

AOSA: THE FORMATIVE YEARS AND BEYOND, A CAPSULE SUMMARY OF THE YEARS 1971-74

Ronald R. Ferrucci, OD

Greater Milford Eye Associates

drferrucci@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The American Optometric Student Association (AOSA), officially begun in 1968, has played important roles in the lives of optometry students, giving them a voice in the direction of their education and profession. This author played a role in the Massachusetts College of Optometry (MCO) becoming an official chapter of the AOSA in 1972, and was elected to serve as the sixth national president of AOSA in 1973. This paper examines MCO student activities in those years and some of the challenges and accomplishments of the young AOSA during the presidencies of John Fawcett (1971-72), Cecil Furer (1972-73), and Ron Ferrucci (1973-74).

February 1972 was a different time – a gallon of gasoline cost 55 cents, Watergate had yet to erupt as a scandal, and *All in the Family* was the hottest show on television. E-mails, faxes and smart phones were the stuff of science fiction. I was in my second year at the Massachusetts College of Optometry (MCO), busily immersed in my optometry studies, and blissfully unaware that a whole new dimension of optometric involvement was about to open for my colleagues and me.

The late '60s and early '70s were heady times for students. Controversy over the war in Vietnam and disillusionment with government in general had created a student activism in the United States that had never been seen before. Optometry students were no exception.

While the concept of a national optometric student association was considered as early as 1941, it was not until much later that the idea gained enough traction to become a reality. The AOSA was beginning its fourth year of existence in 1972, having been started by a trio of students led by Ray Myers of Indiana University Division of Optometry (IU), as documented by Myers in this issue of *Hindsight*. In 1972, there were 12 colleges of optometry in the U.S., and eight of these had already formed local AOSA chapters. (See Appendix I for a list of U.S. optometry schools in 1972)

In the winter of 1972, MCO was not an official member of AOSA, but that was about to change when four enthusiastic students from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry

(PCO) made a visit to Boston on February 6 and 7. The PCO students were AOSA Vice-President Cecil Furer, PCO Trustee Tony DiStefano, PCO Local Chapter Secretary Harvey Hanlen, and AOSA Interprofessional Committee Chair Mark Barth¹.

The students from PCO proved to be effective emissaries of AOSA. Over the course of two days, they met with the student leaders and the student body at MCO, and brought the news of AOSA's exciting success story. Shortly thereafter, as the president of the second year class at MCO, I approached the MCO Student Council with a proposal that our school join this emerging national student movement. The opportunity for us Massachusetts students to continue our activism by having a unified voice



Fourth President (1971) John Fawcett (IU) (left) and fifth President (1972) Cecil Furer (PCO) (right) (Photo from *Student Review*, 1972; 4(5):1).

in matters affecting our profession was an intriguing proposition. However, the decision to join this fledgling organization was not made without serious deliberation. After all, optometry school was a serious financial burden and the annual dues of AOSA were a whopping \$2.00 per student per year!

Nevertheless, by the end of February, 1972, the MCO Student Council voted to become the ninth chapter of AOSA, sent in a check for its dues, and in turn, I was elected to be the first AOSA Trustee from MCO.²

Meanwhile, on the national level, significant events were occurring. Thanks to a grant from the NIH Bureau of Health Manpower Education, the first National Student Interdisciplinary Health Manpower Conference was held in Chicago on March 10-12, 1972. AOSA President John Fawcett of Indiana was involved in securing optometry's role in the process, and Tony DiStefano, AOSA Public Health Chair, served on the national planning committee.³

I was fortunate to be one of the twenty optometry students who participated in the conference. Eleven of the twelve optometry schools were represented at the three day event that involved over 300 health science students from multiple disciplines. This meeting helped to forge a bond of mutual understanding and respect among the various health disciplines that attended. One of the offshoots of the Chicago conference was that its success was the genesis of additional future grant monies to support 10 more such conferences to be held on a local level.³

By this time the MCO Chapter of AOSA had earned the full support of the College's administration, headed by President William Baldwin. With

help from the school administration, MCO was able to send several student delegates to the Second Annual AOSA Congress. This was held on March 24-27, 1972, at the Southern College of Optometry (SCO) in Memphis, Tennessee.

