

Professional Biography



Gerald E. Lowther, O.D., Ph.D., F.A.A.O.

Dr. Gerald Lowther was born and raised in southern Ohio. He graduated from Lancaster High School in 1961 and entered The Ohio State University that fall. He entered the OSU College of Optometry in 1963 and during the 3-year professional program he worked in the research lab of Dr. Richard Hill, taught binocular vision labs under the direction of Dr. Boyd Eskridge and worked as a technician repairing ophthalmic equipment. In 1966 he graduated with the Bachelor of Science in Optometry degree cum laude. He was president of his class and received the Beta Sigma Kappa Silver Medalist Award for graduating with the highest grade average in the class. National and state boards were passed and he received an Ohio optometry license.

In the fall of 1966 he entered the new, optional for his class, Doctor of Optometry degree program and in the spring of 1967 received the O.D. degree. He then entered an associate practice of optometry in Newark, Ohio with Dr. Phillip Haynes. In December of 1967 he became a fellow of the American Academy of Optometry and earned diplomate status in the Cornea and Contact Lens Section of the Academy.

In 1968 he returned to Ohio State entering the graduate program receiving the M.Sc. in Physiological Optics in December 1969 and the Ph.D. in 1972. His research was in the area of corneal physiology and his faculty advisor was Dr. Richard Hill. While a graduate student he taught courses in contact lenses and practice management. He received an Ezell Fellowship from the American Optometric Foundation during his graduate studies.

In 1972 he became a full time faculty member, as an assistant professor, at Ohio State teaching contact lens courses, practice management, public health and was director of the contact lens clinic. He established a clinical research program studying the effects of contact lens wear on the eye; evaluation of new contact lens materials; extended wear contact lenses; solutions; and deposits on contact lenses. He lectured extensively at national and international research and educational meetings. In 1975 he was promoted to Associate Professor with tenure.

While at Ohio State, Dr. Lowther was on a number of Ohio Optometric Association committees including contact lens, public health, practice management and continuing education committees. He was a member of the U.S. Food and Drug (FDA) ophthalmic drug advisory committee in 1973-74 and a consultant to the committee in 1975-76. From 1977 to 1980 he was a member of the US FDA Ophthalmic Devices Classification Panel. He was a member of the Task Force of the Council of the National Eye Institute on Corneal and Adnexal Disease in 1976. He was chairman of the Association of Contact Lens Educators from 1976-1978.

During his time at Ohio State Dr. Lowther was on numerous College committees and chaired the continuing education committee.

In 1977 Dr. Lowther moved to the new College of Optometry at Ferris State University where he was professor and director of the contact lens clinic. He taught courses in ocular physiology, practice management and contact lenses. He developed a computer controlled videodisk for contact lens education as well as a computer program to do contact lens calculations which were used by numerous optometric institutions. While at Ferris he continued his research program on many topics related to contact lens wear and lectured widely nationally and internationally. In 1986 he did a sabbatical in Sydney, Australia in Dr. Brien Holden's Corneal and Contact Lens Research Unit.

He was also active on numerous college and university committees. He was on the university Distinguished Teacher Committee, Educational Planning Committee, Faculty Research Committee, Human Subjects Review Committee and the Optometry Dean Search Committee. During his time at Ferris he was chairman of the Council on Academic Affairs of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (1979-1980) and a member of the AOA Commission on Ophthalmic Standards (1982-1988).

He received the Distinguished Faculty Award from the Michigan Association of Governing Boards and the John Neill Medal from the Pennsylvania College of Optometry. While at Ferris he became the editor (in 1981) of the International Contact Lens Clinic Journal and was the editor for 20 years.

In 1989 Dr. Lowther became professor of optometry at the School of Optometry, University of Alabama at Birmingham. In 1990 he also became the Associate Dean of the school. While at UAB he was on numerous committees and taught in the contact lens program in addition to his administrative duties. He continued to have an active research laboratory while at UAB. During this time he received the Award for Distinguished Research on the Cornea and Contact Lenses from the University of Houston College of Optometry.

He was a member of the AOA Council on Research. He is a charter member and on the executive council of the International Society for Contact Lens Research. He was president of this organization from 1993 to 1995.

