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THE AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC STUDENT ASSOCIATION IN THE 2010s

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The 2010s have been an exciting decade of exponential growth for the American Optometric Student Association (AOSA). The AOSA has remained true to its mission statement: "to improve the visual welfare and health of the public, to promote the profession of optometry, and to enhance the education and welfare of optometry students."¹ Every area of expansion, idea, and future goal is focused on this foundational vision.

In the present day, the AOSA continues to be governed by a four-person Executive Council and the AOSA Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees is comprised of one Trustee per school, a third year student, who serves as the liaison between the school AOSA chapter and the national AOSA organization. The Executive Council and Board of Trustees continue to meet bi-annually. The January meeting now rotates to various locations across North America and June meetings continue to be held in conjunction with the annual American Optometric Association (AOA) Optometry's Meeting. In 2013, a new Executive Director, Bob Foster, was appointed to spearhead daily operations at the St. Louis, Missouri Headquarters and help manage the organization at the strategic direction of the AOSA Executive Council and Board of Trustees. Mr. Foster was an instrumental asset in the progression and expansion of the AOSA."

The AOSA currently has over 7,150 members and represents 24 optometry schools in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico.² As

new optometry schools continue to open across the United States, additional opportunities are available for the AOSA to play an integral role in a student's first connection with the American Optometric Association. The AOSA continues to communicate the importance of developing a lifelong commitment with the AOA. Over the last two years, the newest schools, founded in Massachusetts and Kentucky, have established local AOSA chapters and Trustee representatives to serve on the national AOSA Board of Trustees.

Membership categories over the last decade have also expanded to include sections designated for pre-optometry students, international students, and sustaining members. This expansion has allowed more individuals to be connected to the AOSA and ultimately AOA.

Like the rest of the world, technology has had a vital impact on the AOSA. To thrive in today's current market, organizations must have a credible and professional online presence. The AOSA continues to maintain a modern and integrative website to serve as a resource for current and potential members. Biannual publications of *Foresight*, a magazine written by students for students, are now digitized and are read by people around the world.³ To-date, over forty-seven *Foresight* magazines have been published with content topics addressing student life, optometry, and future professional implications of modern-day current events. Many of the latest editions can be found online through the AOSA's website.³ Various social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram,

and Twitter have allowed the AOSA to communicate with people across the globe and establish an impactful and hefty online presence. The organization has used social media to provide travel grant and scholarship opportunities for students in addition to raising awareness about key issues affecting the optometric profession. Popular AOSA social media competitions have included an annual photo contest and virtual spirit awards. The AOSA's social media have also been an amazing opportunity for optometry students to easily connect and network with other students across the country!

One of the biggest contributions the AOSA has had on optometry student life is the numerous travel grants given to offset the expense of attending meetings like the AOA Advocacy Conference and AOA Optometry's Meeting. National AOSA liaisons, social media winners, and numerous others have benefited from the financial opportunities given by the organization. Having reached record numbers in membership, the AOSA has continued to make sure students remain the focus of the organization.

While numerous issues have impacted the AOSA over the last decade, heavy hitters in the 2010s have included student loan debt, optometry's scope of practice, Affordable Care Act, and the role of the internet regarding online eye exams and glasses and contact lens sales.⁴⁻⁶ While these issues continue to develop, the AOSA has remained committed to providing resources and information needed to navigate through these political and modern day world events.

Over the last 50 years, the AOSA has been and will continue to be the voice of the optometry students. Having

grown so much in just a few decades, the future of the AOSA is truly exciting!

References

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