

# BEST IN CLASS 2019

PASSIONATE AND DEDICATED TO OPTOMETRY



MARGE AXELRAD / SENIOR VP, EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

**T**oday's optometry college graduates reflect diverse backgrounds and an impressive range of professional and individual achievements. The demands of school curriculums span clinical, practical and research arenas and are accompanied by the strong sense of

purpose that drive today's students to give back and take part in local community and international volunteer work as well

Selected by their schools to represent the Best in Class for this special VM report, these students have worked with their peers, organized special events, and played an active role in their college's future, including reaching out to students in

other fields of study.

Their career paths are varied but their enthusiasm and passions come through as they enter practice at such a dynamic time for the profession and healthcare in general. *Vision Monday* congratulates all of this year's optometry graduates and dedicates this special section to shine a light on the spirit of the Best in Class 2019.

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# BEST IN CLASS 2019

## CAROLYN CHAKUROFF, OD/MS

The Ohio State University College of Optometry  
Columbus, Ohio



Chakuroff explains that she had been interested in optometry from a young age when she first got glasses in elementary school. “But my interest was not solidified until I worked as an optometric technician in three different

optometry practices after college. I immediately fell in love with the eye when I got my first glimpses of the retina while taking fundus photography images for the optometrists I worked with. After that, I was hooked. I am so grateful to those doctors for introducing me to such a wonderful career (and a wonderful optometry school)!”

Chakuroff was the 2019 Graduate of the Year at the The Ohio State University College of Optometry where she also earned her MS in Vision Science. This award is based on clinical excellence, academic achievement, leadership and professional promise. The award is based on nominations of faculty and staff who have worked with students in classrooms, laboratories, and in clinics.

Chakuroff demonstrated leadership as president of three student organizations: the OSU Student Chapter of the American Academy of Optometry, Gold Key International Optometric Honor Society, and Student Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity (SVOSH). She was also a member of the Beta Sigma Kappa International Optometric Honor Society and received their highest award, the BSK Silver Medal, as the valedictorian of her class.

She is about to begin a residency program at the Kansas City VA in ocular disease and low vision rehabilitation. “After my residency, I look forward to continuing to use the knowledge I gained to serve our nations veteran’s within the VA system.”

**HER SCHOOL SAYS...** “Carolyn excelled in the classroom and displayed an innate ability to translate her knowledge from the classroom to clinic. She displays a work ethic and professionalism that is beyond exemplary. She is dedicated to elevate patient care to the highest level and has a passion for contributing to the current body of knowledge that will impact the quality of future standards of care.”

## JASON GRYGIER, OD

SUNY College of Optometry  
New York, N.Y.



SUNY Optometry’s class president during his third and fourth year as a student, Dr. Grygier admits that as a child, and then later in undergrad, optometry “was always the furthest thing from my mind.” He explained, “My father was an op-

tometrist and I always strived very hard to be unpredictable. Besides, I had misspelled ‘cataract’ in my 8th grade spelling bee, so I figured that was a sign. (There really should be an ‘e’ in the middle.)”

It was between career paths as a Spanish/psychology double-major (he received his B.A. from Clemson University) that he ended up back at home working for his father and eventually managing his practice for several years. “During that time I saw how beneficial a service to the community optometry could be and how happy the children were who picked out and saw through glasses for the first time. Later on, I worked as an optician in Connecticut, and I realized I still wanted to know more, so that’s why I finally pursued becoming an OD.”

He was president of the SUNY Connecticut Student Association of Optometrists, SUNY Deans List 2015-2019, recipient of the S.T.Folsom Scholarship in 2017, the Millman Scholarship in 2016. He was secretary, Golden Key International Optometric Honor Society, SUNY chapter and a Beta Sigma Kappa member, International Optometric Honor Society. He also received the Dr. Stanley Eisenberg Memorial Award for Excellence in Practice Development and Administration and the New York State Optometric Association Auxiliary Award for Outstanding Service to the Call of 2019.

Following graduation, Grygier has a SUNY-sponsored residency lined up in binocular vision and vision therapy at a private practice, EyeCare Associates, in Connecticut.

**HIS SCHOOL SAYS...** “Jason was highly involved and made significant contributions to the College community. He is truly the ‘whole package’—his contributions include community service, research, and service to the College community through leadership.”

## HAMDEE HOUCHEIMI, OD

New England College of Optometry  
Boston, Mass.



