

## CLASS OF 2011: A New Generation of Female Leaders

As we honor this year's "Most Influential Women in Optical," we also continue shining a spotlight on the next generation of optical professionals—recent female graduates from optometry colleges and opticianry programs nationwide.

The students in *VM's* "Class of 2011" Special Report have been selected by their respective

schools for this feature. They all have excellent academic achievement, are in honor societies, and have received awards and scholarships, but they have also distinguished themselves by doing research projects, going on volunteer missions, and participating in professional organizations.

The new optometrists love optometry because it offers them options and more time with

patients. The new opticians also wanted to be in the health care industry, and found the profession to be the right fit for them.

This marks the 6th edition of our special section, underwritten by a grant from the Luxottica Group. We are proud to present this new group to you. ■

—Seth J. Bookey  
Contributing Editor

## OPTOMETRY STUDENTS

### Sarah Brehm, OD

Nova Southeastern University  
College of Optometry  
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.



Sarah Brehm, OD worked with the Foundation for Fighting Blindness VisionWalk by serving as the school's team captain. She also worked with student optometric associations lobbying the state legislature in Tallahassee to allow ODs to prescribe oral medications.

She is currently in a primary-care resident at SUNY, to round out her clinician skills. Eventually, she would like to work in a primary-care practice, and is interested in working with low-vision patients.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Sarah distinguished herself and graduated with her Doctor of Optometry degree with highest honors. She was the president of Gold Key Honor fraternity and the recipient of many clinical awards.”

### Jessica Carson, OD

University of Missouri—St. Louis  
College of Optometry  
St. Louis, Mo.



For Jessica Carson, OD, her most rewarding experience during school was her trip to Oaxaca, Mexico, with I Care International. “It reminded us the most important reason we want to be optometrists—to give the gift of sight.”

Carson has a residency at the VA Medical Center Eye Clinic in Fayetteville, Ark., and looks forward to studying treatment and management of glaucoma, cataracts, diabetes, AMD, and other diseases, as well as learning minor surgical and select laser procedures.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Dr. Carson graduated first in her class, and was president of the Beta Sigma Kappa Honor Society. She was also an active student ambassador, who mentored incoming students.”

### Kelly Chajka, OD

SUNY College of Optometry  
New York



At SUNY, Kelly Chajka, OD, was involved with a variety of extracurricular activities, including being secretary of the school's VOSH chapter. She also worked with the Urban and Global Mission Alliance to bring eye exams to patients in the Dominican Republic. She was also involved in the AAO student council for four years, and was president in her fourth year.

Chajka hopes to eventually work at a practice in her native Syracuse, N.Y., area and integrate vision therapy and rehabilitation into her career.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Kelly combines academic and clinical excellence, a love of research and a genuine desire to help others. She is emblematic of the best qualities of our graduates.”

More →

## Britta Hansen, OD

School of Optometry,  
University of California—Berkeley  
Berkeley, Calif.



Britta Hansen, OD, was involved with student groups, and she represented the school at the AOA and at legislative meetings in Sacramento. “We helped legislators understand our level of education. In California, we have not been able to use therapeutic treatment of glaucoma, but now, there are more aspects that can be treated by ODs who have the right certifications.”

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Dr. Britta Hansen epitomizes the best of the best in the profession of optometry. As a graduate of the Class of 2011 at Berkeley Optometry, she was recognized for her leadership and dedication by being selected by Berkeley Optometry Faculty and her fellow classmates as the 2011 Gold Retinoscope recipient.”

## Brigitte Keener, OD

Southern College of Optometry  
Memphis, Tenn.



At SCO, Brigitte Keener, OD was involved with ASOA and SVOSH. As president of the student government, “I had a chance to influence our school, and my goal was to emphasize service,” she said. On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, she got the SCO faculty, staff, and students to paint a school in Memphis.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Brigitte Keener, OD, ranks among one of the more dedicated student leaders: Her tenure as SGA president coincided with a strategic increased emphasis on college-wide service. She is on track to be a leader in our profession.”

## Melissa Liepens, OD

Illinois College of Optometry  
Chicago



Melissa Liepens, OD was involved in a variety of honor societies and professional organizations, but the most helpful was being president of the Private Practice Club. “Many students get caught up in academics, and don’t learn about networking and post-graduate opportunities.”

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“She graduated summa cum laude and was our salutatorian in 2011. Her notable accomplishments have included membership in the BSK, Gold Key, and Tomb and Key Honorary Societies. She was president of the ICO Private Practice Club, and the VSP, Student Association, and Trustees Scholarships.”

## Jessica Lucas, OD

Northern State University  
Oklahoma’s College of Optometry  
Tahlequah, Okla.



At NSUOCO, Jessica Lucas worked with Women in Optometry, the Private Practice Club, and the AOSA, was on the school’s curriculum committee, and served as a liaison to the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry. She and a classmate also had an article published in the Journal of Optometry and Vision Science. She would like to get into family practice and focus on pediatric vision care.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Jessica maintained a 4.0 GPA throughout her optometric education, and she has outstanding clinical skills. She has demonstrated her professionalism and commitment to service and we look forward to watching her impact the lives of many.”

## Kacie Monroe, OD

Indiana University School of Optometry  
Bloomington, Ind.



At IU, Kacie Monroe, OD, spent three years working with the school’s VOSH chapter, and served as its president the last year. “We saw 1,200 patients during a mission to Guanajuato, Mexico, where some people traveled a four-hour bus ride one way just to get eye exams.”

Monroe is currently working for Fitzgerald and Associates in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She is pursuing a 100-hour course for certification in vision therapy. She also wants to do more to serve pediatric patients.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Dr. Monroe has been an active member of our school, serving in leadership positions with our chapter of VOSH. She confirmed her dedication to service by traveling to Guanajuato, Mexico.”

## Lauren Nelson, OD

University of Houston College of Optometry  
Houston, Texas



“I helped shape the profession by serving on the admissions committee,” Lauren Nelson, OD, tells VM. She also worked as a teaching assistant for several courses, and enjoyed helping new students. She is a member of Beta Sigma Kappa, Student Texas Optometric Association, American Optometric Student Association, Student Optometric Practice Management Association and SVOSH.

HER SCHOOL SAYS...“Lauren distinguished herself as a first year student, and continued to do so throughout her academic career, graduating with honors and receiving many awards and accolades. We know she will continue to distinguished herself as a leader and role model within the profession.”

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