



# Advancing Optometry's Future

## FOUNDATION

### 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

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#### *Greetings.*

This year has been one of the American Academy of Optometry Foundation's best. We have been able to recognize those who demonstrate excellence in the profession and provide financial assistance to students, residents, faculty, and researchers, while also expanding initiatives that support optometric programs and education. We are pleased to share highlights of the year with you in this report. As 2022 comes to close, we welcome your support and hope you will consider a donation before the end of the year.

Sincerely,

The AAOF Board of Directors



#### 75 Years of Making a Difference in Eye Care Through Philanthropy

The Foundation kicked off its 75th anniversary during Academy 2022 San Diego with a celebration at the San Diego Wine and Culinary Center. This occasion provided a chance for us to celebrate and a special opportunity to recognize the many people who support the Foundation with their time, energy, and donations.

Founded in 1947 by William C. Ezell, OD, and six colleagues, the American Academy of Optometry Foundation (then known as the American Optometric Foundation) was formed to support optometric education and research. In 1992, the AOF became organizationally affiliated with the Academy.

### THERE'S STILL TIME TO GIVE IN 2022!

Click here to donate:



**DONATE**



Doctors Prince Kwaku Akowuah, Emmanuel Kobia-Acquah and Augustine Nyarko Nti received the William C. Ezell Fellowship at Academy 2022 San Diego.

*Photo courtesy of the Ghana Optometric Association.*

## Supporting Our Future

This year the Foundation awarded 15 prestigious William C. Ezell Fellowships. Named for founding president, William C. Ezell, OD, this fellowship seeks to assist full-time students in their pursuit of advanced degrees in optometric research and education.

Since 1949, 473 fellowships have been awarded to talented individuals in the field. The 2022 recipients received \$8,000 for the year-long fellowship. They also were awarded two travel grants of \$750 to attend the Academy's annual meeting and the Association for Research and Vision in Ophthalmology (ARVO) meeting.

Funding for these Fellowships is provided by leading optometric companies, private endowments, and other business organizations representing most sectors of the industry.

## Congratulations to this year's Ezells!

**Charlotte YiYi Wang, OD, FAAO**  
American Academy of Optometry Centennial Ezell Fellow  
University of California Berkeley School of Optometry

**Rachel Williams, OD, FAAO**  
American Academy of Optometry Centennial Ezell Fellow  
University of Houston College of Optometry

**Emmanuel Kobia-Acquah  
OD, MSc, FAAO**  
American Academy of Optometry Section on Cornea, Contact  
Lenses, and Refractive Technologies (CCLRT) Ezell Fellow  
Technological University Dublin Ireland

**Kierstyn Napier-Dovorany, OD, FAAO**  
American Academy of Optometry Ezell Fellow  
Indiana University School of Optometry

**Rebecca Deffler, OD, MS, FAAO**  
American Academy of Optometry Foundation Ezell Fellow  
The Ohio State University College of Optometry

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Bert C. & Lydia M. Corwin Ezell Fellow  
University of New South Wales

**Neeraj K. Singh  
BOptom, MPhil, FAAO**  
Danne Ventura / Essilor Ezell Fellow  
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**Prince Kwaku Akowuah, OD, FAAO**  
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**Augustine Nyarko Nti, OD, FAAO**  
Rod Tahrán / Essilor Ezell Fellow  
University of Houston College of Optometry



## A Clinically Certified Success

During the Academy's annual meeting, the Foundation hosted a graduation reception for 88 optometrists who received Clinical Investigator Certification. Graduates also had the opportunity to meet and network with industry representatives who sponsor clinical trials.

The AAOF plans to develop a database of investigators in 2023, so watch your inbox for details.

If you have questions about the database, please direct them to our Vice President of Philanthropy, Bob Gray, at [BobG@aaoptom.org](mailto:BobG@aaoptom.org).

## You Make a Difference – Thank You!

Your generous donations enable the Foundation to provide financial support for optometric research and education in patient clinical care. Each year, hundreds of optometric professionals, residents, and students benefit from funding that enables them to continue their education and advance in their careers.

In addition to administering awards, fellowships, grants, and scholarships, the Foundation's Board of Directors, volunteers, and staff continue to develop and expand the six initiatives listed below.



**Clinical Podcast Series** distributes six video podcasts a month discussing trending, clinically relevant research to improve patient care. Since Fall 2021, the program has produced more than 6,000 downloads.

[LISTEN HERE](#)



**Clinical Investigator Certification** provides practicing optometrists with the training and skills to serve as a clinical investigator for sponsored research. Since our first class began in Spring 2021, the CIC program has "graduated" 88 Fellows.

