



American Optometric Association meeting badge of Kelly Kinney (Nichols), along with logos from various optometry schools she collected from other students during the meeting and ribbon in support of Dave Nelson for AOA Trustee (Photo courtesy of Kelly K. Nichols).

EXPERIENCES WITH THE AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC STUDENT ASSOCIATION IN THE 1990s

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At the end of my first year as an optometry student in 1992 at the University of California Berkeley (UCB) School of Optometry, as trustee-elect, I attended my first American Optometric Association (AOA) meeting in Montreal. At the time, I did not realize the impact my involvement in the American Optometric Student Association (AOSA) would have on my then short-term future, as well as my long-term path. Congratulations AOSA on this milestone anniversary!

A DIFFERENCE IN PERSPECTIVE

Over the next three years in optometry school, I went on to be trustee, and when the time came I successfully ran for the office of

President. At the time, the annual AOSA meeting was held separately from the June AOA meeting, and schools would compete for the privilege of hosting the AOSA meeting. Our all-female officer team (Kelly Kinney, Joanne Bachman, Melissa Ernst, and Jennifer Bailey) was elected in Southern California in 1994 (Newport Beach—and Disney Land sponsored by Allergan!) and our year ended in Memphis. We were allowed to “walk the ducks” from their penthouse to the pool at the Peabody Hotel, a tradition reserved for famous hotel guests and dignitaries. What a fun memory! More than those unique events though, was the chance to see things differently through the eyes of students from all over the country. Even though optometry school provided an opportunity to meet students from different undergraduate universities, in my case most were from California, so I enjoyed learning the accents and hearing how



1994-95 AOSA officers, left to right: Melissa Ernst (UH), Secretary; Joanne Bachman (UAB), Vice President; Carol Freihaut, Executive Director; Jennifer Bailey (IU), Treasurer; Kelly Kinney (Nichols) (UCB), President (Photo courtesy of Kelly K. Nichols).

optometry schools were different from my colleagues to-be from all over the United States and Canada.

A CHANCE TO BE AN ACTIVIST

As AOSA leaders, we all had the chance to see AOA political wheels in action, and in my presidency year, all AOSA student leaders became advocates for Dave Nelson's AOA trustee campaign. Nelson had himself been an AOSA president in 1984-85, and we supported him. We all wore "vote for Dave, the wave of the future" ribbons to the House of Delegates and around the meeting. To our knowledge, it was the first time the students had been asked to participate through support, and this relationship led to the beginning of the discussions to have the student meeting join the June AOA meeting, which went on to be known as "Optometry's Meeting." Nelson was and still is, an advocate for the students, and while the process of moving the student meeting to the June meeting wasn't without distress, the ultimate result was beneficial for the profession.

A WINDOW INTO THE FUTURE

At the time, duties of the AOSA president included being the student member at the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO) board meetings, as well as attending AOA membership committee meetings as the student representative. At the NBEO dinner reception, NBEO members Lesley L. Walls (Southern California College of Optometry President at the time), Thomas L. Lewis (Pennsylvania College of Optometry/Salus President at the time), and Arol Augsburg (University of Alabama Birmingham Dean at the time) advised me that I should consider a Ph.D. in Vision Science—a career path I had never thought of, and did not seriously



Student leaders (left to right) Kellye Kneuppel (SCCO), Keith Chow (UCB), Kelly Kinney (Nichols) (UCB), and Stan Woo (UCB) at the AOSA meeting in St. Louis in 1993 (Photo courtesy of Kelly K. Nichols).

consider at the time, but the seed was planted. Fast forward to the present, multiple degrees later and as the only (to my knowledge) AOSA president to become a dean, I feel I can trace it back to that conversation at a meeting reception related to AOSA (and a boat load of work to follow). My advice—never say never!

THE TEST OF TIME

In those years when the AOSA meeting was separate from the AOA meeting, our fearless AOSA executive director, Carol Freihaut, managed us all with a kind heart and a penchant for order (thankfully). Our experiences, with her expert help, in the meeting room in Montreal, inside the Gateway Arch in St. Louis (it snowed that year!) and at every meeting to follow provided every officer, trustee, and trustee elect with an opportunity to experience optometry at its collaborative best, with the viewpoint that all things are possible if we work together. While I have the honor to serve future optometrists as dean at the University of Alabama Birmingham (UAB) School of Optometry, my

experiences through AOSA added shape to my career and have come back into my life in meaningful ways—my mentors (from the NBEO meeting long ago) are friends and colleagues. My fellow AOSA trustees and officers are leaders in our profession. AOSA connections have a way of persisting. At our recent UABSO alumni weekend, I had the pleasure of sitting by a class of 1977 alum, Dr. Mike Gambino. Through conversation I discovered he was AOSA president in 1975-76—his memories are as fond as mine. So, as a nod to today's student AOSA leaders—enjoy every minute and take advantage of the opportunity. You will see, some things just stand the test of time.