

# FOCAL POINTS

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY'S NEWSMAGAZINE

SPRING/SUMMER  
2021

## FEATURE

Dr. Kalaczinski, AOA  
Educator of the Year

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## FACULTY FOCUS

Dr. Lillian Kalaczinski

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## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

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## STAFF FOCUS

Randy D. Dahlstrom

# MESSAGE FROM THE INTERIM DEAN



MCO Interim Dean, Dr. Daniel Taylor

Alumni, Friends and Emeriti of the Michigan College of Optometry:

It is a time of transition at MCO. Though some personnel turnover is common at the beginning of a new fiscal year, this past June, MCO's Dean, Dr. David Damari; Assistant Dean for Clinical Education and Director of Externships, Dr. David Durkee; and Clinical Operations Manager, Mrs. Lisa Roach; all moved on. The entire MCO community wishes them well and are thankful for the service they provided to our college.

Though it is certainly a challenge when so many key members of an organization leave, it is by no means an insurmountable one. I have been appointed Interim Dean of MCO, and our staff and faculty continue to work with admirable dedication to provide exceptional

education to our outstanding students, and state-of-the-art care to our patients.

For the remainder of the 2021-22 academic year, I will work to establish a firm, consistent foundation upon which the mission of the college can be fulfilled. Key to the success of this endeavor will be a renewed emphasis on recruiting the best and brightest optometry students in North America, investing in the professional development of our faculty as both subject-matter experts and volunteers in national optometry, involving our alumni throughout MCO's operations, and expanding our attraction to members of underrepresented racial and ethnic minorities. This will culminate in a nationwide search for the next permanent Dean of Michigan College of Optometry, which should begin in early 2022.

To ensure that all MCO stakeholders are informed of the facts, I would like to invite you to reach out to me personally at any time. I can be reached by e-mail at [DanielTaylor@ferris.edu](mailto:DanielTaylor@ferris.edu) or by telephone at (231) 591-3703. I am also happy to connect with you on LinkedIn; just send me a connection request or an inline message!

Thank you for your long-standing commitment to the Michigan College of Optometry at Ferris State University. Our past and future are dependent on your excellence and involvement. We at MCO look forward to reestablishing and strengthening our relationships with you in the months and years to come, as we continue to care for our patients with compassionate expertise, and provide our students with the best in optometric education.

**BEST,**

*Daniel A. Taylor, OD EdD MS FAAO DipOE*

Interim Dean, Michigan College of Optometry



MCO is pleased to honor the AOA Educator of the Year, our own Dr. Lillian Kalaczinski

CONGRATULATIONS ON THIS WONDERFUL

*Honor!*

Dr. Kalaczinski was chosen as the national, American Optometric Association Educator of the Year! Her award was bestowed at Optometry's Meeting in June. For those unable to attend, here is the link to a feature video produced by the AOA:

<https://youtu.be/Zq8GG1WNCEg>

We are proud to honor Dr. Kalaczinski as a dedicated faculty member and mentor to our students!

# FACULTY SPOTLIGHT- DR. LILLIAN T. KALACZINSKI



**Please tell us about your career path prior to joining the MCO faculty.**

I am a 1998 MCO grad. I knew when I graduated that I wanted to complete a primary care residency in an academic setting, but I needed to take some time off to reinvigorate and replenish my bank account! I ultimately decided on a PC/Ocular Disease Residency at ICO, which I completed in July 2000. My first position after residency was with a private OMD in the Metro Detroit area. I practiced full-scope with a lot of refractive and cataract surgical comanagement. I only stayed with this practice for one year and then moved on to Henry Ford OptimEyes where I stayed for four years, again practicing PC optometry in a variety of office settings. By this time, I was married and had an infant son, and my husband and I decided that we wanted to move out of Southeast MI. I was looking for a career change and ultimately stumbled on a position with Cherry Health, a Federally Qualified

Community Health Center, in Grand Rapids. I ultimately joined that organization as their first full time optometrist and was promoted to Director of Vision Services after four years. When I started at CH, the clinic was caring for about 1,200 patients and when I left, we were seeing 12,000+ patients annually. The practice at CH was full scope when I started, but as we hired more ODs, I settled into a practice that was heavily skewed to ocular disease particularly glaucoma and diabetes. In 2015, I joined the faculty at MCO.

**What drew you to a career in academia at MCO?**

I always thought that I wanted to teach, which was why I chose to complete a Residency in an academic setting with teaching responsibilities. I also had third and fourth year clinical students the entire time I was at CH. I really enjoy the variety of teaching responsibilities (didactic, clinic and lab).

**What do you enjoy most about your role at MCO?**

While I personally enjoy classroom teaching, I think my strength is still clinical instruction. I have always enjoyed patient care and how that enthusiasm translates to students.

### **What was the process for receiving the AOA Educator of the Year award from nomination to receipt?**

The third year students select the MOA Educator of the Year. I am not sure about the history of that process. I learned in January that I was the recipient of the MOA award. In Michigan, whoever wins the State awards is the nominee for the AOA national awards. So, the MOA completes the AOA nomination (I helped for completeness and accuracy) and submitted to the AOA in late March. The AOA nomination requires information on State and National optometric involvement (MOA, local societies, AOA committees, PAC contributions, etc.) as well as service to humanity and local communities. It is quite an involved process. Then, a group of AOA leaders evaluate the nominations and select the final winners. While many factors are considered, I am most proud that this award started with our MCO students!

### **What are your favorite parts of your personal life? Tell us about your family.**

My husband David and I have been married for just over 19 years. We met when I was a resident in Chicago and he eventually moved to Michigan to join me here (he still has not forgiven me!). We have two wonderful sons, Roman who is 17 and just finishing his junior year, and Dean who is 13 and finishing 7th grade. I adore being a Mom. If things were different, I would have been a stay at home caretaker instead of working! I love encouraging their interests and providing as many opportunities for new experiences as possible. I am proud of who they are and find them hilarious and a joy to be around!

I am a fitness enthusiast. Not many days go by without some form of structured exercise occurring and I am one of those people who really enjoys it (most of the time!). I don't have great cardiac genes, so staying healthy is my primary motivator. As I have gotten older, exercise has also helped keep my stress under control! I also love scrapbooking and cardmaking (really all papercrafts) but don't have much time to indulge currently.

My husband and I both love to travel (though I don't love to fly!) and our list of destinations never seems to shorten. We also love to attend live music events and have seen at least 50 concerts together in the last 18 years!

Dr. Kalaczinski  
receiving her  
Educator of the  
Year award at  
Optometry's  
Meeting in June



**What is a favorite memory of your time as an MCO student?**

I had an exceptionally close class (MCO 98) and we shared many great experiences. Many of us loved to dance! On most Thursday nights (if there was no exam on Friday) the majority of our class could be found on the dance floor at Shooters (after watching the original Thursday night line-up). We planned many silly events such as the Axis Chase which was a wild scavenger hunt around Big Rapids, a snow sculpture contest, and random road trips. Attending AOSA meetings together was also special. I do think our hooding ceremony is my favorite memory because we had not been together for a year and that is such an important and meaningful ceremony to share.



Dr. Kalaczinski on the ski slopes with her sons, Roman and Dean



Dr. Kalaczinski with her husband, David, and sons, Roman and Dean

**What are your words of advice for our current MCO students?**

Learn as much as you possibly can while you are a student. When you are in practice, you will never have enough time to read and research as you would like! Always treat patients with empathy, kindness and the best care you can possibly provide.

**What message would you like to share with our MCO alumni and friends?**

MCO is still a great place to be! We need your help in recruiting the best and brightest for the next generation of MCO graduates!



# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## JAMES L. CARPENTER

### Where are you originally from?

I was born and raised in Northville, Michigan which is a suburb West of Detroit.

### Tell us about your undergraduate education?

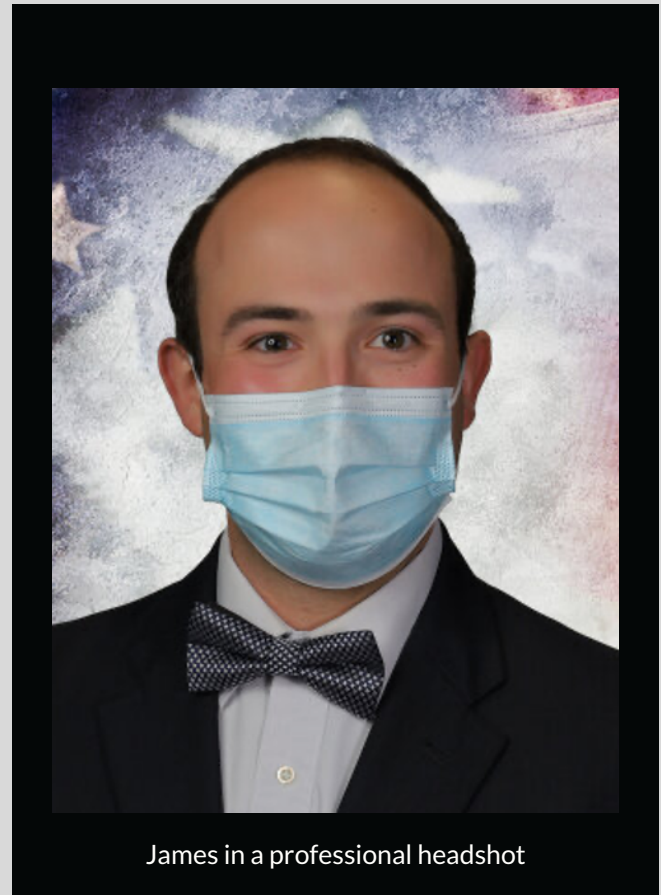
I attended Michigan State University where I received a Bachelor's degree in Biomedical Laboratory Diagnostics (BLD). One of the first things I did when I started at MSU was join the pre-optometry club. At that point I already had my eyes set on optometry as my future profession and with optometry school as my goal. Choosing my major was not an easy decision but at a showcase of majors for pre-health students, I was invited to a meet and greet event with other BLD students and professors. I was blown away at how tight-knit the BLD students and department was.

I was incredibly lucky as I consider that to be one of the best decisions of my life. Those years at North Kedzie gave me more than just a fantastic foundation of knowledge to build on in optometry school, but it also taught me how there is no place so big that you can't find your people within it. The

community also showed me how beneficial a small student to staff ratio is, which played a big role in my decision on the Michigan College of Optometry.

Fourth Year Student

"Student of the Year" for the Class of 2022



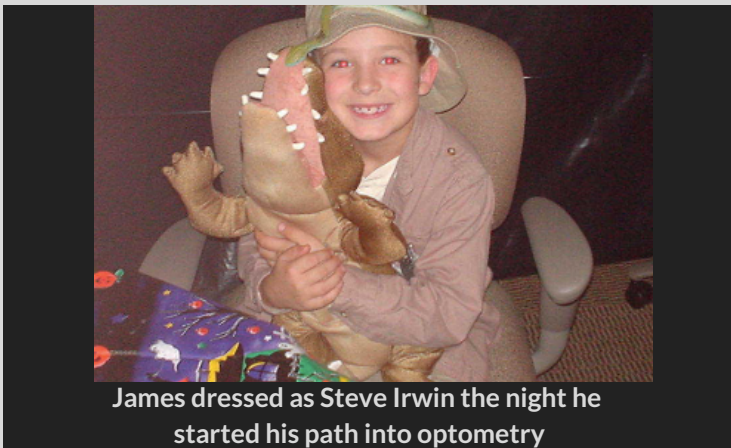
James in a professional headshot



James traveling on one of his adventures

### What made you choose optometry?

Back in elementary school I received a corneal abrasion while trick-or-treating and a family friend optometrist brought me into their office and took a look at it. They were super nice and I thought seeing their office with all the models and equipment was the coolest thing. As I progressed through high school, I knew I wanted to do something in healthcare and those memories really stuck with me.



James dressed as Steve Irwin the night he started his path into optometry

### **Tell us about your time at MCO!**

My time here has been some of the most enjoyable and formative years of my life. The faculty and patients here have packed so many learning experiences and lessons into such a short time that it's hard to believe it's been three years and not ten! I've enjoyed all the intellectual challenges in the classroom that push me to be a better clinician, and I've enjoyed my time in the clinic where the attending doctors never let a teachable moment pass. Most of all, I've enjoyed getting to know the other students in the class of 2022. Optometry is already an incredibly challenging program without a global pandemic loaded on top of it. Isolation, as you know, is NOT a very conducive working environment. Through the whole online summer to the strange transition to fall/spring in a social distance capacity, I always felt comfortable leaning on my classmates to review for an exam, to go over information that just wasn't sticking, or to just talk about how life in our quarantine bubble was going. They're an incredible group of people and I honestly feel like I won the lottery every day I get to see them.

### **Do you have any advice for students?**

Absolutely! What helped me a lot in optometry school is asking lots of questions. You're a student so asking questions and learning is your job! The other thing I would recommend is trying to always find something to keep you positive. It's a very rigorous program and it's far too easy to get bogged down with negativity. Just remember all the work you've done to get to this point. You have what it takes to make it through, you wouldn't have made it this far if you didn't! Lastly, when you're talking to people who are on the same path as you but not as far, try to remember what it was like when you were in their shoes. I always aspire to be the person for them that I needed when I was in their position and I think that is a great way to have a positive impact. Good luck!

### **What type of practice do you envision yourself joining in the future? What are your career goals?**

Since we haven't started externships yet (as of the time of this writing), it's kind of tough to answer that question! I'm not quite sure what path I would like to take for specializing just yet, but I have the feeling it will more depend on the needs of the location I end up at. Regardless of where/what I do I would really like to either work for or start my own contracting company to do eye care in assisted living facilities. It's a patient population that I enjoy working with, and it's an underserved population that is only going to increase for the better part of my career.



James, Dr. McDowell, and members of the class of 2022 at the annual eyeball banquet in 2019



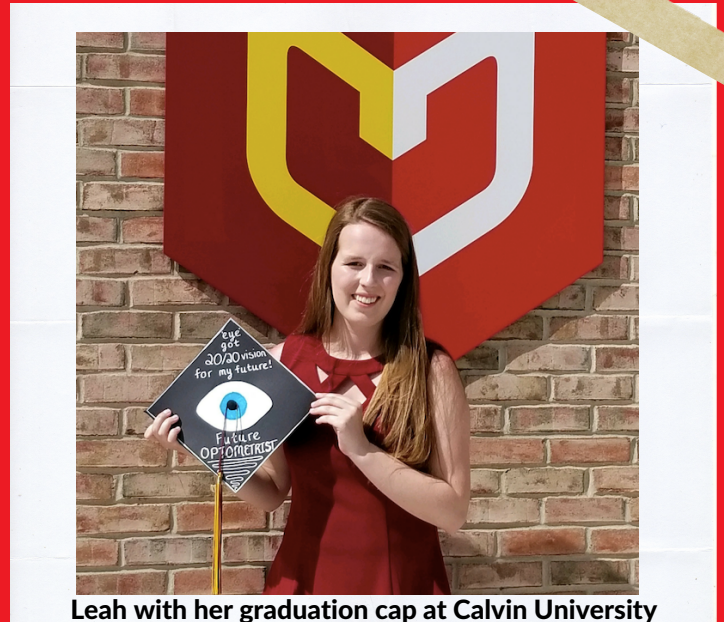
# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

## LEAH C. THOMPSON

First Year Class Representative

### What is your educational and work background?

I attended Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan. I received a Bachelor's of Science degree in Biology with honors and a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Spanish with honors. For my Spanish degree, I lived in Oviedo, Spain for five months, one of my most memorable experiences of undergrad. During my time at Calvin, I participated in numerous extracurricular activities, as well as volunteer and work opportunities. I was treasurer for our Pre-Health club, a reporter for our school newspaper, a dancer and choreographer for the dance club, and a volunteer in numerous hospital and medical settings. For work on-campus, I was a teacher's assistant in the physiology and microbiology labs, a campus tour guide, and a Spanish communication groups leader. Off campus, I was a student research intern at Van Andel Research Institute for two summers, and I worked as a scribe and technician for Lakeshore Professional Eyecare in Norton Shores, MI, West Ottawa Eyecare in Holland, and Eyes on Main in Fremont. My summer spent working as a scribe/technician in the optometry practices was one of the most beneficial experiences I had before starting my studies at MCO. I learned so many skills that prepared me not only for my first



Leah with her graduation cap at Calvin University

procedures course but for all of my courses in general. I'm excited to be back at the offices again this summer and to learn more skills to apply in class and clinic next year and beyond!