THE FAWCETT ADMINISTRATION (1971-72)

The 1971-72 AOSA national officers were as follows:

- John Fawcett (IU), President
- Cecil Furer (PCO), Vice-President
- Albert Velasco (SCO), Secretary
- Connie Pollack (IU), Treasurer

Paul Monroe of SCO was the host Trustee and AOSA President John Fawcett of Indiana University presided over the Second Annual AOSA Congress agenda.

AOSA was a growing force at this time. From the beginning, the movement had attracted the attention and support of certain members of the AOA leadership. At this critical juncture in its history, the AOSA needed to show it had enough maturity and staying power to represent itself and its profession on a national stage along with its peers in medicine, podiatry, pharmacy, and the other student health professions. By any measure, the Second Annual Congress was a great success and, in this author's view, was a major turning point in the development of the AOSA.

It should be noted that the AOA was strongly represented at the Second Annual AOSA Congress. AOA President-Elect J.C. Tumblin was a main speaker and an attorney from the AOA Washington office was present to assist as a legal advisor. AOSA's first president, Ray Myers, who had become AOA Director of Career Guidance, attended as a mentor and historian.



AOSA VP (1973-74) and AOA President (1999) Harvey P. Hanlen (PCO) speaks at the 2001 AOSA Meeting (Photo courtesy of AOSA).



Ronald R. Ferrucci, president of the American Optometric Student Association in 1973-74 (Photo courtesy of Ronald Ferrucci).

The AOSA delegates did not disappoint. Several major accomplishments were achieved:

- 1) The delegates voted to officially incorporate the AOSA as a not-for-profit organization in the state of Missouri.
- 2) The AOSA Constitution was reviewed, revised, and ratified.
- 3) With the official acceptance of the applications of MCO, Southern California College of Optometry (SCCO), University of Houston (UH), and State University of New York (SUNY), all twelve of the existing optometry schools became affiliate members of AOSA.
- 4) This brought the membership in AOSA to 2813, or over 80% of the total national optometry school enrollment.^{4,5}

In January 1971, the Fawcett Administration also produced the "First National AOSA Opinionnaire", an attempt to obtain an understanding of the collective opinions of the nation's optometry students.

The 1972-73 national officers elected at the Second Annual AOSA Congress were as follows:

Cecil Furer (PCO), President
Ron Dachelet (UAB), Vice-President
Dan E. Owen, (SCO), Secretary
Connie M. Pollack, (IU), Treasurer

AOSA student activities in Massachusetts moved along swiftly during its first year of involvement. Local AOSA committees were formed which mirrored the national structure – Legislative, Public Health, Save Your Vision Week, Minority Recruitment, Intraprofessional Liaisons, AGU/ Summer Employment, and among others, an MCO Associate Editor for the national student newspaper, the *Student Review*. New student leaders

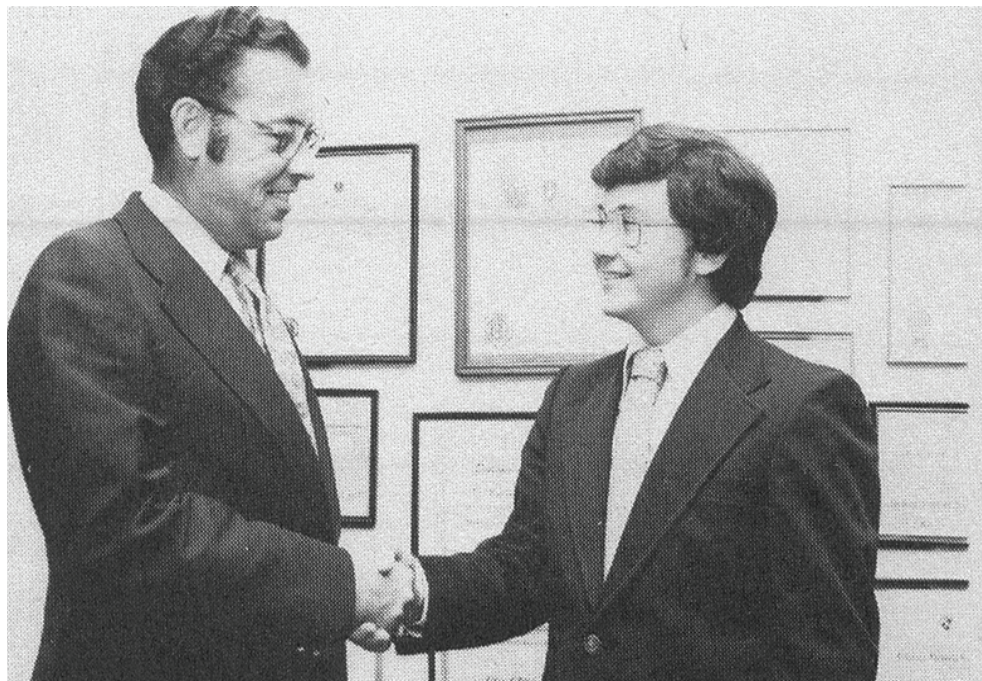
emerged from the ranks to fill these many positions – all of them gaining experience that would one day assist them as they began successful optometric practices, or went on to productive careers in teaching, research, and organized optometry.

