

Renowned Academic and Industry Leader Reflects On New Position as SCCO Dean

By Cathi Douglas

Late last year, Mark Bullimore, MCOptom, PhD, joined Marshall B. Ketchum University as its new Dean for the Southern California College of Optometry. We spoke with Dean Bullimore about what attracted him to the position, his observations thus far and his priorities for the College over the next few years.



When did you know you wanted to be an optometrist?

A Prior to university [Aston University in the UK], I thought I would join a practice or open a practice of my own. But my high school physics teacher knew better. Before I had even started in optometry, he asked if I'd considered research and academia. I replied "no." It's a nice story of someone who saw something inside of me, that I had yet to discover.

What attracted you to the position of SCCO Dean?

SCCO is in a nice part of the country, the College has been in existence for more than 100 years and has a strong alumni network, and it boasts a talented student body. When I described the position to my girlfriend, she said, 'Ah, you are the culture keeper.' That is a good summary of this job in terms of setting the tone to achieve the College's goals and by doing so, move the University forward.

How has your background prepared you for this position?

I come from major state institutions having held positions at UC Berkeley, The Ohio State University and the University of Houston where tenure is sacrosanct and faculty governance is important. I'm committed to openness in communications and welcome sharing the data that will drive our decisions. I want us to have informed discussions based on the data.



SCCO students pose with Dean Bulimore at the Fall Scholarship Program.



SCCO first-year students pose with Dean Bulimore in their class t-shirts.

What do you think makes SCCO attractive to students?

For an urban/suburban campus, it has a very pleasant atmosphere. When I look more closely I'm incredibly impressed with the caliber of students we attract. In part it's because of the California location and the state's well-educated population. Most of the students who matriculate here come from California and two-thirds of them are graduates of the University of California system – that speaks volumes about who comes here.

What are some of the challenges of your job?

What's exciting for me are new challenges. Some of our facilities need updating. We need new equipment. We must pay attention to the metrics by which we will measure success, such as the passage rate in national boards. I work with the faculty and the President, but I feel as if I work for the students. Their fees pay my salary, so they are the reason I have a job.

How will you manage faculty and students?

My campus office is off the beaten path, so I get out and visit with faculty, drop in on students working in the lab, or just walk around in the fresh air. I know if I wander around for five minutes before the hour, students will be out there. More student-friendly communications are in order. During our recent town hall meetings, there were some frank discussions. Even though I'm new I said, 'I agree. You have a right to expect better.' I mean those words. I had an opportunity to tell the students, 'I hear you,' and show them I will do my best to change things.

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What do you see as your top goals?

The University President is developing an initiative called the Student-Centered University, which focuses on providing a higher level of customer service and accountability to our stakeholders. By the time a student graduates from SCCO, they will have paid a great deal in tuition. They have a set of expectations and they won't be happy if they are not met. I will be identifying areas we can up our game, such as increasing the numbers of research grants and contracts, providing a better-quality education, looking at the curriculum and asking tough questions, and benchmarking us against other institutions.

Have there been any surprises, pleasant or otherwise, since your arrival?

As culture keeper, I'm trying to change the tone of the College. Students are pleased I'm here. They are looking for something to be optimistic about. Among the faculty, it's evident that they want someone to lead them and harness their energies; they need a voice and they want to be upbeat. The caliber of some of our faculty has exceeded my expectations.

What do you see in SCCO's future?

We have good leadership and great people all around, including the President and the people in Student Affairs and University Advancement. They are people who help me do my job better. I want to recruit and retain faculty. I want to help the younger faculty blossom and be a good mentor to them. Our College is primed for fresh insights and energies, a new perspective on how things could be done. I respect tradition because the way things are done culturally are important – but that shouldn't be an excuse for not looking for better ways to do things.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

I go home in the evenings and open my computer and try to clear out my email. It's good to get into some shorts and walk to the beach and throw my Frisbee around with my 50-pound cattle dog named Calvin. My girlfriend Beverly and I like being outside and enjoy hiking. We spent last weekend in Vegas and the weekend before that in Joshua Tree. [\[X\]](#)