

# Improving Vision Health Equity through Workforce Diversity



## MODERATED SESSION



**Session Moderator:**  
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Prevent Blindness Board Member

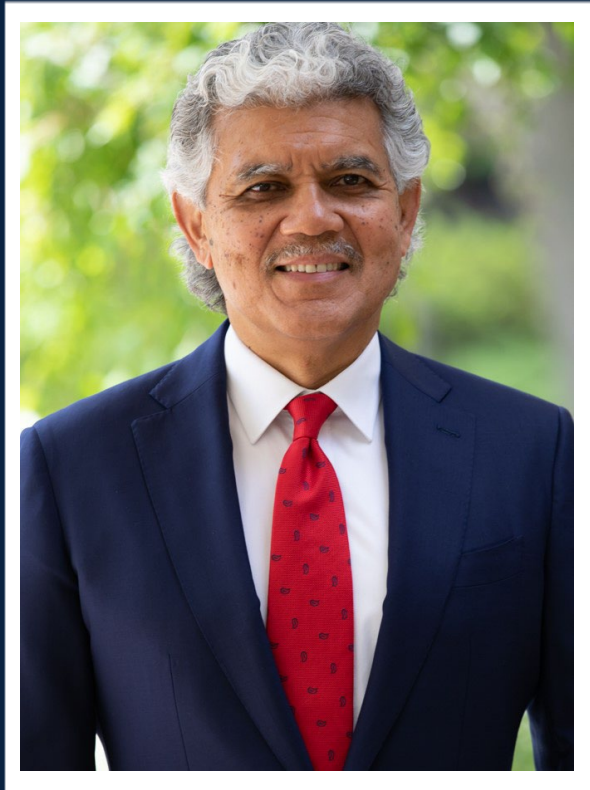


**M. Roy Wilson, MD, MS**  
Wayne State University



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Focus on Eye Health Summit:  
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# Developing a Diverse Ophthalmic Workforce

**M. Roy Wilson, M.D., M.S.**  
President, Wayne State University

# What is meant by “diverse”

- URM—Black, Hispanic, American Indian, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander
  
- Women and URMs

# Magnitude of the problem

## Residents: 2005-2015

- Female residents: proportion increased from 35.6% to 44.3%
- URM: proportion decreased from 8.7% to 7.7%
- 2020: slight increase in URM residents from 7.7% in 2015 to 9.0% in 2020
  - Increase almost exclusively in Hispanics, 5.1% to 6.1%
  - Blacks went down from 2.4% to 2.3%

# Ophthalmology department faculty less diverse than other medical faculty as a group

- Academic path to ophthalmology
- Women and URM
- Orthopedic surgery less diverse
- Radiology about the same

# What can be done?

## Exposure

- K-12 to medicine and science
- Medical students to ophthalmology

National Medical Association, founded 1895 <https://www.nmanet.org/>

NMA Rabb-Venable Excellence in Ophthalmology Research Program  
<https://www.rabbvenable.com/>

AAO/AUPO Minority Ophthalmology Mentoring Program <https://www.aao.org/minority-mentoring>



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# Building a Diverse Optometric Workforce

**Ruth Y. Shoge, OD, MPH, FAAO**

University of California Berkeley  
School of Optometry



In the beginning...