In its first full year in AOSA, over 70 of MCO's 258 enrolled students were involved in its activities. Two of the most significant projects were carried out by first year students Sandy Schwal and Thom Freddo.⁶

As the Chair of the March, 1973 Save Your Vision Week's activities, Sandy arranged for MCO students to conduct several lectures on optometry and vision at area high schools, organized a screening of grade school children, planned a minority recruitment effort, flooded the city with optometry/vision PR materials, and hosted a day-long public symposium at a Boston hotel which featured lectures on optometry and vision science, and highlighted Optometry's and MCO's growing

role in the Boston community health system.⁶

On another front, Thom Freddo led an interdisciplinary consortium of local health care students who applied for and received one of the ten NIH grants that had been generated from the aforementioned national student conference in Chicago. As the Project Director of the Boston Student Health Alliance, Thom, and a number of MCO optometry students who were on the planning committee, hosted 175 health care students and professionals for a two day conference at the Harvard Club in Boston. As in the national conference, the meetings served to foster a greater awareness of and appreciation for the education and skills represented by the many different disciplines. Among the many topics discussed was how a team approach to health care delivery could improve the overall quality and efficiency of care.⁶



William R. Baldwin, president of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry in 1973-74, congratulating Ronald R. Ferrucci, at the end of his 1973-74 presidency of AOSA (Photo from *Optometric Weekly*; 1974; 65:965).

THE FURER ADMINISTRATION (1972-73)

With a number of other AOSA local chapters actively engaged in their own impressive activities, President Cecil Furer (fifth AOSA president) and his administration could turn to matters that impacted our profession on a national scale during the 1972-73 fiscal year.

As the AOSA president, Cecil represented optometry students on the Student Advisory Committee (SAC), a group funded by the Bureau of Health Manpower Education of the National Institutes of Health. This was a consortium of the presidents of the eight major health professions that met quarterly to present student views to the government on policies and proposals regarding legislation in health care planning and delivery. Cecil was selected by his peer members of that group to submit testimony in May 1973, before the Labor Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives.⁷

As impressive as Cecil's appearance in Washington on behalf of optometry was, his testimony was actually the **fourth time** that an AOSA student had testified before the U.S. Congress. (See Appendix II. AOSA Testimony before United States Congress, 1969-73)

In addition to meeting in their official government capacity, the SAC members had organized themselves into an independent group called the National Student Health Organization Liaison Committee (NSHOLC). NSHOLC's major objective was to promote better interdisciplinary understanding and awareness. This group promoted and coordinated the successful Regional Student Health Manpower Conferences in the Spring of 1973 that were discussed earlier in this paper.⁷

During the Furer Administration, AOSA continued to develop its relationship with the AOA. AOA President J.C. Tumblin had named three students as funded consultants to certain key national AOA Committees: Assistance to Graduates and Undergraduates; Community Health Optometry; and Membership Development.