While at UAB and later he worked with the Karol Marcinkowski University of Medical Science to start the first optometry program in Poland. He has made numerous trips to Poland. Halina

Manczak, an ophthalmologist from Poland spent a year at UAB under the direction of Dr. Lowther learning about contact lenses to go back to teach and fit patients.

In 1994 Dr. Lowther became professor of optometry and the co-director of the Borish Center for Ophthalmic Research (BCOR) at the School of Optometry at Indiana University. At IU he continued his research in the contact lens field. He also developed an educational CD related to contact lens practice as well as a CD on eye examination procedures with Drs. Irv Borish, Mo Jalie and Keziah Latham produced by Essilor.



Videodisk and CD's develop by Dr. Lowther

In 1998 he was selected as Dean of the School of Optometry. In this position he has actively worked to increase the research activity of the school, hire outstanding faculty, improve the facilities and increase the international activity. From 1998 to 2006 the externally funded research has gone from less than \$500,000 to over \$5.5 million with the number of individuals supported by research grants from 4 to over 20.



Dean Lowther with the three previous heads of the optometry program Drs. Hofstetter, Heath and Bennett

Since 1998 the Atwater Eye Care Center clinic in the optometry building was completely gutted and remodeled; a two story addition was added to the Community Eye Care Center clinic in Bloomington; the major classroom in the school was completely remodeled; and a new clinic was established in Carmel, Indiana in conjunction with the IU School of Medicine Department of Ophthalmology.

In addition to the above, in 2001 a clinic was established in Guanajuato, Mexico at the request of the Department of Infants and Family (DIF). This was a small clinic attached to a hospital with a full time IU faculty member and 3 to 4 fourth year optometry students on rotations. As a result of the good work done in this clinic, DIF and the Mexican government raised approximately \$1 million to build a much larger clinic which in addition to exam rooms contains a fabrication laboratory, eye wear center, large waiting area, ophthalmologist's office and a surgical suite. This facility allows the provision of extensive vision and health care services to the indigent population of the Mexican State of Guanajuato. It also gives our students a unique clinical experience seeing different and more severe ocular and health conditions while providing an excellent cultural experience. (<http://www.opt.indiana.edu/clinics/centers/mexico/index.htm>)



Exterior view of the Mexico clinic



Patient seating area of the Mexico clinic

Dr. Lowther has also worked to increase the international activity of the School of Optometry as it is a priority of the university and his long-term interest in vision care internationally. In addition to the Mexico clinic, a major project has been to help Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok, Thailand develop the first optometry program in that country. He has made numerous trips to Bangkok to both help develop the program as well as to teach in the program. Several IU faculty members have gone to Bangkok to teach and to help develop their faculty. With the first graduation class from the program in 2007, four of the students have spent time at IU and will go back to teach in the program with additional students to come in the future. This project has the potential over time to provide superior vision care to millions of Thai citizens.

(<http://www.opt.indiana.edu/programs/interntl/thailand.htm>)



First graduates from the Ramkhamhaeng University program with Dr. and Mrs. Lowther and administrators of the program.

Hong Kong has been a frequent travel location for Dr. Lowther as he was the External Academic Advisory to the optometry program at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University for 6 years. As a result some IU optometry students are doing rotations at that institution as well as in a hospital in Guangzhou, China. A student from the Hong Kong program is in the IU PhD program.

Students from other institutions have been welcomed at the IU School of Optometry. Each year usually two students from the optometry program in the Netherlands do a rotation in our clinic. We have also had Australian students rotate through the Mexico clinic.

