



AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION

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September 28, 2018

Darin Paulson, O.D.
Chair, Accreditation Council for Optometric Education
243 N. Lindbergh Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63141

Dear Dr. Paulson,

In light of apparent increasing financial stress facing educational institutions across the country, the AOA Board of Trustees urges the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education to immediately begin exploring whether accreditation standards for optometric degree programs need to be updated to ensure full and entirely uninterrupted adherence to the educational and clinical standards at the core of both your mission and the optometric educational enterprise.

In particular, reports from within our profession point to the very recent open marketing to corporations of at least one institution's full naming rights, a financial and operational arrangement without precedent in optometry, and one that is potentially harmful to public perception of the profession's independence and the quality of its educational institutions. Moreover, the corporation that is understood to have now concluded terms with NOVA Southeastern University for institutional naming rights maintains, in the AOA's view, a set of clinical, public health, public awareness and advocacy priorities, which are frequently at direct odds with priorities advocated for by the profession's representative associations, the AOA and AOA-affiliated state associations.

We recognize that corporate support of educational institutions is not new. However, we feel that naming a school after a corporation is inappropriate, and suggestive of a relationship between the donor and the program that has the potential to influence the curriculum, especially as it relates to the development of practice skills through externship programs and other means. We note that corporate influence on post-graduate education, commonly referred to as "continuing education," is strictly regulated by accrediting bodies in order to prevent one company's priorities influencing the care that patients receive, just as most states regulate corporate ownership of optometry practices for similar reasons. We are deeply troubled at the possibility that a single corporation's approach to practice might influence students' education. That's why we feel so strongly that a review of ACOE's standards should encompass not only those applicable to academic offerings but also clinical externship programs, with a focus on safeguarding the autonomy of the program.

We recognize that ACOE always strictly adheres to its guidelines for standards development and its published procedures for granting and renewing accreditation. We also appreciate the fact that all new or revised ACOE standards must ultimately be based on educational needs and must apply equally to all programs. We do not wish to single out any particular accredited program. However, this unanticipated and unprecedented development in our view merits action as soon as possible, in line with ACOE's established guidelines, for review and possible updating of the standards that apply to all accredited programs. It is our belief that ACOE's high educational standards have provided the foundation for optometry's advancement to physician status, greater scope of practice and an essential and expanding role in the health care system. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



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