Photo credit: Salus University

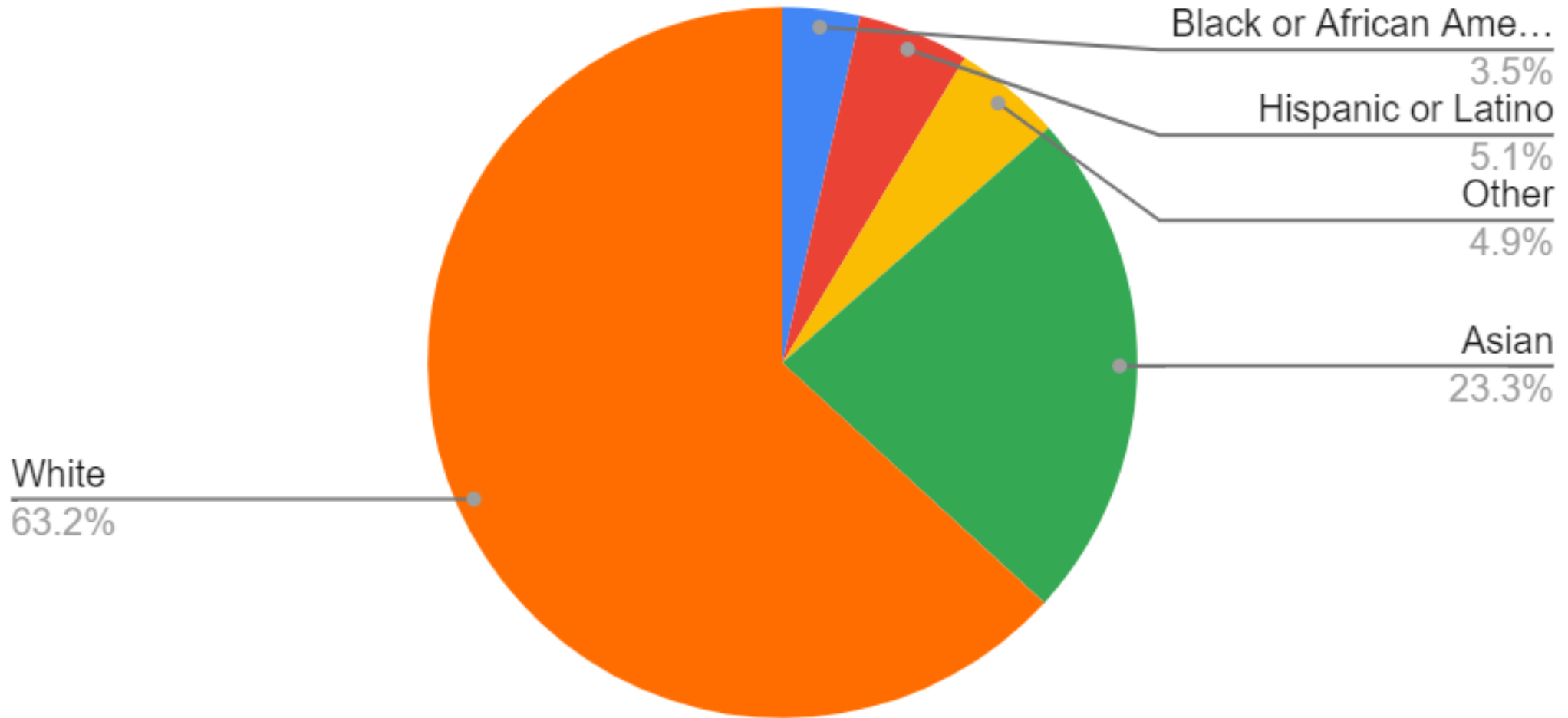
# Who Runs the World...Girls!

- 1899 Gertrude Stanton<sup>1</sup> became first licensed optometrist
- 1969: 3% enrolled students
- 1979: 19%
- 1989: 44%
- **And now...70% of student body!**
- 50% of practicing ODs



