

Meet Some of the 2023 Recipients!

Sophia Johnson, SUNY 4th Year

*What has been a key part of
your optometric student
journey?*

A key part in my journey in
optometry school was
committing to saying "Yes !"

In optometry school it is very
easy to shrink back and do it
alone, but what helped me the
most was inviting people in
and doing a very hard thing
with others.



"While journeying through optometry
school, I made a commitment to
myself that I would say 'yes' to
people, groups, and events that
would add value to myself and to
others. It was the best decision I ever
made."

Dr. Leslie Mintz Scholarship Recipient

Menatolla Soliman, MPH MCPHS

What most excites you about practicing optometry in New Jersey?

One of the most rewarding aspects about being able to practice optometry in NJ is the vast majority of different ethnicities and races that I get to work with.

This allows me to maximize my scope of practice and truly see how you can get just about anything that presents in your seat!



"I ultimately chose optometry because my goal was to make my patient's feel happy and healthy. However, this can't happen without properly choosing to take care of yourself and to understand that happiness blossoms from the inside."

Dr. Leslie Mintz Scholarship Recipient

Veena Bokka, SUNY 4th Year

What has been a key part of your optometric student journey?

Support from family and friends has kept me steady during this journey of becoming an optometrist.

The people surrounding me believed in me which further motivated me to continue. This type of support is not easy to obtain, and I am incredibly grateful to have found it in my life.



"I am excited to be in areas of New Jersey where I was for my childhood and show how much I have achieved and grown. I am excited to be near my family and be able to take care of them as well."

Dr. Leslie Mintz Scholarship Recipient

Renee Pogrebneak, SALUS

What has been a key part of your optometric student journey?

To see fellow students, who I have made life-long friendships with, have similar passions in regards to future practice in New Jersey goes to show that New Jersey is doing something right! We, as students, are the future of optometry and to see so many people wanting to practice in New Jersey is exciting and quite incredible.



"From shadowing and now working under a New Jersey optometrist who practices in the area she grew up, I learned how special it is to give back to the community you've been a part of your whole life."

Dr. Leslie Mintz Scholarship Recipient

**Alexa
Vardiman,
SALUS 2nd Year**

What has been a key part of your optometric student journey?

It has been joining the American Optometric Student Association (AOSA). I am currently the Trustee for Pennsylvania College of Optometry and represent my school on the national board.

This has been a truly rewarding experience and brought me so many fantastic opportunities!



"I am excited to continue to grow as a student and future doctor while advocating for my home state in the field of Optometry!"

Dr. Leslie Mintz Scholarship Recipient

Ewa Kowalczyk, SFAAO

What has been a key part of your optometric student journey?

I have gained valuable leadership and communication skills as an NJSOP E-board member.

The Special Olympics vision screenings, as well as other volunteer opportunities, have opened my eyes to how much good we can share with others.



"Helping people with their sight has been a rewarding experience for me. I am looking forward to further serving the NJ community as an optometric physician."

Dr. Leslie Mintz Scholarship Recipient

Gabrielle Tull-Lewis, SALUS

What has been a key part of your optometric student journey?

I enjoy getting to know the patients as well as having a hand in educating them on their diagnoses. Seeing patients under the supervision of an experienced optometrist has by far been the best learning experience for me.

Clinical experience has solidified a lot of what I learned in class and reinforces that I chose the right career.



"I look forward to connecting with new mentors. I would love to advise future optometry students and pass on information I received from others."

Dr. Leslie Mintz Scholarship Recipient