



## PROFILES IN HISTORY

### Seventy-five Years of Optometry Training

C. Beaulne\*

#### Introduction

"Seventy-five years of Optometry Training — It's a Celebration". This was the title of my editorial in Vol. 6, No. 4 of "*L'Optométriste*" ("*The Optometrist*"), the publication of the Quebec Association of Optometrists.

In fact, 1985 marks a milestone that should be highlighted. It's the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the University of Montreal's School of Optometry, and the sixtieth year of its affiliation with the University.

I am therefore going to give a brief historical background of the only Francophone school of optometry in North America, discuss its current situation and its future projects at the dawn of the 21st century.

#### Historical Background

The Montreal School of Optometry was founded in the spring of 1910. One year later, its first ten students graduated after having night courses for an entire academic year.

In 1915, the school purchased a building at 393 St. André St. in Montreal, and gave lectures and laboratory and clinical sessions.

Starting in 1920, discussions were held with officials of the University of Montreal in order to affiliate the School of Optometry with the University. Discussions ended on April 8, 1925, or sixty years ago this year. Following this event, the School of Optometry, placed under the jurisdiction of the Association of Optometrists, became the University's School of Optometry. This affiliation thus established the high level of scientific training and academic value of the teaching provided by the school. During these years, conditions for admission to the school were: the junior matric, Arts-Science Diploma or 1st year Arts College or equivalent education, determined by the University's Registration Office that has since become the Office of the Registrar.

At that time, all applicants had to finish one preparatory year of scientific studies including

subjects such as: biology, physics, mathematics and philosophy at the Faculty of Science. Success in this first year meant awarding of a certificate by the Faculty that was in fact a "passport" for admission to optometry studies that lasted a year and were taken in the St. André Street building. The curriculum that basically included three subjects — optics, optometry and ocular pathology — had been developed jointly with the Faculty of Science and had received the approval of university officials. Success in the examinations provided candidates with a Bachelor of Optometry Degree (Ba.O.).

In 1934, the level of academic instruction was increased and the length of studies in optometry was upgraded to two years.

Starting in 1944, proceedings were started to completely integrate the School of Optometry to the institution with which it had been affiliated since 1925. In order to attain this objective, it was necessary for the professional corporation, the College of Optometrists, to abandon its rights over the School of Optometry so that the school could become completely autonomous. This led to incorporation of the Montreal school of Optometry. This greatly assisted with the eventual housing of the school in the buildings of the University of Montreal, and starting in September, 1945, academic activities were offered at the University with the exception of the clinic, which remained in the St. André Street building. In the fall of 1946, following the invaluable cooperation of Dr. Georges Baril of the Faculty of Science, the school was located in the East Wing, 7th floor of what is known today as the Main Building, in a 1200 square foot area.

In 1949, complete integration had not yet been carried out, and new discussions were begun to finally end with the complete reorganization of the school (with new requirements for graduation) when the University's new charter was granted. Following discussions with the twelve schools of optometry in North America, the school's program was extended to three years professional studies following obtention of a B.A. (Bachelor of Arts Degree). As before, this project was submitted to the authorities and completely approved by the University's Studies Committee and Board of Governors

---

\* Outgoing Director,  
School of Optometry,  
University of Montreal.



who then began to award to new graduates the "Licence ès-sciences/Optométrie — (L.Sc.O)" Degree.

In 1954, following twenty-nine years of dedicated service to the School of Optometry, its Dean, Alfred Mignot, announced his retirement. He was succeeded by Mr. J. Armand Messier, a member of the faculty since 1926. Mr. Mignot was Director of the school from 1925 to 1954, and Mr. Armand Messier's Directorship lasted 15 years — from 1954 to 1969, the year the school was integrated to the University.

In 1957, the school moved again into D Wing, 2nd floor, of the Main Building and had 5000 square feet of space, more than four times the amount it had up until then. The academic structure was reorganized to create six teaching sectors, namely, biological sciences, visual sciences, optic sciences, administrative sciences, the clinics and laboratories with heads of all six reporting to management.

Later, an Advisory Board on Teaching was formed. The Board included the University Rector, Mgr. Irénée Lussier, and representatives from the College of Optometrists and the School of Optometry. Following a study of the various training programs in Optometry in the USA and Canada, the Advisory Board announced several recommendations, among others: the integration of the School of Optometry into the University of Montreal; recruitment of young professors with graduate and eventually postgraduate degrees; the improvement of resources to encourage teaching and research.