Meanwhile, AOSA continued to develop its own national committees: Public Health, Legislation, Assistance to Graduates and Undergraduates, Minority Recruitment, Intraprofessional Liaisons, National Boards, and Student Review.

And, of course, there was always the task of fostering the growth and development of the local AOSA affiliates. This goal was assisted by having the national AOSA officers lead four successful regional conferences across the country.

The Third Annual AOSA Conference was held at SCCO in Anaheim, California from March 29 to April 3, 1973. Fifty delegates from 11 of the 12 optometry schools met to deliberate on the next stage of AOSA's development. The agenda was packed with sessions by prominent optometric leaders who gave presentations on such topics as leadership, political optometry, and insights on how the National Boards of Examiners design the board examinations. Among the issues discussed were the need for a dues increase, the establishment of a Sustaining Member category, and support for the upcoming resolution at the AOA Congress in San Francisco that would allow for a student vote in the AOA House of Delegates.⁸

The 1973-74 national officers elected at the Third Annual AOSA Congress were as follows:

Ron Ferrucci (MCO), President
Harvey Hanlen (PCO), Vice-President
Duane Dodds, (SCCO), Secretary
David Welch (UAB), Treasurer

Only three months after its Third Annual Congress, a long-term goal of the AOSA became a reality at the 73rd AOA Congress in San Francisco. In June 1973, the AOA House of Delegates (HOD) voted unanimously to amend the AOA Bylaws to allow optometry students a vote. The initiative for a student vote in the AOA HOD had been started as early as the Trask Administration in 1971.⁹ Each school was allowed to seat one student representative and one alternate delegate. The students were collectively entitled to one vote.¹⁰ Of course, more important than the actual vote was the opportunity for students to have an official national forum in which to express their views and concerns to the leaders of the profession.

President Furer was an active and productive leader. His mid-year report of March, 1973 contained the following observation and prediction: "The office of President is getting to be more demanding each day as the organization progresses into a viable and strong association. The next President of AOSA will be doing more traveling to represent the students, will be busier with the day-to-day operations of the organization, and will have an extremely demanding task ahead of him."

THE FERRUCCI ADMINISTRATION (1973-74)

When I became the sixth AOSA president on July 1, 1973, there were a myriad of opportunities and challenges facing the organization. By this time, the leadership in AOA had been convinced that the students had much to offer, and embraced the

AOSA as a potential breeding ground for a new generation of leaders. AOA President Robert Day named five AOSA students as liaisons to AOA Committees and funded their travel to the meetings. These committees were as follows: Assistance to Graduates and Undergraduates; Community Health Optometry; Federal Legislation; Administrative Agencies; and Membership Development. (See Appendix III. Student Consultants to AOA 1973-74)

Robert Day's successor as AOA president, Bud Shannon, took an even stronger step during his presidential year, when he named Ohio State University student Beth Workman as a full AOA member of the Membership Development Committee, along with three additional student consultants to other committees. (See Appendix IV. Student Consultants to AOA, 1974 -75)

Meanwhile, during the year, formal liaisons were established with the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO), the American Optometric Foundation (AOF), the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO), and the International Association of Boards in Examiners in Optometry (IAB).¹¹ Past AOSA leaders had been communicating student ideas and concerns to the aforementioned optometric groups for several years, so it was gratifying during my administration to see that these past student endeavors could culminate in students having an official and welcomed voice within each organization.

During this time, the AOSA continued its strong connection to the National Student Health Organization Liaison Committee (NSHOLC). As AOSA president, I attended several meetings of this group in New York City and at the HEW Headquarters in Bethesda,

Maryland. Along with the president of the Student American Medical Association (SAMA) and the president of the National Student Nurses Association, I was selected by my student peers to represent the Alliance at the October, 1973 meeting of the Milbank Memorial Fund Commission for the Study of Higher Education for Public Health. The other presidents and I were invited to present formal remarks before the Commission on our opinions regarding the direction of health care education. My remarks were later published in the *Journal of the American Optometric Association* in a paper entitled "Recommendations for the Education of Health Professionals."¹² This was the latest instance in which an optometry student, an AOSA leader, was selected by his peers in the other health professions to represent all of them on a national arena. As a result of my paper, I was invited to be a participant in the AOA's Futures Meeting the following year in Biloxi, Mississippi.

