

**University of Missouri St. Louis Commencement**  
**College of Optometry May 16, 2015**  
**Terry Swinger, O. D.**

Congratulations on this commendable accomplishment! I'm so proud of you and know everyone else here is, too!

And welcome to a great fraternity! Some of my best friends are OD's; the bond is so close with so many of them it is like a fraternity! February 10<sup>th</sup> of this year was my celebration of 50 years of practicing this wonderful profession of Optometry! It has been an experience that has been so positive and rewarding. I'm grateful that I've been able to help others, which is the calling that health care professionals strive to achieve.

My dad's best friend was Dr. J. A. Poe. Dr. Poe was the local OD in the small town that we lived close to when I was growing up. My dad's friend told him several times, "You need to get one of your kids to go to Optometry school because it is the best job in the world"! It has been my experience that Dr. Poe was 100% right! Think about it, the practice of Optometry is the best job in the world! The environment is so pleasant, the service we provide helps people, actually, most people who come to see us are helped and in many cases it is in a short period of time. They see better with their new glasses, contact lenses, or get relief with the problem that caused them to present to us in the first place. Also, I'd like for you to think about the thought processes these patients go through before they come to see us, they have many choices: several practitioners are in the area offering the same or similar services, they could choose to do nothing, they could go online, or pick up ready-made glasses at the drug or big box store. So when they arrive for our services they are in a pretty good mood, have a good attitude about our abilities, and are receptive to our recommendations.

And, as a rule, OD's are well accepted in the areas where they practice. We have many colleagues who are selected to serve in areas that help their communities in other ways: school boards, city councils, several have served as mayors of the towns where they live, we have members of our profession who serve in state legislatures, thanks to the help and generosity of this profession and many of our colleagues, I had the privilege to serve in the Missouri State legislature. This institution has an alumnus who served as speaker of the house in the Missouri State legislature, Dr. Steven Tilley, and as most of us know, Dr. John Boozman, an OD, is one of the two U. S. senators from Arkansas, and is a great advocate for our profession.

When I was in the legislature, one Sunday morning our preacher said he wished politicians had to wear jump suits like NASCAR drivers so we would know who their sponsors are! And then there is the story of the person who just got elected to the legislature and decided to visit the local nursing home, just as she walked into this long hallway, she saw this elderly gentleman and he waved, started smiling and started toward her extending his hand, and as she started shaking his hand, she said, "Do you know who I am?", he became very excited, very animated, turned her hand over and started patting the back of it and said, "No honey, but if you go to that nurses station over there, they'll tell you who you are"!!

When I was a senior in optometry school one of my best friends told me that his Uncle was coming to speak to us, he practiced optometry in Louisiana, My friend was a lot of fun and said his Uncle was a good story teller so I went and he was right, he told a story that I remember to this day. Dr. R. D. Sandefur said there was a fellow class member who had the narrowest pupillary distance that he or his classmates had ever seen. It was so narrow that they called him "PD", they joked that his PD was so narrow that he could "peek through a keyhole binocularly", meaning he could see through the keyhole with both eyes. He said when he went into practice, a young lady came in to get her eyes examined and when he was measuring her PD, she ask what he was doing. Well Dr. Sandefur was about 25 and single, the young lady was about 25, single and quite good looking, so he decided to tell her the story of his classmate PD. When he got into the story he realized he needed to explain what a PD is and its importance and also explain binocularity and thinking about how pretty she was, when he got to the punch line he said, "his PD was so narrow that he could pee through a keyhole binocularly."

He had my attention and then he made four suggestions. I've followed all of them and that has led to many joys for me as an optometrist! His first recommendation was to take a Dale Carnegie Course, which I did and I benefited from it greatly. He then made three other suggestions and said you have to have all three to succeed in optometry. First, continuing education, second, be a member of your state and national associations, and third, be active in your community, especially the political part of the state legislature. He compared these three suggestions to a stool with three legs. What happens if you have such a stool and one of the legs is missing? It's worthless, it's clutter, and it just takes up space and serves no useful purpose.

To reiterate: First, be current, stay up to date on the latest knowledge. Our program states this is commencement, today we continue a life- long learning process. Continuing - education is essential for success in any profession. Second, be active in your state and national associations. The sad part of that is only 50% of new OD graduates become members. I'd like for you to think of one of your fellow class members and when you get that person in mind I want you to think about, that one of you will be a member and make a contribution, you'll help move this profession forward and help the public be better served and contribute to the well-being of this profession. The other will be a free loader, not making the financial commitment or the commitment of time to help those we serve by advancing our profession. Which will you be? A contributor, one who helps promote the well- being of those we serve, or will you be taking a free ride, benefiting from the hard work of your fellow OD. I don't think for a second that this class will have only 50% membership, I've heard Dean Davis on more than one occasion speak with pride of your selflessness! How you voted overwhelmingly to significantly increase your tuition, which played a big part in Dean Davis getting the funding for the new Patient Care Center which will house the optometric clinics. I believe that 80 to 90% of you will be members and make great contributions to the health care of our patients! And third, be active in your community; give back to those who make your life so pleasant! It will help your community and your practice.

Again, I want to congratulate you on this momentous occasion! And one more thing to think about, this is a great fraternity, as a rule most OD's like each other and work together. When we had our greatest legislative successes in Missouri in the 80s and 90s, we had oneness of purpose, we worked together, and we all sang off the same song sheet, we all pulled in the same direction! Three states Oklahoma, Louisiana, and Kentucky have had great legislative successes in recent years, why, because they put petty differences behind them and worked together, with oneness of purpose.

Good luck, you have accomplished a lot! You have great potential to make a meaningful contribution to your patients, your community and your families!!