The School of Optometry for many years has provided care to the uninsured and indigent population. The care provided to this population had grown significantly, particularly in the Indianapolis area. It had reached a point that the requests for help from the clinics and organizations in the area were beyond what could be provided. In addition, there was not sufficient staff to follow-up with patients who had been screened and found in need. Likewise, many of these patients needed referrals, care and follow-up from other professionals and required someone to help them through the maze of the health care system. Dr. Lowther initiated a process to raise funds to hire staff to educate the target population, organize screenings, coordinate with health clinics and help the patients in need to receive care. As a result there was a collaborative effort between the School of Optometry and the Department of Ophthalmology to obtain funding. Initially a grant of \$150,000 was obtained in 2004 from the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust to start the program. Two staff were hired, one a M.P.H. and the second a M.S. in social work and the Eye Care Community Outreach program (ECCO) was established. Since

then over \$750,000 has been raised to support the program including a \$150,000 and a \$400,000 grant from the Anthem Blue Cross and Blue Shield Foundation. ECCO has helped thousands of individuals obtain eye and health care and coordinates efforts with over a 100 other organizations (<http://www.opt.indiana.edu/ecco/index.htm>). The program received the Outstanding Project Award from the American Public Health Association Vision Care Section in 2006.

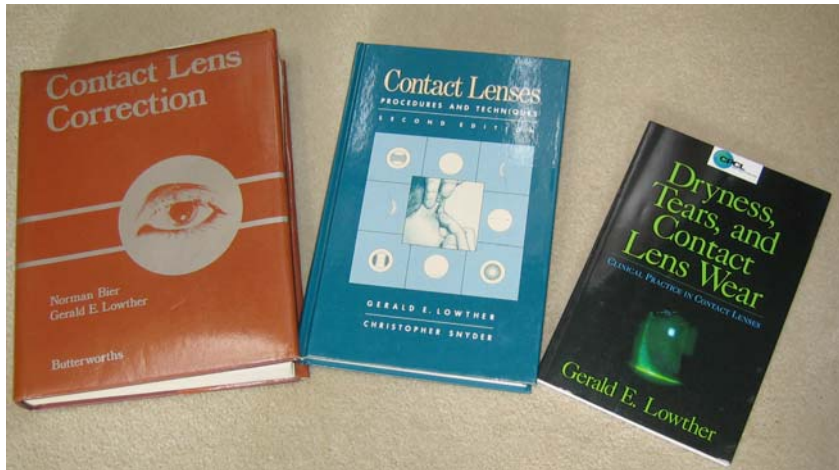
While at IU Dr. Lowther has been involved with numerous professional organizations. He is a board member of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry and the secretary/treasurer in 2006-2007 and president-elect in 2007-2008. He is a board member of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry and was president of this organization in 2003-2004. He is a past board member of the Partnership Foundation for Optometric Education and the American Optometric Foundation. He was on the Planning Committee of the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education in 2002-2004.

While at IU he has received numerous awards including being selected to give the Max Shapero Memorial Lecture at the American Academy of Optometry meeting; elected as a Distinguished Scholar to the National Academy of Practice in Optometry; Distinguished Service Award from the Indiana Optometric Association; Life Fellowship Award from the American Academy of Optometry; and an honorary Doctor of Philosophy degree in Human Resource Development from the Ramkhamhaeng University in Bangkok, Thailand.



Dr. Lowther receiving the honorary degree from Her Royal Highness Maha Chakri Sirindhorn in 2006

In addition to approximately 100 publications, he has published several books including Contact Lens Correction with Norman Bier; Contact Lenses-Procedures and Techniques (first addition alone and with Dr. Chris Snyder for the second addition); and Dryness, Tears and Contact Lens Wear. In addition he has written some nine chapters in other books.



Over the years Dr. Lowther has been very active in the American Academy of Optometry. He has been the Diplomate Award chair and Program chair of the Cornea and Contact Lens Section of the Academy. He was the program chair for the Academy's 1992 international meeting in England. In 1986 he was elected to the Executive Council of the Academy where he served until 2000. In 1997 and 1998 he was president of the Academy.

Dr. Lowther has been on advisory committees and/or consultant for numerous companies including Bausch and Lomb, Syntex, Sola Ophthalmics, Ciba Vision, Alcon, Dow Corning, Vistakon, Paragon, Essilor, Benz Research and others. He has also been a referee for the Am J Optom and Physio Optics, J Am Optom Assoc, Canadian J Optom, International Contact Lens Clinic, Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics, and Science. He has reviewed textbooks for a number of publishers.

Dr. Lowther has also had a number of graduate students at Ohio State, UAB and Indiana University.

His Curriculum Vita is available at <http://www.opt.indiana.edu/people/faculty/lowtherg/cv.pdf>.