

—President's Message

Consider the plight of a young graduate student attending his first professional event at the OSA Annual Meeting in Houston, Texas, USA—a gathering of over 1,000 accomplished (and often renowned) individuals in the optics community. Knowing few people and looking to make good use of his time in an unfamiliar city, the young man signed up for an OSA-sponsored tour of NASA's Johnson Space Flight Center.

When the student stepped up the stairs to the air-conditioned bus that would ferry the members to the facility, few seats were left. He took one of the remaining seats and found himself next to a distinguished-looking gentleman who then initiated a conversation. During the 30-minute ride, the man asked the young student where he was from, where he was studying and what his academic focus was. They found they were both from the Boston area and compared stories about their New England educations. As the conversation continued, the student began to relax and feel the camaraderie of this group and a reassuring sense of belonging.

As the bus approached the Space Flight Center, the student collected his courage and began to ask his new colleague more personal questions about his background and life experiences. When they reached the Center, they rose to depart the bus and he asked the older man, "What is your role with the OSA?" His answer: "My name is Dow Smith, and I am the president of OSA."

As you may have guessed, I was that student, and this memorable encounter is as clear today as it was four decades ago. I was 21 years old and in shock that such an accomplished person would relate to me as a colleague. It was an epiphany and the beginning of long-standing collegial bonds with my many OSA friends.

OSA has a long tradition of helping students transition to their professional lives. I am proud to say that OSA warmly welcomed me all those years ago, and that it has remained true to that practice and those values through the present day.

We embrace this tradition not only through professional meetings, but also with the many programs that have been developed over the years to support students and early-career professionals. The OSA Foundation's central theme is to foster the advancement of these groups, to equip them with skills that will enhance their career trajectories, and to ensure that OSA provides an enlightening technical home for an increasingly diverse membership.

During my presidential term, I look forward to connecting with many of you and continuing to expand our outreach to scientists, engineers, technologists and business leaders around the world. I was the beneficiary of a truly inspiring serendipitous meeting with Dow Smith. He had a remarkable career in optics. I will forever appreciate the kindness Dow offered me that day, and I hope all of us will continue to pay forward the warm welcome that I received as a bright-eyed new member of this remarkable organization.



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—Stephen D. Fantone,
OSA President