Although AOSA was making headway on the national stage, it was important for the organization to keep its base strong at the same time. AOSA's base, the backbone of its strength, was the affiliation of our twelve national school chapters. Some of these chapters were mature and well organized by now, while others were still relatively new and feeling their way. Therefore, we decided to continue the tradition of holding regional meetings among the schools. Once again, the AOSA Executive Council divided the country into four regions with three schools in each region. Each officer of the AOSA Executive Council was assigned to organize and head a regional meeting. The purpose was to provide leadership and direction to the newer schools and to encourage the stronger, more

established schools to mentor their sister institutions.

Strengthening the local chapters was greatly assisted by the dissemination of a detailed guidebook to AOSA Trustees on how to organize and run a local AOSA Affiliate Chapter. I had developed this guide based on my experience of starting a brand new AOSA chapter at MCO. Such an instructional guide was a necessity, given that with the ongoing graduation of established student leaders, there was the continual passing of the torch to a less experienced underclassman.

My administration kept in place the seven national AOSA committees that had become well established over the past several years, but I added a new standing committee which encompassed the overall concerns of the optometric student experience. This was the Education Committee, chaired by Sam Stennis of UH, the nephew of then Senator John Stennis of Mississippi. The Education Committee was "established to investigate, examine, and evaluate on both the local and national levels the quality of their education, and to make recommendations for its improvement."¹³ This was at the time that the profession was beginning to make a major paradigm shift from emphasis on physiological optics type courses to those which more closely paralleled the "medical model". Optometry students were more than ready for this shift, and we felt that we wanted to have a voice in its implementation.

Another major committee in my administration was the National Affairs/Legislative Committee. This was co-chaired by Terry Marquardt of SCO and Alan Gold of MCO. Both Terry and Alan were able student representatives. Terry later was elected

to the legislature in the state of New Mexico, and Alan went on to earn a degree in law.

The Fourth Annual AOSA Congress was held in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) on March 8-11, 1974. As always, there was spirited discussion as to what direction the students wanted the profession to move toward, and how we could improve the efficiency of our own organization.

Although by this time Rhode Island had passed the nation's first Diagnostic Pharmaceutical Agents (DPA) law in 1971, the issue as to how far to expand the scope of optometric practice was still hotly debated among the various schools of optometry and within the state and national associations as well. The students of the Fourth AOSA Congress were ready to weigh in on the discussion and they were clear in their opinion. They passed unanimously Resolution 74C -18, that read in part "the AOSA believes that the clinical use of agents, devices, and procedures commensurate with professional optometric education would enhance the role of the optometrist in diagnosis and treatment related to optometric care and health care in general." The resolution went on to say that the AOSA would support the efforts of entities that sought to implement this concept. This sensitive resolution was not made public, but was shared with the AOA Board of Trustees, ASCO, and the NBEO as a confidential memo.

By the end of the Ferrucci Administration, AOSA had grown to the point where it was becoming necessary to seek a way to obtain central staff services to assist with the growing administrative burden on the AOSA President, Executive Council, Trustees, and Committee Chairs. For example, during my

administration, I wrote a number of articles and editorials that appeared in such journals as *The Journal of the American Optometric Association*, *Optometric Management*, *Optometric Weekly*, the *AOA Pacer*, etc., as well as welcome messages which appeared in several optometry school catalogues. There was also the President's Column in AOSA's national newspaper, *The American Optometric Student Review*. Beyond that, there are literally hundreds of letters in my correspondence files, and I estimate that during the span of my involvement in AOSA as trustee and president I had travelled an aggregate of over 50,000 miles and made formal oral presentations at seven of the 12 existing schools of optometry, at least three different state association meetings, the New England Council of Optometrists, as well as at the AOA House of Delegates.

Immediate Past President Cecil Furer's prophecy was indeed coming true. AOSA had reached a critical level of acceptance within the optometric profession and beyond. AOSA leaders at all levels were tasked with unprecedented levels of responsibility. In its mid-year meeting, the AOSA Executive Council had established an Ad Hoc Committee on Central Staff Services. At its Fourth Annual AOSA Congress, the delegates passed a resolution endorsing the concept.

