School of Optometry Remains Committed to International Humanitarian Efforts

"There are so many places in the world where people are not getting vision care. Some countries have only one eye care practitioner for half a million people."

Gerald E. Lowther
Dean, IU School of Optometry

When Henry Hofstetter was asked to serve as the first director of the Indiana University School of Optometry in Bloomington in 1952, he brought to the school his already keen interest in optometry around the world. That interest grew dramatically until his retirement in 1980, and the school, its faculty, and its students benefited from his knowledge and contacts.

While international involvement has not continued at quite the pace Hofstetter set, much progress has been made recently, says Dean Gerald E. Lowther. Optometry is growing and changing internationally and there are a lot of new optometry programs emerging, especially in developing countries.

“Up until a few years ago optometry was developed as we know it only in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. More recently programs have been developed in the Scandinavian countries and now it is growing very rapidly in a lot of other European countries. There are also new schools developing in Africa and in Pacific Rim countries, the Middle East, and places like Saudi Arabia and India,” Lowther says.

“There are so many places in the world where people are not getting vision care. Some countries have only one eye care practitioner for half a million people,” he continues.

The World Health Organization has a major new program to try to improve eye care for people in underdeveloped countries. There are millions of people in the world who are effectively blind, primarily because they have not had refractive errors corrected. If they had a correct pair of spectacles, they would be able to function.

Lowther is excited about IU’s new involvement also because of the potential to broaden student understanding of the humanitarian services they can provide as optometrists. The school is developing programs in Poland, China, Portugal, Thailand, and India. In addi-
tion, several faculty members travel abroad frequently to international conferences and for other projects. The faculty does both basic and clinical research, and often people from other countries come in for short periods to work on joint projects. Several international students are also enrolled in the School of Optometry.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT
Participation in the international optometry scene is not left solely to the faculty. Two groups of students are also involved:

• **VOSH** – Several years ago IU students formed an organization called Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (VOSH) which, over the years, has provided a rich learning experience for students, says Douglas G. Horner, the group's adviser.

Over spring break this past year, 32 students and four faculty members spent a week in Guanajuato, Mexico, a town north of Mexico City. Men, women, teenagers, children, disabled, and elderly people were bussed from 46 municipalities in the state of Guanajuato to receive eye care from VOSH participants.

While there, the group saw approximately 700 people each day, working Sunday through Thursday. This year the group saw 3,600 people and dispensed about 2,000 pairs of donated glasses.

The IU School of Optometry is currently exploring the possibility of setting up a full-time clinic in Mexico. Two to four students at a time would rotate through the clinic to serve a large population that doesn’t receive eye care from other sources. Horner expects that additional students would still volunteer to work in the Mexico clinic over spring break each year.

Valerie Childs, a third year IU optometry student, measures the intraocular pressure of a patient in Guanajuato, Mexico, as part of the School of Optometry’s Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (VOSH) program.

• **Fellowship of Christian Optometrists**
In 1971 students founded an organization at IU called the Fellowship of Christian Optometrists (FOC). Clifford W. Brooks, adviser to the group, worked with some former students to start a nonprofit organization, FOC International, which now has chapters in most schools and colleges of optometry. Each year the group has a conference for people interested in eye care in third world countries.

At about the same time, IU’s student FOC chapter began a weeklong program in Haiti, where the need for eye care was great. The people who invited the group indicated that

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World Council of Optometry Honors Henry Hofstetter

Billed as an optometrist who has influenced every region of the world, Henry Hofstetter, the first director of the IU School of Optometry, was honored April 27 by the presentation of the Distinguished Service Award from the World Council of Optometry (WCO). This is the first such award the organization has presented, says Manfred Mueller, president of WCO.

“Dr. Hofstetter has promoted optometry in every forum: education, health care, industry, and politics. WCO salutes a leader who has changed the path of our profession and, in so doing, has forged a new, global frontier for optometry,” Mueller says.

The award was made during the Hofstetter Symposium on International Optometry and Vision Care, cosponsored by the IU School of Optometry and WCO. Leaders in optometry from around the world participated in the symposium.

Scott Brisbin, president elect of WCO, also announced the formation of the WCO Hofstetter Leadership Campaign. Funds will be used to support a fellowship program that will concentrate on educational needs. In addition, Gerald E. Lowther, dean of the IU School of Optometry, announced that as part of the school's current $3 million endowment campaign, it has established the Henry Hofstetter Professorship, which will be awarded to an individual at the school who furthers global optometric education.
Rogers Receives Highest NAFSA Award

On May 25, Associate Dean and Director of International Services Kenneth A. Rogers was presented with the Homer Higbee Award by NAFSA: Association of International Educators.

NAFSA, the premier organization that provides training, information, and services to 7,000 professionals worldwide in international education and exchange, presented the award to Rogers at its 51st annual conference, held in Denver.

The Homer Higbee Award is the highest honor NAFSA bestows for long-term service to the organization and to international students and scholars. NAFSA does not make the award every year, and the recipients are chosen very selectively.

Rogers has been involved in NAFSA and international education for over 30 years. His award citation reads in part: "Ken is the consummate professional and personifies the best characteristics of NAFSA membership. Seen as an 'eternal diplomat' by many, his experience, expertise, dedication, wisdom, and compassionate personality have bettered all those who have the opportunity to interact with him.

"Ken is an invaluable source of information, history, and perspective, and future generations may best know him as a mentor. He has positively influenced professionals in all sections, levels, and geographic areas of NAFSA. He is genuinely interested in both the advancement of the profession and of the professionals within the profession."

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they needed a full-time clinic and the students jumped at the chance, Brooks says.

That clinic is up and running now and is staffed by two IU graduates, Phil Raber, who graduated from the School of Optometry, and Miriam Raber, who graduated from the School of Dentistry. There is now a dental clinic in Haiti as well as the eye clinic, and both recently received facility expansion grants. One goal is to create a facility that could house students who rotate through the clinic as part of their School of Optometry experience.

Students also started an eye care mission to Honduras, traveling there to see patients over winter break every year. In addition, a group of recent IU graduates is in Honduras now, trying to establish a permanent clinic similar to the one in Haiti.

Both Brooks and Horner see the international involvements as very beneficial to students. On a personal level, it expands perceptions of what life is like in other countries, Brooks says. From a professional standpoint, it is an outstanding learning experience. They see conditions and needs on a regular basis that they would seldom see in developed countries.

“They are able to make a huge difference in people's lives,” Brooks says. “It is not just a matter of getting a person a more comfortable pair of glasses that will help him see a little better. It is a matter of helping people be able to see well enough that they can make a livelihood where they couldn't before. It is a matter of treating people for an ocular disease that could cause blindness—needlessly.”

– By Ruth Albright
Special to the OIP Newsletter

Deans of the IU School of Optometry past and present: