

# Optometric Education In Crisis

COVID-19, Racial & Ethnic Unrest  
Making Situation Worse

# Higher Education In Crisis

- On-line Education Has Disrupted the Traditional College Business Model
- Declining Enrollments Threaten Survival of Traditional Colleges and Universities
- Too Much Student Capacity and Not Enough Demand
- **2.9** Million Fewer College Age Students Than 8 Years Ago
- **93** Colleges/Universities Have Closed or Merged Since 2016
- Harvard Professor, Clayton Christensen Predicts **50%** of the **4000** US Colleges and Universities Will be Bankrupt, Close or Merge by 2035

# Crisis in Optometric Education

- Too Many Schools of Optometry and Not Enough Demand
- **2.9** Million Fewer College Age Students Than 8 Years Ago
- Six New Schools Since 2008 Exacerbate the Problem
- Number of Applicants to Optometry Schools and Colleges Has Essentially Not Increased in a Decade
- Optometry Educational Debt Repayment is Highest of All Professions at **14.9%** of Income
- Surplus of **9,000** Optometrists in USA
- Costly Clinical Training Remains Within the 4 Year Curriculum Increasing Tuition/Debt with No Federal Support

# COVID Pandemic Is Making A Fragile Situation Worse

- Inconsistent Political Leadership at the Federal and State Levels has Plunged the Country into a Public Health Crisis Not Seen Since 1918
- The COVID Pandemic Has Seriously Weakened an Already Precarious Situation in Higher Education
- Further Declines in Enrollments Predicted
- Incentives Such as Discounted Tuition Needed to Sustain Enrollment
- Individual and Class Action Law Suits Possible
- Travel Restrictions Impede Foreign Student Recruitment and Retention.

# The New Normal

- Optional On-Line Instruction Must be Available
- Previous Hands-Training Now via Simulation
- Social Distancing Continues
- Quarantine Accommodations Required
- Temperatures Taken for All Entering Campus
- Contact Tracing Implemented
- Face Masks/Gloves and Other Disposable Items Required
- Negative Test for COVID-19 Required for Students Returning After Breaks in Schedule
- When Available, Proof of Vaccine Required for All Applicants for Admission

# Racial and Ethnic Unrest/Violence Also Affecting Fragile Situation in Higher Education

- Racial Injustice: Black Lives Matters Movement
- Ethnic Hate Groups: Alt-Right/White Supremacy, Neo-Nazi Rallies
- Political Leaders Statements and Policies Threaten Racial/Ethnic Groups and Stoke Cultural Wars
- Optometry Schools Usually Have a Large Number of Students from Ethnic Groups (30-40%) Asian.
- Recent Increase in Hate Incidents Involving Asians. 2,180 Incidents Reported in Early Months of Pandemic. Only 50% of Incidents are Reported to Police.
- Appointment of Diversity and Inclusion Officer

# Contingency Plans Needed to Address Rapid Virus Spread and Escalating Violence

- **Should the COVID-19 Virus Infections Intensify,** Plan to Address Every Area of the College, its Clinics, Housing, Food Service, etc.
- **Should Racial/Ethnic Violence Erupt Near or at the College,** A Plan to Protect Students, Patients, Personnel and College Property is Needed

# Financial Concerns

- Independent Optometry Colleges Are Dependent on Tuition Revenue to Support Operations
- Enrollment Declines Pose a Serious Threat to Their Survival
- Available Financial Reserves of Most Independent Optometry Colleges are Not Sufficient to Sustain Operations for More Than a Few Years
- “Burn Rate” of Assets Calculated
- University-Based Optometry Schools Can Draw Upon University Resources During Enrollment Declines

# Historical Structural Issue Contributing to Crisis

- (1) **1987 Decision Not to Pursue Optometry's Inclusion in(GME), the Educational Component of Medicare**
- If Included in GME, Clinical Education Costs Would be Significantly Reduced
  - Podiatry was Included in GME Language and Later Changed Its Clinical Training Model to Comply with GME Standards.
  - Now Receives **\$111,000** per Resident per Year from the **\$18 Billion** GME Program.

# Historical Structural Issue Contributing to Crisis

## **(2) 1992 Decision to Continue Clinical Education Within the 4 Year Curriculum**

- Clinical Education is the Most Expensive Component of the 4 Year Curriculum Resulting in Tuition Increases and Contributing to Student Debt
- Current 4 Year Curriculum Not Adequate for Expanded Scope of Practice in All States
- 30% of Recent Optometry Graduates Enroll in Postgraduate Residency Programs, Mostly in Specialty of Medical Optometry

# Marketing and Advocacy Initiatives

- In Collaboration with ASCO, Launch an Adequately Funded (3-5 % of Tuition Revenue) Marketing Plan
- Negotiate Annual Ongoing Payments From the **\$35** Billion Vision Care Industry to Support Student Marketing
- Optical Retailers to Provide Full Scholarships to Students with Their Commitment to Practice in Optical Retail (Similar to Programs Offered by Military Branches)
- Ensure Optometry Students/Graduates are Included in All Federal Scholarship, Loan Forgiveness and Financing/Refinancing Programs
- AOA/ASCO Aggressive Lobbying for Inclusion in GME Once a Postgraduate Training Model is Implemented

# Innovative Strategies Needed

- Right-Size College to be Congruent with Projected Long-Term Student Demand (5-8 Year Period)
- Realign College Business Model to On-Line Instruction
- Sponsor National Faculty of Renowned Lecturers for On-Line Instruction
- Concentrate Resources in Core Curriculum-Discontinue Non-Essential Programs (Research, CE, Foreign Programs-Unless Effective in Student Recruitment)
- Out Source More Clinical Training and Reduce Operating Expense of College Owned Clinics
- To Bolster Enrollment and Benefit From Economy of Scale, Merge With Another Optometry College or University

# Issues Facing Optometry

- Too Many Schools and Too Many Graduates
- Too Much Educational Capacity and Stagnant Student Demand
- No Standardized Optometry Model Practice Act
- No Federal Support for Optometric Clinical Training
- Too Much Graduate Debt
- Current Four Year Curriculum Inadequate to Prepare Graduates for Practice in all States with Expanded Practice Acts.
- Fragmentation of the Profession

# Fragmentation in the Practice of Optometry Since 1972:

- **Commercial Practice** With High Educational Debt More Graduates Select Commercial Practice
- **Concern:** Economics, Automation and Technology Seriously Threaten Optometry Refractive Eye Care Practices
- **Private Office Practice** Offering Traditional Optometric and Some Medical Eye Care
- **Medical Optometry** Within Health Care Facilities (Government Facilities, Local Hospitals/Clinics, Optometry/Medical Schools, Ophthalmology Practices) Offering Traditional Optometric Care and Expanded Medical Eye Care

# Re-Imagine Cost-Effective Optometric Education

Enhance Appeal for Careers in  
Commercial, Office Practice and  
Medical Optometry

# New Educational Models

## **Commercial Practice**

- Reduce Time/Cost for an OD Degree to 3 Years

## **Office Practice**

- 3 Year OD Plus Optional One Year Postgraduate Training

## **Medical Practice**

- OD Plus Minimum of One Year Postgraduate Training
- Eligibility for Specialty Board Certification

- 1972 Tufts/New England Medical Center /NECO Model-Developed, but Not Implemented
- Optometry Graduates Placed in Medical Component of Ophthalmology Residency Program
- If Board Examination Passed, Optometrists Awarded Board Certification in Medical Ophthalmology
- Collaboration Between American Board of Certification in Optometry (ABCMO) and American Board of Ophthalmology (ABO)