By the time I left office, the committee was in serious discussions with several other optometric groups about the possibility of sharing staff and administrative support.

These discussions continued into the 1974-75 AOSA Administration, led by President Larry Bonderud (SCCO). At the Fifth Annual Congress of AOSA in Chicago, the issue was once again a hot topic. The AOSA continued to deliberate on the issue

of administrative support for several more years. However, it was not until 1981 that AOSA was able to obtain the services of Carol Freihaut, who remained as Executive Director for over 25 years until her retirement in 2007.

There is no doubt that as AOSA has grown, its level of sophistication and involvement in optometric affairs has also grown exponentially. Today, AOSA's 7000 plus membership is served by an Executive Director headquartered at the AOA offices in St. Louis, MO.

The future of AOSA is bright and it will undoubtedly continue to spawn new leaders whose efforts will take optometry to unparalleled heights. Nevertheless, as I look back on the early history of AOSA, I salute the courageous young stalwarts, who with little resources, but with an abundance of energy and talent, took a dream and turned it into a reality.

References

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6. Ferrucci R. Annual Report on the 1972-73 Activities of the MCO Chapter of AOSA, March, 1973.
7. Furer C. President's Report. *Am Optom Student Rev*, Oct 16, 1972:2.
8. Minutes of the Third Annual AOSA

Congress, Dan Owen, Secretary, March, 1973.

9. Trask R. AOSA 1970-71 Presidential Report.
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12. Ferrucci R. Recommendations for the education of health professionals. J Am Optom Assoc 1974;45(6):713-716.
13. Ferrucci R. President's Column. Am Optom Student Review, Sept, 1973.

APPENDIX I. List of U.S. Schools and Colleges of Optometry in 1972.

Illinois College of Optometry

Indiana University, Division of Optometry (now Indiana University School of Optometry)

Massachusetts College of Optometry (now New England College of Optometry)

Pacific University College of Optometry

Pennsylvania College of Optometry (now Salus University Pennsylvania College of Optometry)

Southern California College of Optometry (now Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University)

Southern College of Optometry

The Ohio State University College of Optometry

University of Alabama in Birmingham School of Optometry/The Medical Center

University of California, Berkeley School of Optometry

University of Houston College of Optometry

State University of New York State College of Optometry

APPENDIX II. AOSA Testimony before United States Congress, 1969-1973.

Statement of Robert J. Mittleman on behalf of The American Optometric Student Association on Federally Guaranteed Student Loans before Special Sub-Committee on Education, U.S. House of Representatives, July 24, 1969.

Statement of Robert J. Mittleman, O.D. for the American Optometric Student Association before the Labor/HEW Subcommittee of Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives, June 18, 1970.

Statement of Anthony DiStefano, Sophomore Class President, Pennsylvania College of Optometry, on the Health Professions Educational Assistance Act Amendments of 1971, Submitted to the Subcommittee on Health, Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce, U.S. House of Representatives, April 29, 1971.

Statement of the American Optometric Student Association on Appropriations Funding, Labor-HEW Budget-FY 1974, presented by Cecil D. Furer, President, American Optometric Student Association

before the Subcommittee on Labor/HEW Appropriations Committee on Appropriations United States House of Representatives, May 22, 1973.

APPENDIX III. Student Consultants to the AOA, 1973-74.

Ronald R. Ferrucci, Assistance to Graduates and Undergraduates

George Gottschalk III, Membership Development Committee

Terry T. Marguardt, Federal Legislation Committee

Alan R. Gold, Administrative Agencies Committee

Donald L. Barniske, Public Health and Optometric Care Committee

APPENDIX IV. Student Consultants to the AOA, 1974-75.

Beth Workman (TOSU), Full Committee Member, Assistance to Graduates and Undergraduates

Burt Dubow (PUCO), Consultant, Committee on Public Health and Optometric Care

Mark Flora (SCO), Consultant, National Affairs Division

Robert Day, Jr. (UH), Membership Development Committee