### Why did you choose MCO as your optometry school?

I chose MCO for multiple reasons. First is that MCO is very close to home in Whitehall, Michigan. I knew it would be important for me to have my support system close by during optometry school. Second, MCO reminded me of Calvin University and home in many ways. The small class sizes are something I have always been used to. I have never been in a lecture with more than 50 students in attendance, so MCO's class size of 35-40 was perfect. I also loved hearing students talk about their close connections to one another and the faculty. This was something I loved and cherished during my time at undergrad, and I wanted to replicate it any way I could for graduate school. Lastly, the affordability and state-of-the-art facility helped seal my decision to come to MCO. I loved knowing we have access to relatively new equipment in a building optimally designed for optometry students for a lower price compared to the other optometry schools I was considering at the time. After finishing my first year, I can say I am so blessed to be a student at MCO and so glad I decided to come here.



Leah sporting her Detroit Redwings flag overlooking Oviedo, Spain

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

**What are some favorite memories so far inside and outside of MCO?**

The biggest memory I have is that I got engaged this year! It's been wonderful celebrating that with all of my new friends at MCO! Also, I have loved being a class representative for my class. It has helped me to connect better with my classmates, faculty members, and administration. I am excited for all of the future connections to be made and events to be planned through this role. It has been great becoming more involved in clubs and extracurriculars at MCO as the year has gone on. I am looking forward to planning events for MOSPPA as president-elect next year and putting in some glasses sorting hours to work towards a SVOSH trip. I have also enjoyed becoming involved in the Big Rapids community by attending a local church and a young adults Bible study. After this first year, I can say that MCO and the Big Rapids community have begun to feel like a home away from home for me.



Leah in her white coat



Leah and her fiancé, Jason, in her engagement ring

**What type of practice do you envision yourself in the future? What are your career goals?**

Even though I am just finishing my first year, I have some ideas for my future optometric career. I would love to work in private practice in the West Michigan area with a group practice model as my ideal setting. I also would love to offer bilingual exams for Spanish-speaking patients, possibly even learning more languages like Arabic or Chinese to reach others who do not speak English as a first language. I am also interested in possibly incorporating vision therapy into my practice. The MCO Vision Therapy clinic has already been so beneficial this year for my strabismic, amblyopic eyes that I want other patients to experience the joy I have received in my journey to improve my vision. All of these dreams and ideas are placed in God's hands as He always has the best plans in store for me and my future career.

**Do you have a message for our alumni?**

I would say thank you for sharing your stories about your time at MCO. I have heard so many wonderful things about MCO through your stories that were beneficial in my decision to attend MCO. Thank you for being wonderful mentors and supporters to us. I hope that as a MCO alum I can one day return the favor.

# ALUMNI FEATURE

**Dr. Bradley Taylor**

MCO Alumni Association Board Chair

**What is your educational background? When did you graduate MCO?**

I split my undergraduate time between Ferris and University of Michigan-Flint. I graduated from MCO in 1987. Right before graduation I learned that I was 3 credits shy of the Bachelors in Vision Science degree. I took a class at Jackson Community College in 1988, transferred the credits to Ferris and received the BS in Vision Science degree. My OD diploma says "Ferris State College" and my BS degree says "Ferris State University". In 1992 I received a scholarship to attend the University of Michigan School of Public Health where I received my Masters in Public Health with an emphasis on Public Health Policy and Administration in 1994. My cohort was the first class to use a new communication technique known as "email"!

**Why did you choose to attend MCO?**

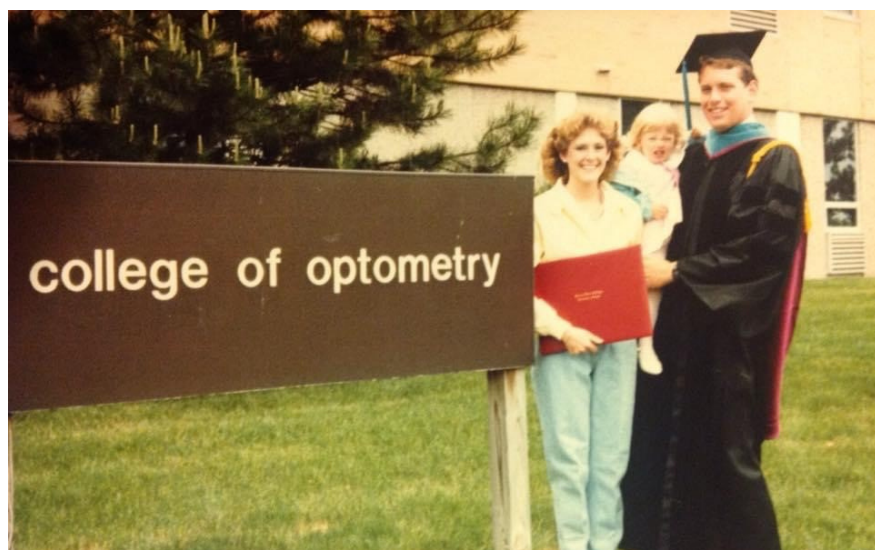
I loved Big Rapids, I loved my time at Ferris as an undergrad. I had friends like Jeff Rautio and Mark Dunbar who were already at MCO telling me how great it was. After my interview with Dr. Bob Carter, there was no other place I wanted to be.



