



For Immediate Release
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American Academy of Optometry Announces Dr. Alexandra Benavente-Perez as 2019 Career Development Awardee



ORLANDO, FL – October 24, 2018 – The American Academy of Optometry is pleased to announce Alexandra Benavente-Perez, MCOptom, PhD, FAAO, as the 2019 Academy Career Development Award recipient. The Academy will provide a maximum of \$50,000 in direct costs per year for up to two years, potentially renewable once for a total of up to four years of funding. The State University of New York will provide matching funds, dollar for dollar, up to \$50,000 per year for each year of funding.

Dr. Benavente-Perez was selected from a pool of applicants by an Academy committee based on her potential for growth and future major extramural funding. The funding will help support her research focused on developing a novel experimental model of progressive myopia to study the early retinal changes associated with high myopia.

The Career Development Award is designed for optometric educators and/or scientists involved in vision research as long as the case can be made for the potential to acquire future extramural funding. Preference is for innovative, original, independent, Principal Investigator driven projects. It has been recognized for some time that young investigators, including optometric investigators, take many years after the inception of their careers before successfully acquiring Federal research funding. In fact, the mean age of first time National Institutes of Health (NIH) grantees is over 40 years of age. In an effort to positively influence and reduce the age at which early stage optometric researchers attain large scale federal support, the Academy launched the Career Development Award.

“I am very grateful to the American Academy of Optometry, its Research Committee and the Board of Directors for this award. As a clinician-scientist trained under the mentorship of leading research experts in clinical and experimental myopia, I want to contribute to the development of preventive and therapeutic treatment strategies for myopic degeneration - known to be a significant public health concern. I speculate that there are several early retinal changes that are tipping-points for the development of the sight-threatening myopic retinal changes. In collaboration with Drs. Suresh Viswanathan, Scott Read and Miduturu

Srinivas, I will develop a novel model of progressive myopia and describe its associated anatomical and functional changes to potentially offer new avenues for effective early interventions,” Dr. Benavente-Perez said in a statement.

Dr. Benavente-Perez is an Associate Clinical Professor at The State University of New York College of Optometry. Her primary research interest is to understand the visual signals that trigger these eye growth changes that eventually lead to myopia. In particular, the role that the peripheral retina and eye shape might have as predictors of future changes in refraction. Another focus of her research is to understand the interaction between ocular size and vascular physiology.

Read more about the award online at <http://www.aaopt.org/About/careerdevelopment>.

About the American Academy of Optometry

The American Academy of Optometry (AAO) enhances excellence in optometric practice by fostering research and disseminating knowledge in vision science through its journal, *Optometry and Vision Science*, and the continuing education presented at its annual meeting. Fellows of the Academy are committed to the premise that learning is a lifelong obligation of a professional, as is the commitment to expand the profession’s knowledge base through ongoing fellowship and exchange.

The next annual meeting of the Academy will be November 7-10, 2018 at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in San Antonio, Texas. For more information, visit: <http://www.aaopt.org>.

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