It should be remembered that up until then, the school had succeeded in its development with very limited resources. Fortunately, the 1961 Education Act led to introduction of subsidies for universities, and starting in 1963, the School of Optometry received its share — \$40,000. Following yearly progressions, the subsidy was tripled to \$130,000 in 1967. The improvement in its financial situation therefore allowed the school to pursue the objectives set earlier and to develop a five-year plan (1964-1969) to make the necessary administrative changes, to hire full-time teaching and non-teaching staff, to increase the number of papers and publications in the Library as well as the amount of equipment for clinics and labs, to revise the program, etc. . . .

The hiring of full-time teaching staff with the required academic qualifications was vital in carrying through the teaching program for integration purposes.

It was also at this time that the Parent Commission was set up to make the necessary studies on all levels of primary, secondary and university education, and to make the suggestions and recommendations that would provide better teaching coordination. In order to properly define and publicize its orientation, the School of Optometry had tabled a brief with the Commission, whose final report

contained the recommendation to integrate the School of Optometry with the University of Montreal.

In 1967, the school was moved into much larger premises at 3333 Queen Mary Road. It is still located at this address, and has undergone several space additions since then.

Integration finally occurred in 1969 with the institution with which it had been affiliated for forty-five years.

In 1974, the training program was expanded from six to seven semesters. Four years later, in 1978, four years of schooling were required to complete the program, and since then, graduates have received the degree of Doctor of Optometry (O.D.). In June, 1983, the program received the approval of the Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association.

## **The University of Montreal's School of Optometry in 1985**

### *Its Objectives:*

The school is the only Francophone school of optometry in North America. In fact, it is probably the only Francophone school in the world with a curriculum related to those of all other North American schools.

With this in mind, we defined a certain number of objectives.

First of all, we must — within the four-year program — train professionals to use scientific clinical methods thereby providing primary optometric care. These future professionals are also well aware of the necessity of self-discipline and self-training, in particular, following the initial training period.

It is the duty of the school to promote and develop the entire range of visual care knowledge through research. This also applies to the clinical sciences.

Another objective is to offer graduate programs. The School currently provides a Master of Science program (Physiological Optics), that helps to train future professors, at both the research and academic/clinical levels. The school must also get involved in continuing education to help its graduates maintain and improve their knowledge and skills and remain up-to-date in visual science development.

These general objectives lead to the following secondary objectives that deal more specifically with clinical training.

Firstly, we must provide students with all the assets that will ensure optometric care for patients according to the highest standards recognized in professional practice, the most recent visual science knowledge and technology, but also according to available resources that are unfortunately becoming more and more difficult to obtain.



We must also inform students, graduates, other health care practitioners and the general public of the true definition of optometric practice and its standards, in order to meet all the individual and collective needs for visual care.

The orientation and activities of the clinical program must be — to the greatest extent possible — based on epidemiological studies. They also must make sure that students receive a satisfactory and sufficient number of clinical cases. In addition, the program must give students the opportunity to develop and improve their knowledge and skills in patient care.

This expertise, offered according to the best standards recognized, must apply to all fields, such as: low vision, orthoptics, aniseikonia, electrophysiological diagnosis, vision of children and the elderly, contact lenses, industrial vision, and care for the mentally retarded and the hearing impaired, etc. . . .

We must also train the students to provide the patient with the required care by orienting them — if need be — towards specialization. They must therefore receive the clinical knowledge and training which will allow them to discover ocular and systematic problems through the gathering of the pertinent data.

During the clinical program, we emphasize the following points when there is student/patient communication:

- i) the integration, synthesis, evaluation and application of all theoretical concepts;
- ii) development of communication skills and interpersonal relationships, as well as the capacity to observe, measure, analyze and decide after the precise information and data have been obtained;
- iii) having the capacity to make optometric care as personalized as possible and to accept the responsibilities that go with quality care directed towards the patient's well-being.

#### *Clinical Activities*

On campus, the School of Optometry's clinics provide services four and a half days per week, year round, including the summer months, except for two weeks in April, August and December. Optometry services offered are the following: general clinic, special clinic (especially for ocular pathological cases), and aniseikonia, orthoptics, and contact lens clinics. A few years ago, a "specialized" services program was set up in cooperation with the Montreal Institute for the Deaf, for the hearing impaired, and then with nurseries in the Montreal Region for children up to 6 years old.

Off campus, the School of Optometry signed a contract with the Institut Nazareth et Louis-Braille located in Longueuil on the south shore of Montreal. Third and fourth year students give the necessary

care to patients with low vision within a multi-disciplinary context. The Head of the clinic and the Trainee Coordinator are both optometrists. Students also handle these types of patients in a training course given at the Montreal Association for the Blind where certain of the School's professors and those responsible for clinics provide eye care.