Dr. Taylor at his Optometry school graduation

**Tell us a little bit about your path into your current position and mode of practice!**

Currently, I am the Supervisor of the Optometry Clinic at the Aleda E. Lutz Veteran's Administration Medical Center, better known as the "Saginaw VA". The Optometry Team includes 4 O.D.'s, 4 Optometric Techs, 1 Optician, and 3 Blind Rehabilitation Specialists. What led me to this position was 24 years as an Air Force Officer in the Air National Guard, 17 years on faculty at Kellogg Eye Center at the University of Michigan, 7 years on faculty at Southern College of Optometry, 5 years in a large M.D/O.D practice, and 3 years in my own private practice. It has been a great ride with so many great people helping me out along the way and so many opportunities that I was able to take advantage of.



Dr. Taylor with his wife and daughter during optometry school graduation

**What are some fond memories you have of optometry school?**

So many great memories. The Class of 87 was and still is a tight knit group. We were in class together, we studied together, and we partied together. The student group (FOCUS- Ferris Optometry College Union of Students) was very active in improving the social life of students. We were always planning a house party. Jon Webb and I organized the first Optic Cup in 1985. The Optic Cup after parties at Highbanks park were epic! The great faculty we had...names like Saladin, Betts, Carter, Uniacke, Peterson-Klein, Vance, Paramore, Cron, Keating, Malinowski, Lowther, Shanksy with Dean Bennett in charge...they all belong on the Mount Rushmore of MCO. A lot of my "fond memories" probably don't seem very interesting in this day and age, but the life long friends who I shared them with all understand.



Dr. Taylor and his wife Cathy



Dr. Taylor with his retirement cake from the United States Air Force National Guard

**What is the most rewarding part of your career?**

Learning every day from my patients and the people I work and interact with.

**What kind of involvement do you have within the optometric community?**

I am presently a member of the State Board of Optometry, along with my classmate Sandy Guy Doud. I am a member of the MOA , the AOA and the Armed Forces Optometric Society. With the tremendous help of Dr. Bob Carter, Dr. Sarah Hinkley and Dr. Bob Kocembo, I helped reorganize the Michigan College of Optometry Alumni Association, which I remain Chair. If you have ideas/suggestions for the Alumni Association or are interested in joining as a board member, let me know!



Dr. Taylor with his family at his retirement celebration



The Class of 87's fateful field trip to Benson's Optical. This pic was taken at Sleder's Tavern in Traverse City. From left to right, Jeff Mead, Brad Taylor, Jon Webb, Tom Koehler, Dick Sims, Mark Roy, Mark Simard, Helen Tower

### **If there is one thing you can say to MCO students, what would it be?**

Enjoy yourself. Enjoy your classmates. Enjoy your time at MCO and in Big Rapids. Help make MCO a better place. Get involved. Realize the importance of learning. Be an advocate of MCO and the profession of Optometry. I guess that is 7 things!!

### **If there is one thing you can say to MCO alumni, what would it be?**

Give back. Whether it is with your time, your talent or your money, there are so many opportunities for you to give back to MCO. Think about how the faculty and administration supported you as an Optometry student, you can and should return the favor. My wife and I recently funded an endowed scholarship at MCO to provide financial assistance to a student. It is easier than you think and financially very doable with the Ferris Futures Scholarship Challenge, which matches your donation dollar for dollar.

### **What are your interests outside of optometry?**

My beautiful wife Cathy and I have a home on Lake St. Helen and we enjoy everything that it offers year round. I have 3 talented daughters, 2 great son-in-laws, and 3 grandkids who will forever keep me running. I have 30+ bicycles in various stages of ride-ability. I worked at a bicycle shop in high school and throughout college, I love wrenching on bikes. I am always looking for old bikes, especially Schwinn's, to bring back to life and put back on the road.



Dr. Taylor with his grandchildren

# GOOD NEWS

HIGHLIGHTS SINCE OUR LAST EDITION

## PAPERS AND BOOK CHAPTERS

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- Dr. Vandana Rajaram, Professor, co-authored a book chapter in Biostatistics with Dr. Stanley Hatch that was published in Public Health Optometry 2020: Environmental Vision, Epidemiology, International Optometry as an open source ebook 2020.
- Dr. Sarah Hinkley, Professor, and alumna Dr. Ariel Pscheidl published "The Legal and Ethical Care of Patients Who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing with an Emphasis on Communication Methods" in Vision Development and Rehabilitation.
- Dr. Sarah Hinkley's expert commentary on the American Journal of Optometry article "Impact of COVID-19 on Patients With Sensory Impairment" was published in Practice Update.
- Dr. Jennifer Schad, Assistant Professor, authored a chapter titled "United States Government-Sponsored health Insurance" in Public Health Optometry 2020: Environmental Vision, Epidemiology, International Optometry.

## LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS

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- On January 30th, Dr. Paula McDowell, Associate Professor, and Dr. Emily Aslakson, Assistant Professor, gave a presentation to the Michigan Vision Therapy Study Group called "The Great Balancing Act: The Academic Approach to Teaching Vision Therapy".
- On February 3rd, Emily Aslakson, Assistant Professor, gave a presentation to Pacific College of Optometry entitled "Evidence Based Teaching Practices for Optometric Educators".
- Dr. Paula McDowell and Dr. Lillian Kalaczinski gave a continuing education lecture sponsored by SUNY College of Optometry: "Optometric Care of the Transgender Patient," the first of a three part series on "Building an Inclusive Practice".