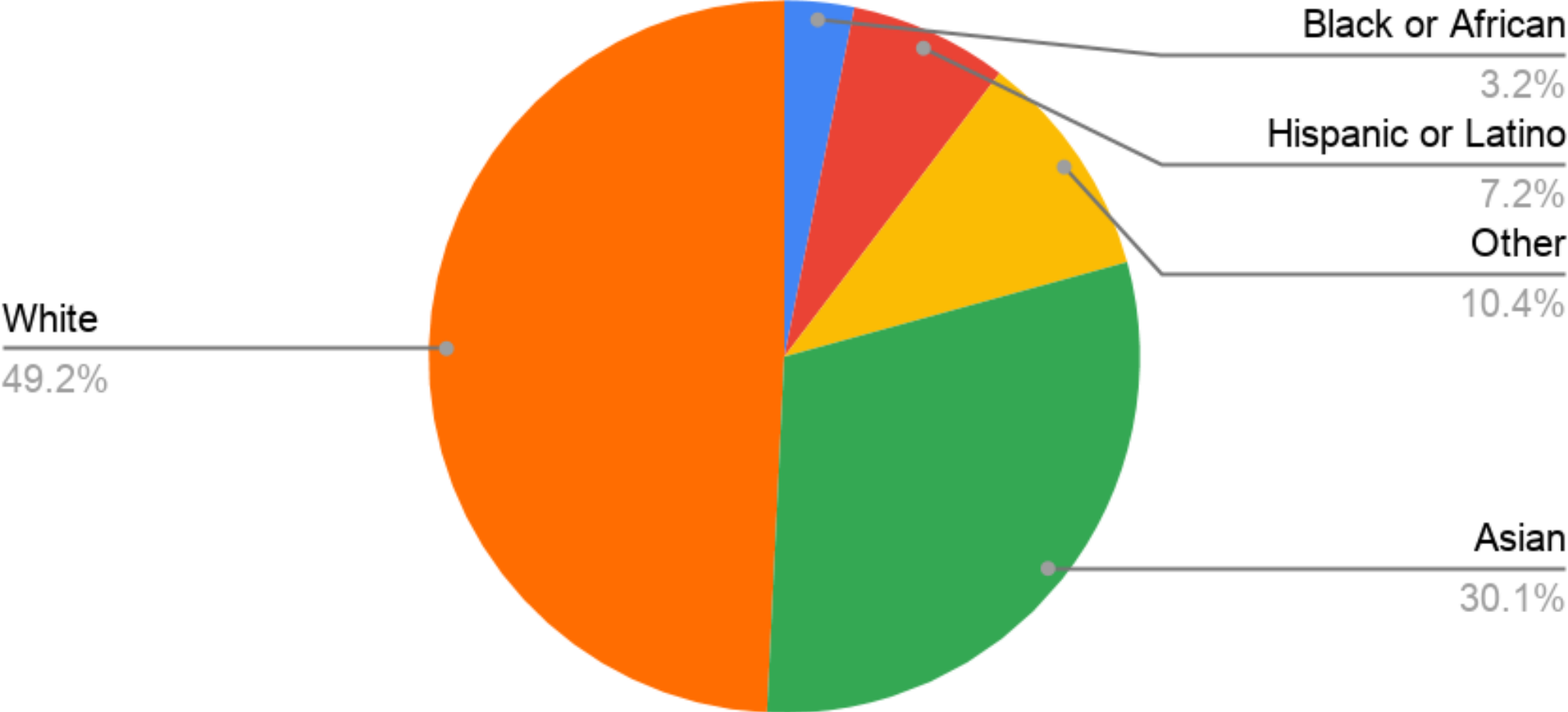
Photo credit: SUNY College of Optometry

# Demographic Trends in OD Students, 2006



Resource: Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry

# Demographic Trends in OD Students, 2020



Resource: Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry

# Current Optometric Workforce

- 48,196 practicing ODs (42,680 FTE)<sup>2</sup>
  - Net annual growth approximately 1.4%
  - Workforce will likely grow 0.6 – 0.7% faster on average than the US population
- Racial/Ethnic Demographics<sup>3</sup>
  - 2.5% Black/African American
  - 4.7% Hispanic/Latino
  - 16.2% Asian (East, Southeast, and South)
  - 72% White/Caucasian

# Efforts to Improve Workforce Diversity

- Remove barriers
- Increase scholarships
- Mentorship
- Cross-organizational collaboration
  - Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry
  - National Optometric Association
  - American Academy of Optometry
  - Black Eye Care Perspective



