School of Optometry Expands its International Links

On January 11, 2006, Gerald E. Lowther, dean of IU's School of Optometry, received an honorary degree, Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource Development, from Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok, Thailand. The diploma was presented to Lowther at the graduation ceremony by Her Royal Highness, Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn.

Lowther and the optometry faculty have worked with Ramkhamhaeng University over the past five years to develop the first optometry program in Thailand. Later this fall, the Thai university's president, Rangsan Saengsook, is expected to come to IU to sign a renewal of a "Memorandum of Understanding" between the two institutions.

On the other side of the world, the optometry school has had a long-standing program of clinical care in Mexico. Most recently, it is working with the Department of Infants and Family (DIF) for the Mexican state of Guanajuato, a government unit that provides services for the indigent. The DIF raised about $1 million from the government and private sources to build a new vision clinic in Guanajuato. No university funds were requested for this new clinic, which will be run by the IU school. Looking forward to the completion of the new clinic, Lowther says, "The DIF administration obviously has been very pleased with the services we have provided to thousands of the indigent, many of whom have never had eye care before."

The new facility is much larger than IU's present facility and will contain 10 to 12 examination rooms, an ophthalmic laboratory, an eyewear center, a surgical suite, and reception areas. The surgical suite will allow IU ophthalmologists to travel to Guanajuato to do cataract and other surgeries that are so badly needed in that region. Many patients have cataracts and other conditions that can be corrected with surgery who currently do not have any access to eye care. Three to four students at a time will go to Guanajuato for 12-week rotations. Lowther counts on the new facility to be "a great clinical experience as well as a cultural experience for IU's optometry students."

The new clinic is expected to be completed by spring of 2006, and Lowther will attend the grand opening.

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