

A Letter from Dr. Borish [Summer 2000]

My Dear Professional and Academic Colleagues and Friends,

Optometry, when I entered it, had been legally in existence for only one third of its present life span. It was a raw, nascent calling, with elementary qualifications, a haphazard educational system, and limited entitlements. It was critically purveyed, when not ignored, by government, the military, health insurance systems, and health-field commentators and publications.

That the public's appraisal of one's vocation, along with race, nationality, religion, and economic capacity, is prominent in estimating our individual status among our fellows may have been the major stimulus that goaded our continued endeavors to move Optometry toward a societal identity more equivalent to that of its longer-established, fellow health care professions.

Charles Sheard cautioned, as I have repeated before, that Optometry would never "make it" (that is, achieve such equivalency) until it earned the respect of its peers. Such respect, he felt, depended on continuous presentation of researched applicable material at an impressive level and quantity.

Indiana Optometrists so readily accepted the concept that equivalent status was essentially dependent upon the achieved academic standing of our profession, that, almost a half century ago, their concerted effort to establish the present program in optometry at Indiana University is still cited in Indiana legislative history.

Teaching and honing of techniques are aimed at perfecting students' facility and proficiency. This realm of preparation is enhanced by research.

Initially, most optometry schools were, and some may still be, technical institutes, concentrating on perfecting techniques. The establishment of the IU School of Optometry increased the overall capacity for vision research, among Optometric institutions.

Indiana University can take great pride in its contributions to our profession. A number of its graduates are or have been deans and presidents of fellow educational institutions. Others have been named as national optometrist of the year. And, the only two individuals who have been awarded both the Apollo Award and the Distinguished Service Award of the American Optometric Association, and the first two living members to be elected to the newly established Optometric Hall of Fame are both connected to Indiana University.

While Optometry has increased its number of graduate research facilities, particularly in the realm of pure visual science, it still remains behind ophthalmology, in the publication of specific clinical research.

Thus, Indiana developed a center for ophthalmic research—an entity to develop a premier clinical vision research center that would attract scholars and researchers from around the world; provide an infrastructure that would promote innovative and challenging clinical investigations; provide development of clinical research in vision; encourage multidisciplinary approaches; and develop strong

relations with the university, governmental agencies, industry, professional organizations, practitioners, and the public.

During the five years since its formation, under the co-direction of Drs. Gerald Lowther, Dean of the School of Optometry, and P. Sarita Soni, Associate Dean of Research of the School, and under the co-support of the School of Optometry and the Research and Graduate School Division of the University, at least 41 separate projects have been undertaken. These include studies on contact lens wear, including the national keratoconus investigation; orthokeratology, tear analysis and visual performance of bifocals; efficacy of new, progressive spectacle lens designs; concepts of improved optical performance, glaucoma detection, and improving reading for those with macular degeneration. A number of submissions have been made for outside funding from major agencies, and details of these projects are outlined in this publication.

Meanwhile, the endowment development program has reached a consequential percentage of its objective of one million dollars.

A significant indication of the effect of the Center is expressed in a letter to me from the Associate Dean for Research of the University, Dr. Jeffrey R. Alberts:

"On Thursday, April 15, 1999, Dr. Larry Thibos of the Indiana University School of Optometry and the Borish Center for Ophthalmic Research appeared as the Distinguished Faculty Research Lecturer. He delivered a wonderful, up-to-date and even futuristic lecture (which) embodied the interplay between basic research and applied knowledge. It was a model of original, systemic inquiry. It was also a very impressive representation of the value of the Borish Center, and I think you would have been proud and gratified. We regret you were unable to attend, but I want you to know your support of the center is paying dividends in the creation of new knowledge and in the enrichment of life for many people through education. The Distinguished Faculty Research Lecture is one of IU's most prestigious forms of recognition. It is relatively uncommon for a faculty member from a professional school to be chosen for this honor. I suspect that the existence of the Borish Center has made more possible such important changes in our campus culture."

I wish to express to each of you my sincerest appreciation for your help in establishing and supporting the Center for Ophthalmic Research. I humbly submit my personal thanks to my academic colleagues, my fellow practitioners, my friends, and my compatriots in the industry. First, for honoring me by attaching my name to the Center, and more importantly, for helping provide so momentous an avenue, as suggested by Dean Albert's letter, for advancing our persistent struggle toward achieving peer equity.

To all of you involved in the origination, perpetuation, and development of the Center, my heartfelt regards and wishes . . .

Sincerely,

Irvin M. Borish