UMSL College of Optometry. He is now practicing optometry in the practice of Dr. Kevin Lenahan in Lawrence, Kansas. Katie completed her optometric training in May and is not only practicing optometry but has also started in a Master’s in Business Administration program at UMKC.

They are also extreme-ly active outside of optometry. They both completed a mini-triathlon in August. Kyle completed the 70.3 mile (1.2 mile swim, 56 mile bike, 13.1 mile run) Kansas half ironman in Lawrence this past June. Katie also participates on a water ski team and recently participated in a large ski show (for the 19th year in a row) in July. Their hearts were touched during optometry school and the result is a partnership with great future promise - both within and outside of the profession of optometry.
College Reps Walk for Diabetic Eye Health

The College of Optometry participated as a Health and Wellness Fair Sponsor at the Step Out: Walk to Fight Diabetes event at Creve Coeur Lake Park on Saturday, October 10th. Over one thousand “goody bags” contained eye health care information specific to diabetics, facts about our College resources and other local resources, and pocket band-aid dispensers with College contact information.

“Step Out” is sponsored by the American Diabetes Association, with similar events organized in various parts of the country. Funds generated by sponsors and raised by participant walkers are used to support ADA research and publish ADA scientific findings, and to provide education and other services to people with diabetes, as well as to their families and the public.

Unofficial mascot and service-dog “Maisie Jones”, along with the eyeball stress balls were indisputably the best people-magnets and the biggest hits at the information table.

Pictured left to right: Julie Gram, Dean Larry Davis, Tammy Jones and her dog Maisie.