Photo credit: Ruth Shoge

## Race/Ethnicity – Past Five OptomCAS Cycles

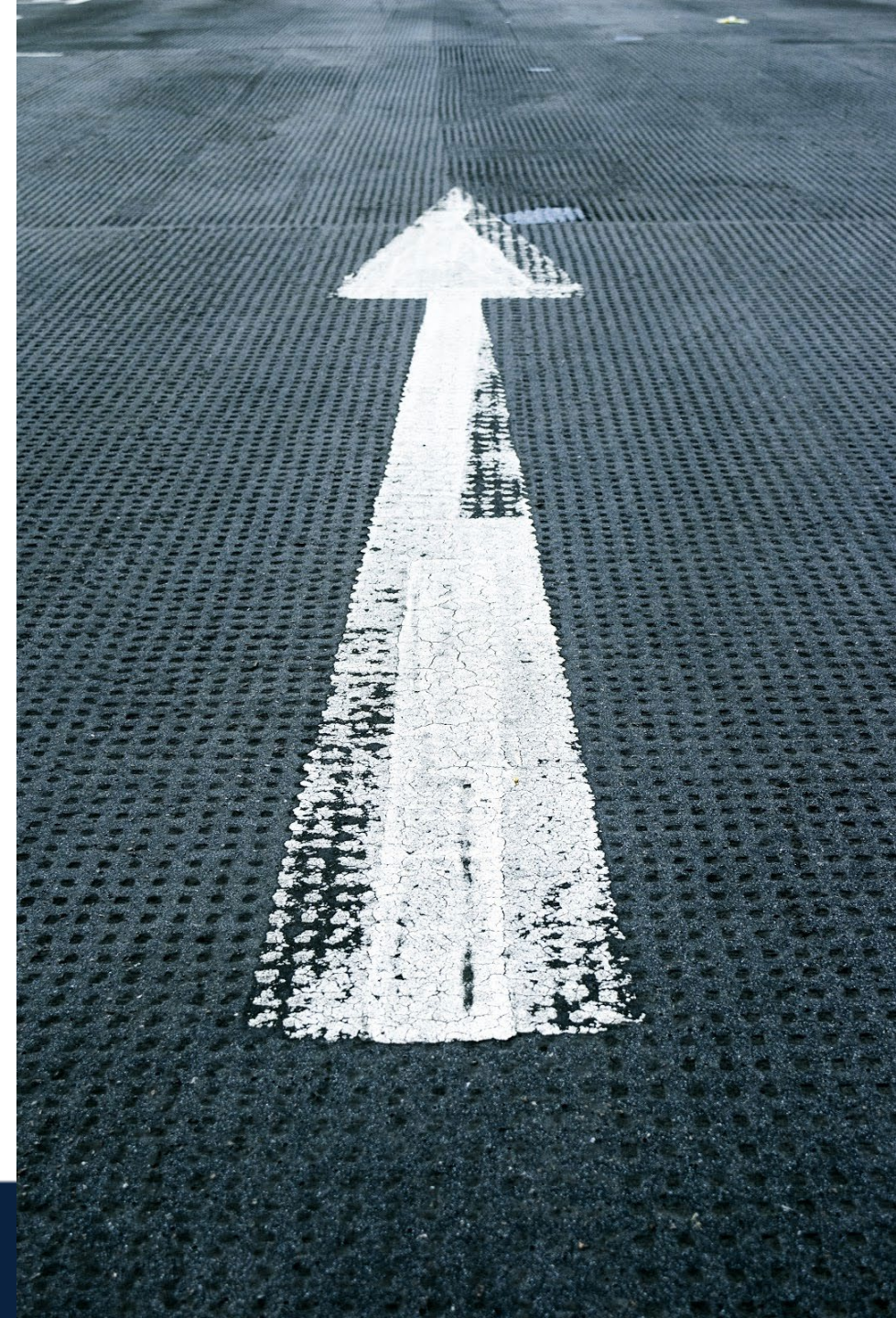
Application Cycle	Black/African-American Applicants		Hispanic/Latino Applicants		Total Verified Applicants at End-of-Cycle
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
2015-2016	119	4%	261	9%	2812
2016-2017	104	4%	258	10%	2687
2017-2018	102	4%	236	9%	2527
2018-2019	119	5%	265	11%	2472
2019-2020	140	5%	284	11%	2563
2020-2021	160	5.96%	339	12.63%	TBD

Applicants to OptomCAS		
Ethnicities and Races	Number of Applicants	% of Applicants to OptomCAS
American Indian	6	0.22%
Hispanic	339	12.63%
Asian	801	29.84%
Black or African American	160	5.96%
Native Hawaiian	2	0.07%
White	1210	45.08%
Other	0	0.00%
Multiple	100	3.73%
Did Not Report	66	2.46%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2684</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



# Why It's Important

- Reduce disparities in eye care
- Improve health outcomes
- Patient-physician concordance
- Cultural competency and humility training



# Accountability

- Holding ourselves and each other responsible
  - Acknowledge the progress we've made
  - Commit to do more
  - Be transparent about mistakes and obstacles
- Is our profession a reflection of the communities we serve?
- Beyond diversity → Inclusion, Equity, and Belonging

# Resources

1. Denial A. A look back: Celebrating women in Optometry. *Optometric Education*,2019;44(20)
2. Heath DA, Spangler JS, Wingert TA, Chan M, Smith EL, Grover L, Flanagan JG. 2017 National workforce survey. *Optometry and Vision Science*,2021;98(5):500-511
3. Chen EE. Comparing Proportional Estimates of US Optometrists by race and ethnicity with population census data. *Optometric Education*,2013;37:107-14



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