Houcheimi graduated from the University of Alberta with a Bachelor of Science degree with a specialization in Biochemistry. He was about a year into pursuing his PhD in chemical biology, working on morphology and cancer

drug research, when Houcheimi decided the lab was not for him. He tells VM, “I wanted something where my impact would be felt much quicker. My research led me to optometry which not only allowed me to interact directly with patients on a day to day basis, but also combined my love for science and business.”

During his time at the College, he has become father to a son (born at the beginning of his second semester) and a daughter, now three months old.

He was his 2019 class valedictorian, receiving the highest grade point average for classroom, lab, and clinical education. He also received two awards, the Klein Family scholarship and the Beider Moral Obligation scholarship.

After graduation, Dr. Houcheimi will pursue his interests in private practice and ocular disease management and plans to work for a couple of years so help pay off most of his student loans, but then he intends to open his own practice in Edmonton Alberta Canada with his brother who is an optician.

**HIS SCHOOL SAYS...** “There are so many different definitions of leadership, including leading by example. Hamdey constantly leads by example, showing that if one has a goal, one can reach it by living in the present and looking to the future. With the support of his growing family, he persevered and found academic, clinical, and personal success.”

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CLASS OF  
2019**

— AND ALL THE —  
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# BEST IN CLASS 2019

## KATE HAMM, OD

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



Dr. Hamm always thought she would become a teacher, coming from a family of teachers and married to a teacher, too. “But,” she noted, “I’ve always had a love for physics and optics. During college (at Kansas State University) I realized I could combine these two passions in optometry.

After some shadowing, I fell in love with the profession.”

She found her niche in pediatric optometry, perceptual and vision therapy and getting involved in advocacy. “I love working with children and optometry allows me to support their education and their health.”

Dr. Hamm’s school noted, “She was exceptional in her four years as class president and served UMSL very well as AOSA trustee for which she was primarily responsible for UMSL winning the coveted Spirit Award at Optometry’s Meeting. She was awarded the Raymond I Myers, OD award for outstanding leadership at graduation.” In addition she received the College of Optometrists in Vision Development (COVD) Award for Excellence and the Optometry Scholars Excellence Award.

Among her many activities, Dr. Hamm was student liaison to the Missouri Optometric Foundation, founder of the United Optometrist Association, national liaison to the Optometric Extension Program, and World Sight Day chair during her time with Student VOSH,

Dr. Hamm also has written several papers on children’s vision issues and hosted podcasts with Defocus Media.

Dr. Hamm is joining Essilor as a summer intern within the professional relations department. In August, she will join Lentz Eye Care in Wichita, Kans.

**HER SCHOOL SAYS...** “Kate was an outstanding student leader, one of the finest in UMSL’s history.”

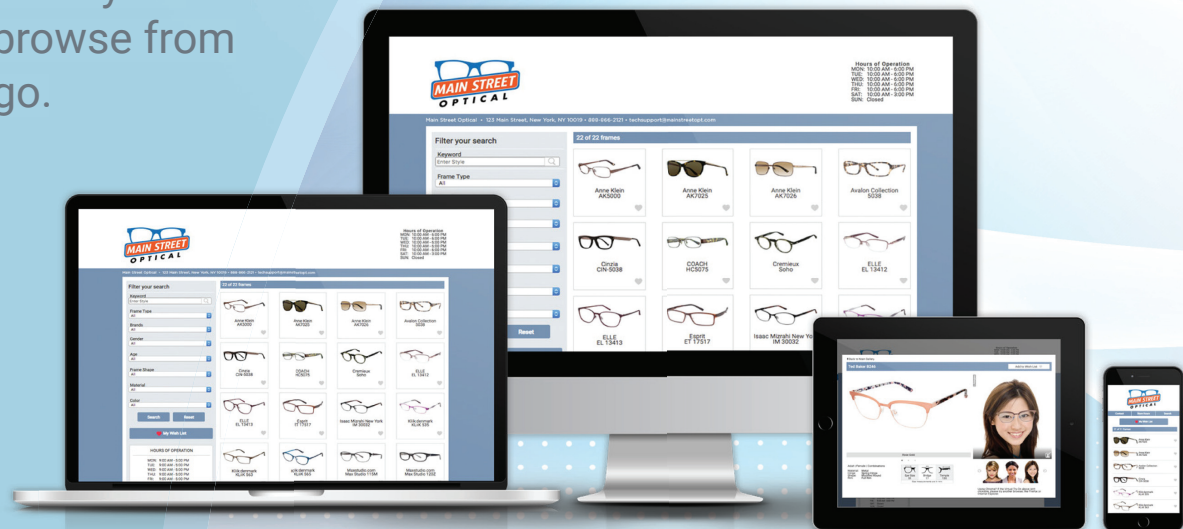
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