

AOSA/NOSA Joint Initiative: Diversify Optometry Program

On behalf of the National Optometric Student Association (NOSA) and the American Optometric Student Association (AOSA) we are excited to introduce our joint initiative called the Diversify Optometry Program (DOP). The mission of the Diversify Optometry Program is to promote an influx of black and minority undergraduate students into the profession of optometry through mentorship, career and professional development, networking, and enrollment assistance. Our shared vision is an inclusive optometric community with minority representation reflecting that of the general population.

The National Optometric Student Association (NOSA) is the student extension of the National Optometric Association (NOA). NOSA is a service organization open to all and dedicated to providing the delivery of effective and adequate eye care to minority and underserved communities. In addition, NOSA creatively markets the field of optometry to increase recruitment and retention of underrepresented minorities into the profession. The association shall strive to stimulate and encourage high professional, intellectual, and social relationships with members of optometric programs as well as other health professional student organizations.

The American Optometric Student Association (AOSA) is the student extension of the American Optometric Association (AOA). AOSA is the student advocacy association open to all students dedicated to the advancement of the profession of optometry. The AOSA is focused on its mission of empowering students to thrive as doctors of optometry, while remaining focused on the founding pillars that help to guide the association in its decisions: education, advocacy, student tools for success, and the student experience.

Our goal is to promote our profession by exposing minority undergraduates to the field of optometry. AOSA and NOSA have identified key overlapping initiatives to grow the profession in meaningful ways for people of underrepresented ethnicities and would like to combine resources to reach our goals in a collaborative manner. We hope to accomplish these goals through the following steps:

1. Create a database of optometrists willing to support the initiative through opening their practices for shadowing opportunities and mentorship.
 - a. Letters/emails sent from each optometry school to their alumni networks
 - b. Develop mentor-mentee relationships
2. Reach out to undergraduate colleges and universities and obtain the contact information for their pre-health professional clubs, and minority student organization leaders.
 - a. Expand our network(s) and establish legitimate contacts so that more students are brought into the optometry pipeline
 - b. Increase awareness of the profession and active recruitment through undergraduate professional/pre-medicine clubs
3. Form DOP Liaisons positions at the national level in AOSA and NOSA and at the individual school level made up of AOSA and/or NOSA members at each optometry

school whose sole roles will be to facilitate the accomplishment of the above tasks and those below.

4. Create a calendar of presentations with optometry speakers and invite prospective optometry students at various schools nationwide to attend the presentations and learn more about optometry.
5. Provide assistance to minority students seriously pursuing optometry as a career.
 - a. Promote AOSA's new scholarship: "Opportunities in Optometry"
 - i. Enrollment open April 5 - May 15, 2021
 - b. Administer workshops to help with OAT prep, interviews, and letter writing.
6. Build a more diverse generation of optometrists
 - a. With especially, Black minorities reaching a level of 13% or greater of students and doctors, which is reflective of the general population.

Through this collaboration between NOSA and AOSA we will make our optometry networks stronger, mobilize more practicing optometrists to become involved in diversifying our beloved profession, and begin a greater, more collaborative, and diverse era of optometry.

We ascertain that by increasing the number of black and minority optometrists into the profession, we will be able to better serve our patients of various cultural backgrounds. We also believe that this effort will expand cultural understanding for all optometrists seeking to connect more effectively with their patients. In effect, we hope that DOP will soon lead to seeing a greater number of minorities in optometric leadership positions, such as AOA leadership, faculty at institutions, and speakers at major conventions, to name a few.

In conclusion, we hope that you share in our excitement to initiate the Diversify Optometry Program. We will be announcing the program to both our NOSA and AOSA student chapters in March when we will begin recruiting their help in our program efforts. NOSA and AOSA are looking forward to working together collaboratively, and hope to receive support from our members in our endeavor.

Respectfully,

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