## HONORS AND AWARDS

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- Dr. Lillian Kalaczinski, Assistant Professor, Michigan College of Optometry received the MOA (Michigan Optometric Association) Educator of the Year and the AOA Educator of the Year awards
- Dr. Phillip Walling, Professor, was named as one of the Best Optometrists in America by Newsweek, in their recent "America's Best Eye Doctors 2021" report. Dr. Walling ranked at number 46 on this list, and was one of only two optometrists from Michigan named.
- Dr. Daniel Wrubel, Professor, received the Registered Student Organization Advisor of the Year Award for his work with SVOSH (Student Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity).
- Dr. Daniel Taylor, Interim Dean, has been selected as the Chair of the American Academy of Optometry, Optometric Education Section.

## STUDENT HONORS

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- Michigan College of Optometry had 30 students who have completed their Student Academy Fellowship. The program is geared to guide students to develop their skills as an optometric professional.
- Dr. Kaitlyn Arnold was honored as the MOA Student of the Year for 2021.
- James Carpenter was chosen as the Class of 2022 Student of the Year for his leadership and service to his fellow students and MCO.



MCO  
CONGRATULATES  
ALUMNI



# CDR. PAUL DEWITT, OD

As the recipient of the  
Armed Forces Optometric  
Society Public Health  
Service Optometrist of the  
Year and

# MJR. LINDSEY FERRIS, OD

As the recipient of the  
Armed Forces Optometric  
Society Overall Junior  
Optometrist of the Year and  
Air Force Junior Optometrist  
of the Year





**What is your educational background? When did you graduate MCO?**

*Hi everyone! I'm Dr. Jessie LaLonde and I graduated from MCO in 2015. After graduating from high school, I knew I wanted to work in healthcare, but I wasn't sure exactly which avenue I wanted to go down. I decided to study Biomedical Science at Grand Valley State University and I bounced around between a few different ideas (PA, nursing, dental). Finally, one day I was at my optometrist's office, and it clicked! I job-shadowed him (shout out to Dr. Mark Karsten!) a couple of days and was hooked. To this day, I still say optometry blends my interests of math and science together.*

**What are some fond memories you have of optometry school?**

*When I think back to optometry school, I have so many happy feelings. As I am reflecting back in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, my mind immediately goes to the social aspect of optometry school. Being surrounded by so many similarly driven people who were all suffering - I mean working - towards a common goal was a great feeling. We all went through the tough and rewarding times to become great clinicians, and we all got to enjoy the events outside the classroom together as well. I sincerely hope all of my classmates are doing well and living out their lives in the best way possible.*



Graduation picture with Dr. LaLonde's sister (Nikkie) and her mom (Rae) in 2015

**What is the most rewarding part of your career?**

*The most rewarding part of my career is also the reason I went into this profession - the ability to help people on the daily. Whether it be a young child struggling in school or an elderly patient who I can help direct to get their cataracts managed, my daily life is filled with rewarding experiences. Aiming to be a light in my patients' lives is something I strive for daily.*



**Tell us a little more about your path into your current position and mode of practice?**

*After graduation in 2015, I completed a year-long residency at the Wyoming VA Health Care Center in Wyoming, MI (Hi Drs. Coon, Kerns, and Kuipers!). It was a very rewarding year when I gained valuable clinical skills and knowledge under great guidance that I still utilize daily. After residency, I took a position at an MD/OD practice just outside of Grand Rapids. I worked with patients of all ages and would consider it primary eye care. After almost three years, I had an opportunity to move back home and be closer to family and friends, which leads me to my current position. I am employed at Thunder Bay Community Health Service (TBCHS) which is a federally qualified health center in Rogers City, MI. This is the definition of rural primary eye care. I am the only optometrist in our clinic and the town has one other OD who practices only part-time in this location. So I see a mix of everything and that keeps daily life very interesting!*



Dr. LaLonde at her current practice in Thunder Bay Community Health Service

**What kind of involvement do you have within the optometric community?**

*I have been involved in the Michigan Optometric Association and American Optometric Association since the beginning of optometry school. I look forward to being able to attend conferences in the future and bumping into classmates soon (virtual CE just isn't the same). In addition, I am still seeing bits and pieces of the life of optometry students as my younger sister is currently in her fourth year of optometry school at the Illinois College of Optometry. It's been interesting seeing the "school side" of optometry from the standpoint of "5 years later" (all perspective!).*

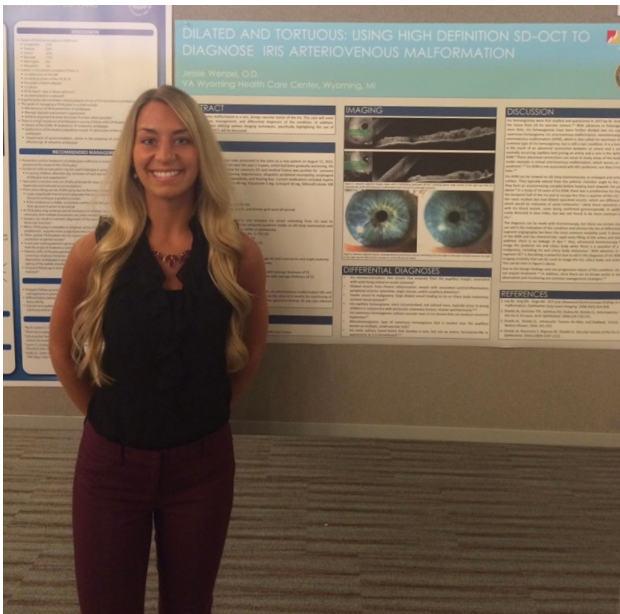
**What are some fond memories you have of MCO?**  
*So many!!! All of our classmates were so great, and we have so many memories from beach events to tubing the river in town. We loved the smaller class size which allowed us to become friends with all of our classmates and our professors!*