Students are also involved in visual screening programs at the school and industrial levels.

#### *Research*

Even with reduced financing and resources, members of the faculty have succeeded in becoming involved in research, thereby satisfactorily adhering to the University's policy and the agreements made with the Syndicat Général des Professeurs that stipulate that research activities are an integral part of every professor's workload.

It is interesting to note that investors are becoming increasingly interested in financing optometrical research in the Province of Quebec. Research projects include various aspects of basic and clinical sciences. In particular, the University's Research Department assists professors with the various administrative elements of their research work.

As part of the school's objectives, research funds were made available for our professors by various bodies including the University's Research Development Fund, the Quebec Health Research Fund, the Canadian Department of Health and Welfare, the Canadian Optometric Education Trust Fund — COETF, the Order of Optometrists of Quebec, The Association of Optometrists of Quebec, and by various ophthalmic product companies.

#### *The Students*

The University of Montreal now awards the Doctor of Optometry degree (O.D.) following the successful completion of a four-year program with two years collegial studies in health sciences as a prerequisite. Every year, about forty graduates receive their O.D. degree.

#### **Registrations for the 1984-1985 year**

1st year:	30 women	19 men
2nd year:	27 women	10 men
3rd year:	29 women	12 men
4th year:	25 women	17 men

This represents quite a change in the student body over the last ten years. From no representation at all, women have now become the majority of the students. This does not only apply to the School of Optometry, but is also occurring throughout the entire University and mainly in the École Polytechnique, and other faculties such as medicine and dentistry.



The number of candidates remains very high compared to the number of people admitted with a ratio about 1/10 or 1/11 every year.

For several months now, numerous discussions have been held at senior levels in the University to establish a policy of participation for students in various departmental committees, namely in a study committee (advisory) where discussions on the various aspects of the program will be held. The overall policy would take effect in September, 1985.

Student activities include the Health Festival, an annual event organized by all health sciences students, and Save Your Vision Week, organized every year by students in optometry.

### *The Future*

It is a humbling experience when faced with the future, in particular when we have priorities for an institution, priorities that are not necessarily those of a successor.

I personally took on heading the University of Montreal's School of Optometry from 1969 to 1973, and then from 1977 to 1985. My second mandate has now ended.

My successor is Dr. Daniel Forthomme, L.Sc.O, Ph.D. who has been a professor of the School since 1963. In 1978, he completed Master's and Ph.D. degrees in pathology at the Department of Pathology of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Montreal.

Over the next months, the School of Optometry must concentrate its efforts and priorities in developing a research program and, as part of this, start discussions as soon as possible with the Vice-Rector, Professoral Affairs, to obtain the financing for another professor's position in research. Obtaining this type of resource has become difficult, if not impossible, due to major budget cuts that universities have had to undergo since 1980.

This thrust could undoubtedly help the introduction of a Ph.D. program.

We must also think about developing a residence program in various fields. These programs would lead to graduate diplomas (master's).

Finally, because of its unique situation in the Francophone world, the School of Optometry must consider developing, in the next few years, means of ensuring international cooperation with all Francophone countries in the areas of research and clinical teaching.

### **Conclusion**

We have succinctly tried to look back over the seventy-five years of existence of the University of Montreal's School of Optometry and its major historical milestones. We also stated its current situation and what we project for the future as, with anything, we must continue.

However, we must all be very aware of the collective effort that has to be made to ensure — over

the short and long-term — high calibre recruits to continue the work and to perfect it. This seed must be sown starting now. This is one of the main objectives we must pursue — among so many others — in spite of the growing restrictions that are blocking us in many areas.

We must continue to meet the needs and the requirements for excellence in training our students, future health care practitioners and future practitioners of primary oculo-visual care.

But we must not deceive ourselves. We must remain realistic. Within the current context (in particular these last three or four years), very often academic decisions have a budgetary, financial or administrative impact that is impossible to ignore. Therefore, in spite of a fierce desire and a sincere effort to move ahead, at times we all see our bright future frustrated faced with achievements that appear beyond our grasp due to lack of funds. We therefore must start looking towards the twenty-first century with strength and hope, but also with realism that wisdom gives us over the decades that inexorably pass.

Expanding Vision and Eye Care Department in multi-specialty health care facility requires an

## **Optometrist**

Responsibilities include provision of full spectrum of services. Qualified staff complements modern, fully-equipped office and dispensary.

Ideal working environment available in addition to attractive salary plus comprehensive benefit package.

Interested applicants are invited to reply in confidence to:

**Manager,  
Personnel Administration**



**GROUP HEALTH CENTRE**  
240 McNabb Street  
Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario  
P6B 1Y5