[LEARN MORE](#)



**Staff Training Fundamentals** trains optometric staff through an online application developed for new employees in practices and clinics. Nearly 500 participants have previewed or enrolled in the program.

[ENROLL NOW](#)



**OD/PHD Scholarship Program** funds optometrists pursuing a PhD in a vision science field. Awardees receive \$30,000 payable over two years. The first scholarship was presented in 2021 and two scholarships will be awarded during 2023.

[LEARN MORE](#)



**Bright Ideas Pitch Competition** encourages new ideas and innovative thinking with competitors pitching their ideas live to a panel of judges. Read about our inaugural program on page four.

[LEARN MORE](#)



**Research Funding Pilot Grant Program** stimulates new research through pilot grants and partner collaboration. This year the Foundation funded more than \$100,000 in new grants and \$450,000 in collaborations.

[DONATE NOW](#)

# INITIATIVE SPOTLIGHT



The competition featured early-stage entrepreneurs with ideas or innovations to improve eye care treatment or devices.



**BRIGHT IDEAS**  
PITCH COMPETITION



## BRIGHT IDEAS Pitch Competition

The BRIGHT IDEAS Pitch Competition is designed to provide recognition, mentoring, and monetary reward to new or early-stage entrepreneurs with an idea or innovation that will improve eye care treatment or devices. This year's winner rose to the top of a pool of nearly 30 applicants who participated in a series of pitches during a four-month period. The final pitches were presented live during Academy 2022 San Diego.

## And the Winner is...

The American Academy of Optometry Foundation is pleased to announce the winner of its inaugural BRIGHT IDEAS Pitch Competition. The first-place winner is SunSnap Kids, presented by Kaleb Abbott, OD, FAAO. This child-focused company was founded to solve the problem of children losing their sunglasses. The company's sunglasses use slap bracelets that comfortably "snap" onto the arm and keep them within reach and easy to use.

*The Competition is presented in collaboration with the Innovation Council.*



# NEWS & NOTES



*“Through the J. Pat Cummings Scholarship, you have lightened my financial burden, which allows me to focus on the important aspects of my studies. Your generosity inspires me to dedicate myself to my clinical development, my interprofessional education and collaboration, and the fulfillment of exemplary ocular care through comprehensive eye health examinations. I hope to attend AAO Academy 2023 to further my academic development. I hope one day I will be able to help students achieve their goals just as you have helped me. Thank you for your support.”*

– Sarah Klein, University of Waterloo



## International Travel Grant Awarded

The Foundation and admittance committee have developed a fund to help international optometrists with leadership promise attend the annual meeting and take the admittance exam in person. The first international travel grant was awarded to John Kwesi Assan, OD, FAAO.

Dr. Assan is a Ghanaian-trained optometrist. He earned Fellowship during the meeting, becoming the youngest African to achieve this distinction.



## Encouraging the Next Generation

During the annual meeting, the Foundation and Academy were pleased to present “Future Focus on Optometry: Diversity Is Our Strength”, a program designed to expose underrepresented minority high school students to the profession of optometry with hopes of sparking interest among them to pursue optometry as a career.

Twenty-five students from e3 Civic High in San Diego participated in the program. They heard short lectures on the profession, different modes of practice, and vision. Afterwards, while touring the Exhibit Hall with Academy Fellows and National Optometric Student Association (NOSA) members, they received images of their eyes and learned more about vision. They ended the day with lunch and brief talks with the NOSA students about why they chose optometry and the barriers they overcame during their higher education journey.

*“The response was overwhelmingly positive, and we plan to repeat the program next year in New Orleans,”* said committee co-chair Mika Moy, OD, FAAO.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Sixty-eight students were awarded travel grants of \$750 each to attend the 2022 annual meeting. This \$51,000 is part of our ongoing commitment and dedication to welcoming the next generation into the Academy.

## Website Makeover Coming Soon!

Watch for new content and detailed information about awards and grant opportunities, updates on our initiatives, and much more.



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## VOLUNTEERS

We have so many wonderful volunteers who enable us to succeed in our mission, and we sincerely thank each one. This year we have continued to expand and advance our initiatives with the help of so many. We would like to highlight a group of those who went above and beyond by contributing their knowledge and hundreds of hours of their time.

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Gretchyn M. Bailey  
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Bradley Dougherty  
Keshia Elder  
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### FUTURE FOCUS ON OPTOMETRY: DIVERSITY IS OUR STRENGTH

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Melissa Contreras  
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Andrew Mick  
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