Dr. LaLonde in the gym

**What are your interests outside of optometry?**

**Anything active! I always enjoyed the competitive nature of school and honestly a small part of me misses putting in the work studying for exams and getting the reward of finishing the exam, the class, the school year, and ultimately, optometry school. I seemed to have replaced that with different activities these days. During optometry school I got into running as a great way to manage stress. After graduation, I made it a goal to run a marathon. After running a marathon, I made it the goal to qualify for and run the Boston marathon. After feeling accomplished with running, I turned to working on increasing my strength in the gym. I focused on proper nutrition and weight training and spent the past three years bodybuilding. You could say I have become addicted to the process of constantly reaching towards something. Outside of fitness, I also enjoy spending days off in the kitchen cooking and baking. Last and not least, I enjoy spending time with my little 1.5-year-old labradoodle, Ivie (she goes by Poison Ivie when she's naughty).**



Dr. LaLonde presenting at Academy while a resident

**If there is one thing you can say to MCO alumni, what would it be?**

**Continue to be the light that this world needs. We have the ability to bring a pretty unique gift to the world and I hope we can all continue to set goals, work towards them, reach them, and most importantly, enjoy the journey. (Also, same extra tid bit as to the students: just be a kind person)**

**If there is one thing you can say to MCO students, what would it be?**

**Enjoy your time and soak it all in! All the nights spent studying for exams and finals, all the unique patient encounters you have at school and on rotation, all the grueling proficiencies, all the weekends spent studying for boards, all the events out socializing with classmates and faculty – enjoy it ALL! Time does not stop and all of these years will form you into the clinician and person you are meant to be. (Extra tid bit: just be a kind person)**



Dr. LaLonde with her 1.5 year old daughter/labradoodle puppy, Ivie

# ALUMNI FEATURE:

# LT MARK DEBANO, MSC, USN, (OD)

## *Navy Junior Optometrist of the Year for 2020*

**What is your educational background? When did you graduate MCO?**

I attended Ferris State University and studied biochemistry, graduating in 2010. I then went straight into the optometry program and graduated from MCO in 2014.

**Why did you choose to attend MCO?**

MCO was my number one choice not only because of the convenience of staying close to home, but also because of their reputation. They produced very competent students with great NBEO exam pass rates, had a small student: faculty ratio, and seemed to truly care about each student. Additionally, soon after my first year, they were going to be transferring into the new building with state-of-the-art facilities!



Dr. DeBano at the Northeast Gate in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba

**What are some fond memories you have of optometry school?**

Oddly enough, I really enjoyed my commute to school and actually looked forward to it. I chose to live 30 minutes south of Big Rapids and regularly carpooled in with Dr. Andrew Wilke. I liked having that time to decompress after class before getting home to my family.

I remember practicing so many exam techniques on my children (thanks Abbie, Max, and Vinny for being my guinea pigs!). I would come home from school and start honing my skills on them, hoping I didn't see any of the crazy pathology we just learned about in class.



Dr. DeBano and some of the kids in Timor Leste when he was deployed there in 2016

**Tell us a little bit about your path into your current position and mode of practice.**

**My wife and I started our family while we were young, so being able to provide for them during my schooling was important. When I learned about the Navy's Health Professions Scholarship Program and how I'd be able to pay for school, receive some income, and still get to serve in the military, it was something I instantly pursued. I was fortunate to receive a four-year scholarship and so right after graduation, I found myself driving my family across country to my first duty station in San Diego, California. While there, I deployed on the USNS Mercy in support of Pacific Partnership 2016, a four-month humanitarian mission to various countries in the Pacific. After three years in San Diego and caring for a wide-array of patients including young Marine Corps recruits to 90+ year old retirees, I was stationed at Naval Hospital Guantanamo Bay, Cuba as the only optometrist on base. Again, I found myself taking care of pediatric patients to 90-year-old Cuban exiles, as well as supporting the mission of the Joint Task Force. I also had the opportunity to lead the Radiology Department and take on other leadership challenges, learning how different areas within the hospital function and operate. After 30 months in Cuba, I transferred to my current duty station in Yokosuka, Japan, where I have the chance to practice full-scope optometry and serve in various leadership positions**

**What are your interests outside of optometry?**

**My family is my #1 passion. I love them more than anything and enjoy spending as much time with them as possible. We enjoy hiking and exploring nature as well as adventuring off into a new part of Japan whenever we are able to. I also have taken up cycling in the past couple years and I am starting to take multi-day cycle trips. Traveling at 15mph allows you to see and experience so much more. It's hard not being drawn to photography when you get to travel all over the world and see so many stunning sights!**



Dr. DeBano with his family in Japan

**If there is one thing you can say to MCO students, what would it be?**

I would tell students that although it may seem like the coursework is unsurmountable, stay focused and put the work in. Before you know it, you'll be graduated and practicing independently. You're investing in your future self and all of your efforts will be worth it. Throughout all of it though, remember to take care of yourself, physically and mentally, and set aside time for fun!

**If there is one thing you can say to MCO alumni, what would it be?**

Continue to be active ambassadors for the profession. The future will undoubtedly bring changes in how healthcare is delivered, patient expectations, scope of practice, and other areas. Embrace these opportunities and seek out ways for optometry to grow and adapt with the times.

