



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Dr. Stephanie S. Messner Announces Retirement Following 41 Years of Distinguished Service at Illinois College of Optometry**

**Chicago, IL — [June 24, 2026]** — The Illinois College of Optometry (ICO) announces the planned retirement of Stephanie S. Messner, O.D., Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean, effective January 22, 2027, concluding an extraordinary 41-year career dedicated to optometric education, clinical excellence, and academic leadership.

Dr. Messner has served ICO with distinction since joining the faculty in 1985, including the past 15 years as Academic Dean. Over more than four decades, she has played a transformative role in shaping the academic and clinical training of generations of optometrists. Her contributions span classroom, laboratory, and clinical instruction, reflecting a deep and enduring commitment to student learning and professional development.

In addition to her extensive teaching responsibilities, Dr. Messner has held a variety of leadership roles throughout her tenure, including Primary Care Service Chief, Residency Director, and Assistant Dean for IEI Patient Care Education.

Dr. Messner has been a dedicated leader within the broader optometric community. She served an eight-year term on the Illinois Optometry Licensing and Disciplinary Board, contributing to the oversight and advancement of professional standards. A longstanding and active member of the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO), she served as Chair of the Chief Academic Officers group and contributed to the Optometric Admission Test (OAT) Committee. She was also selected as a member of the inaugural Optometric Educators Leadership Institute (OELI), reflecting her national influence in developing future leaders in optometric education.

A long-time contributor to accreditation in optometric education, Dr. Messner served as a consultant to the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) and later as a Council member for nine years. As Chair of ACOE for two years, she provided steady and thoughtful leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, guiding the organization through a period of unprecedented disruption while maintaining rigorous accreditation standards.

At ICO, Dr. Messner is widely recognized for her deep commitment to clinical education and faculty development. She has been instrumental in developing innovative programs aimed at enhancing student success and retention, strengthening academic support systems, and fostering excellence across the institution's educational mission. During Dr. Messner's tenure she also supported the expansion of clinical research program including the development and launch of ICO's first Master's degree program in Clinical Vision Research that runs concurrently with the OD degree program.

"Dr. Messner's career reflects an unwavering dedication to students, faculty, and the profession of optometry," said ICO President Dr. Mark Colip. "Her leadership and vision have left an indelible mark on the Illinois College of Optometry and on optometric education nationally."

The Illinois College of Optometry extends sincere gratitude to Dr. Messner for her remarkable service and contributions. Her legacy will continue to inspire future generations of students, educators, and clinicians.

A search for a new Academic Dean will commence in July 2026 with the intention of having a new Dean in place to provide for a seamless transition by the time of Dean Messner's planned departure in mid-January 2027.

### **About the Illinois College of Optometry**

Founded in 1872, the Illinois College of Optometry (ICO) is the nation's oldest continuously operating optometric educational institution. With more than 8,000 alumni, ICO is dedicated to excellence in education, research, patient care, and service to the community. Located in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood on the city's South Side, ICO provides rigorous clinical training and serves over 85,000 patients annually through its teaching clinic, **Illinois Eye Institute**. For more information about Illinois College of Optometry, visit [www.ico.edu](http://www.ico.edu).