

Graham Strong OD'70

Graham Strong completed a joint O.D. degree from the University of Waterloo and the Ontario College of Optometry in 1970. He initially entered private practice in Brantford, Ont., moving on to practice in partnership (1971 – 1979) in Napanee, Ont. During this period, he served on numerous municipal and county boards and committees, including two years as Napanee's Deputy Reeve.

Strong was appointed a full-time Clinical Supervisor to the School of Optometry & Vision Science, University of Waterloo in 1979. During his first five years of full-time clinical teaching, he completed a M.Sc. degree in Physiological Optics. He was promoted to the rank of Professor in 1996. Graham retired in 2012 and in 2017 received the designation of "Distinguished Professor Emeritus" from the University of Waterloo for outstanding teaching and research contributions.

During his time at the School he served as Clinic Director (1985-1990) and as Associate Director (1990 – 1998), as well as an elected term to the University Senate. He next served as Director of the School and Associate Dean of Science from 1999 until 2002. During his term he worked with UW administration to plan and implement a graduated 50 per cent increase in Optometry's undergraduate enrolment. To accommodate increased class sizes, his administration initiated plans for an ambitious expansion and renovation of the Optometry building. This project was assumed and managed by his successors and was eventually completed in 2009.

In addition to these activities, Strong served as Director of the Centre for Sight Enhancement (CSE) from 1987 to 2012. The CSE is an internationally acclaimed low vision research and clinic facility at the University of Waterloo and Canada's only low vision rehabilitation service to be accredited by the National Accreditation Council for Blind and Low Vision Services (NAC). With funding support from the Ontario Ministry of Health in 1994, Strong planned, created and directed UW's Sight Enhancement Equipment Pool and Assessment Centre (SEEPAC). SEEPAC is now a provincially sponsored centre, specializing in the assessment and provision of high technology sight enhancement and sight substitution devices for Ontarians with blindness or low vision.

The CSE has been a pioneer in the provision of high technology device-assisted vision rehabilitation, promoting the research, development, and commercialization of a procession of highly innovative and unique device technologies for people with vision loss. A multidisciplinary model of care emerged and was adopted by the Assistive Devices Program (ADP) of the Ontario Ministry of Health.

Strong's primary research activities are in the fields of low vision rehabilitation and the development of consumer-centred assistive technologies. With support from industry partners, his research culminated in the development and commercialization of award-winning vision rehabilitation products; and the creation of two spin-off companies, Sight Enhancement Technologies and Sight Enhancement Systems. He also served as Leader of the Vision Research Team for the Ontario Rehabilitation Technology Research Consortium (ORTC) since its inception in 1992. In recognition of its achievements, Strong's Sight Enhancement Engineering (WatSEE) lab received a Computerworld Smithsonian Award in 1999 and Strong was invested as a Computerworld Smithsonian Laureate that same year.

One of Strong's ongoing concerns with respect to low vision rehabilitation was the cultural bias and irrelevance of standard acuity assessment tools when used to assess the vision of Aboriginal Canadians (including First Nations, Metis, and Inuit populations). Strong (2005-2006) researched, designed, and validated two sets of culturally relevant logMAR acuity charts to ensure that valid and reliable visual acuity information was obtainable for these underserved Aboriginal populations.

From 2007 to 2016, Dr. Strong served as Vice-President of the US-based National Accreditation Council for Blind and Low Vision Services (NAC). He also served as Chair of NAC's Standards Committee and has expanded his NAC involvement, becoming a frequent on-site peer review team leader for accreditation applicant services and agencies across the United States.

In 1989, Graham was appointed as an "Expert Witness - Forensic Optometrist" by Supreme Court of Ontario. Over the years, he has been consulted to assist with numerous homicide investigations and prosecutions. He provides support to law enforcement investigators, defense attorneys, and criminal prosecutors in criminal cases involving ophthalmic evidence. Strong has also served as a vision consultant for several police and military tactical shooting teams and for Olympic shooters.

Strong's many contributions to the field of Low Vision were recognized in 2003 by the CNIB when he presented the inaugural E. A. Baker Lecture in Low Vision at the 28th Biennial Congress of the Canadian Association of Optometrists in Halifax. He was similarly honored to become the 18th annual Dr. Clair Bobier Lecturer in Vision (2007) at the University of Waterloo.