**What are some fond memories you have of MCO?**

My favorite year was definitely my fourth year during my rotations. I really enjoyed working one-on-one with the great doctors at Cherry Street Health Center, Lansing Ophthalmology, Michigan State University, and Battle Creek VA. Pulling together all the knowledge learned through the first three years of optometry school and having the chance to apply that in direct patient care with the guidance from the attending optometrists was immensely valuable. That year was a whirlwind with many late nights and early mornings, but every day I was excited at what I could potentially see in clinic.

**What kind of involvement do you have within the optometric community?**

Being overseas for the past five years has made it difficult to be involved within the optometry community to the extent I'd like, however I have the opportunity to lead the optometric extern program at our hospital where we host one student from Southern California College of Optometry. I really enjoy teaching students and encouraging their growth while they are with us. It's great to show them a practice modality that they may not have considered.

**What is the most rewarding part of your career?**

There isn't one thing that is most rewarding in my career, rather two: the patient care aspect and the military aspect. I'll never take for granted when a patient tells me that they learned so much about their eyes and vision throughout their exam. Having the privilege to educate patients and care for them is very rewarding for me. With the Navy, I frequently find myself thankful for the experiences that have been offered to me, traveling the world with my family, and caring for a population with unique needs.

*MCO congratulates LT Mark Debaro, MSC, USN, (OD) on his Navy Junior Optometrist of the Year award!*



## Where are you originally from?

I am from Reed City, Michigan. I am a graduate of Reed City High School and the Opticianry program at Ferris State University.

## How long have you worked at MCO?

I have worked at University Eye Center just short of 4 years. I have also worked as an optician in Ophthalmology practices for 20 years prior to coming to Ferris State University.

## What is your role at MCO?

I am an optician at University Eye Center. I provide patients with quality eyewear options and I teach students how to style, fit, adjust, and repair glasses. I also answer phones and schedule appointments, while helping patients with their optical insurance. When needed, I provide backup assistance at our onsite optical lab.

## What do you enjoy most about your job?

It is very nice to see the students advance in their optometry education. I enjoy helping patients, as well as the students, to be their best.



## What are your hobbies/interests outside of work?

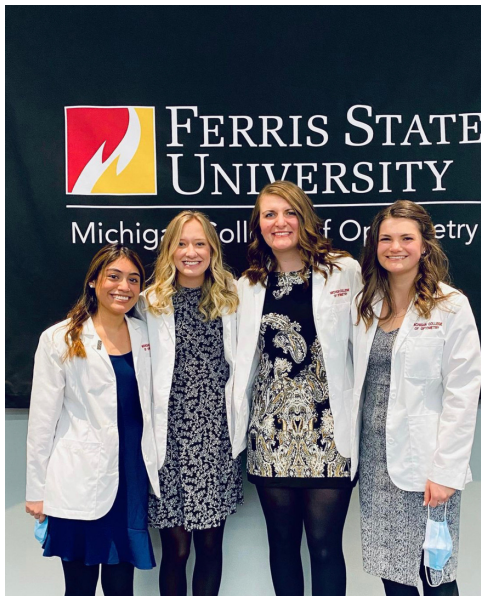
I like outdoor activities such as hiking, hunting and fishing. I also enjoy cooking, golfing, and woodworking in my free time.

## Do you have a message to our students?

Enjoy your time at MCO. You are making lifelong friends and connections. I encourage you take advantage of all the opportunities MCO has to offer.

# SECOND YEAR WHITE COAT CEREMONY 2021

In February, our second year students were welcomed as clinicians who would begin examining patients at the University Eye Center! These now third years are actively involved in patient care.



# OPTIC CUP 2021





# 2020 MOA Award Recipients

MCO congratulates the following faculty, alumnus and student who received awards from the Michigan Optometric Association in 2020:



**Optometrist of the Year: Dr. Julie McMullen (MCO alumna)**



**Educator of the Year: Dr. Lillian Kalaczinski (MCO faculty and alumna)**



**Young Optometrist of the Year: Dr. Amanda Hodge (MCO alumna)**



**Student of the Year: Dr. Kaitlyn Arnold (MCO alumna)**



**Friend of Optometry: Representative Pamela Hornberger, District 32**

# 2021 MCO ALUMNA OF THE YEAR



FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

MICHIGAN COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRY

## CONGRATULATIONS

The MCO Alumni Association is pleased to honor Barbara Horn, O.D. (O'98) as the recipient of the 2021 Alumna of the Year award. Dr. Horn has worked tirelessly to advance the profession of optometry at all levels, from local to national/international. Her professional leadership has elevated optometry and inspired its members. She serves F.S.U. and M.C.O. as a constant advocate for our profession, students and alumni with a special focus on student mentorship and engagement. Congratulations, Dr. Horn!

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CONGRATULATIONS TO MCO ALUMNUS

*Dr. Robert Molter*



On his "Vision Excellence Award" from the  
International Agency For the Prevention of  
Blindness

FOR HIS WORK WITH HIS WIFE AND FELLOW MCO  
ALUMNA, DR. KIM MOLTER, IN ADVANCING OPTOMETRY  
AND IN VIETNAM THROUGH THE BRIEN HOLDEN VISION  
INSTUTITE FOUNDATION AND VOSH CORPS

*Stay  
tuned!*

THE MCO SUMMER CE WILL BE BACK  
IN 2022 WITH SOME EXCITING  
ADDITIONS, INCLUDING CLASS  
REUNIONS AND MORE...

# CONTACT US

WE WOULD LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU ABOUT  
CAREER OR FAMILY NEWS!

EMAIL NEWS TO [SARAHHINKLEY@FERRIS.EDU](mailto:SARAHHINKLEY@FERRIS.EDU)

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