

Essay

Tour de Optometry

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If you talk with any of the more experienced COVD members, they will have little difficulty coming up with a lengthy list of challenges (or opportunities) that face our organization. If that member spends any time in the academic environment, then likely one of these will be the difficulty of integrating behavioral/developmental vision concepts into academia. COVD's presence and impact within some of the Schools of Optometry can be quite limited. COVD and the various academic institutions need to work very closely together to bring our membership's experiences of providing developmental vision care and vision therapy to the students. COVD is an outstanding resource for students, faculty, and administrators. The schools and colleges of optometry and their faculty, on the other hand, conduct and publish research that supports functional vision care and the

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appropriate guidance for the optometric students in the areas of developmental vision.

The COVD Board of Directors has recently undertaken several initiatives to increase the communication between COVD and optometry's academic institutions. The formation of the Academic Services Committee, a committee dedicated to enhancing the relationship between COVD and Academia is one such initiative. The goals of the Academic Services Committee include: working with students, residents and faculty at each of the schools and colleges of optometry to encourage COVD student membership; arrange speakers; provide programs; assist in establishing internships/externships and other important services for students. Other efforts include the establishment of the SAFE (Students are Our Future Endowment) fund which is a grant program to support students attending the COVD Annual Meeting and free first year dues for students.

The COVD Board of Directors has initiated a project to continually improve communication with the schools and colleges of optometry called the "Tour de Optometry." This program involves a member of the COVD Board of Directors or a past president of the board personally

visiting each Optometry School to communicate with students, faculty, and administrators. During the 2005-2006 year, Dr. Lynn Hellerstein, the Immediate Past President of COVD, visited Southern California College of Optometry, University of Alabama School of Optometry, Nova Southeastern University College of Optometry, Pacific University College of Optometry, University of Missouri St. Louis, and the University of California-Berkeley School of Optometry. Drs. Dru Grant, Dan Fortenbacher, Carol Scott, Len Press and Carl Gruning shared the duties of visiting the following schools: New England College of Optometry, Pennsylvania College of Optometry, Indiana University, Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University, Illinois College of Optometry, Southern College of Optometry, and University of Houston.

At each school, a lecture was presented to students. The audience size varied from 35 to 160 students. The lecture was titled, "Practice Full Scope Optometry—Including VISION THERAPY!" Five common myths regarding vision therapy were discussed. The presentation highlighted the importance of vision therapy, the financial viability of vision therapy



practices and the benefits to both the patients and the doctor. Hands-on demonstrations were utilized and many “success stories” were presented. Feedback from the students was very positive. Examples of comments from the students include: it was “very inspirational,” “helped separate the myths of vision therapy,” and “showed that vision therapy is not just for pediatric patients.” Even more telling, Corinna Gray, past COVD National Student Liaison, reported that at least four students attended Dr. Hellerstein’s lecture at Pacific University and later changed their 4th year externship site to one that offers training in vision therapy. This shows the power that direct communication has to inform students and affect the choices of our future colleagues. Surveys were given to the students for feedback. (Table 1 summarizes the feedback that COVD received from students at 10 schools of optometry. Over 500 students completed the surveys.)

In addition to this positive interaction with students, the COVD Board Members had a chance to hear directly from Optometric faculty and administrators about the challenges they face and the goals they have in teaching students. Other topics discussed were current research, the recent positive changes that have taken place in *Optometry and Vision Development* (The official journal of the College of Optimetrists in Vision Development), the transformation of the COVD

**Table 1:
Summary of Student Presentation Surveys
for the Tour de Optometry Program**

1. Are you currently a COVD member?	Yes	96	No	414		
If no, were you aware of COVD prior to this presentation?	Yes	211	No	203		
Based on what you learned about COVD today, do you plan to join COVD now or in the future?	Yes	365	No	25	Maybe	16
2. How would you rate this presentation?	Extremely informative	172				
	Very informative	283				
	Somewhat informative	43				
	Not informative at all	2				
3. If a COVD Board member returned to your school next year would you attend the presentation?	Yes	481	No	24		
	Undecided	4				

(10 schools of optometry visited with 500 students responding)

Certifying Process for Fellows and Academic Fellows, improvements in our Paper/poster session at the Annual Meeting, The Faculty VT Kit, and what COVD can do to assist the Schools of Optometry.

One of the most important topics discussed with nearly every school was the need for high-quality vision therapy externships for students. An externship manual for the optometrist is already in process. More work will be done to make additional externship opportunities available to all those students who are interested.

Dr. Les Walls, President of SCCO, wrote a letter to COVD after the SCCO presentation, stating, “I want to thank you and COVD for the excellent program sponsored here on campus with Dr. Lynn Hellerstein. It was extremely well received and programs such as this do much to motivate and inspire the future doctors of optometry. These programs truly go far to helping students to decide on the future modes of practice... I encourage COVD to keep them going at all the schools and colleges of optometry.”

Although visiting these schools is time consuming and costly to

administer, the COVD Board feels that the Tour de Optometry has been tremendously successful. COVD was fortunate to have received a \$2,500 grant from Mountain States Congress for this program. We thank them for their generous support. This is such a valuable program that additional sponsorships and funding will be sought. This incredibly successful program is just one more example of COVD’s dedication to the optometric community which fosters a strong relationship between COVD and academia.

Although the Board initiated this project, please do not hesitate to become involved. Use your ties to one of the schools or colleges of Optometry. Consider contacting the COVD Board to assist in a site visit or, alternatively, contact the school’s student or faculty liaison and offer to give a student talk or presentation. Together, we can continue to improve the relationship between COVD and academia (its faculty and students) for the benefit of the all. Our optometry students are the lifeblood of this organization! Support COVD’s Tour de Optometry.