

John Greivenkamp, PhD 1980



What influenced your decision to attend graduate school at OSC?

I was always an applied experimentalist, and at the time lasers and holography were all the rage. So, optics it was and the choices were UR and AZ. Growing up in Cincinnati, the climate seemed better here. I also joke that I have very good eyesight and in optics you are often the detector and part of the experiment—a natural draw for me.

What do you wish you would have known your first day of graduate school? Was there anything you wish you had done to prepare more for graduate school?

When I arrived in 1976, OSC seemed well established; it was only later that I realized that I actually started close to the beginning. With a BS in physics and math, I felt well prepared.

Which classes did you find most enjoyable? Which ones did you find most difficult?

The applied optics courses were fun—probably the most fun was Jack Gaskill's Linear System, Fourier Transforms and Optics course. The most difficult were any of the courses taught by Harry Barrett.

Was there an individual (professor, advisor, staff, friend, family member) who played a particularly important role in your education?

I have come to realize that I arrived at the 'golden age' of OSC engineering faculty. The originals were there (Shack, Shannon, Wolfe, Gaskill, Slater, Marathay) and the second wave had just arrived (Barrett, Wyant, Dereniak, Palmer). I am sure I have missed some, but what a group—in my opinion, never to be equaled! Each brought something different technically, but also in approach to teaching. I have tried to emulate what I thought was best from each of them—even though there is no way to succeed in the quest.

The non-engineering faculty were really good as well.

What was your research while attending OSC?

I worked with Bill Swindell and Harry Barrett on an analog optical computer for computed tomography. At that time computing power was limited (the PC didn't happen until 1984) and we thought optics was the way to go. The project was great, however, in that it was multifaceted and required lots of pieces to work together. There were lots of problems to solve, and we got it to work.

What was the cost of rent in Tucson while you were in school?

No idea—this was 40+ years ago. But, my initial RA stipend in 1976 was \$2,700/year.

If you owned a car during graduate school, what year and model was it?

1969 Buick Wildcat Convertible with a 430 cubic inch engine and a four-barrel carburetor.

What was your favorite restaurant/student hangout near campus?

King's Table (think that was the name) for all you could eat fried shrimp on Fridays, the Big A for hamburgers, and Eric's Ice Cream (the same Eric that now owns 1702, and at the same location).

What did you do for fun during your time in graduate school?

Intramural flag football and softball (with Harry Barrett on first base), country swing dancing at the Stumble Inn (Chuck Wagon and the Wheels was the house band), listening to music on my first 'real' stereo system (still have the speakers), tennis, and homework (of course). 😊

What was most memorable about your commencement ceremony?

The fact that I didn't attend.

At the time of your graduation, what were the most sought-after jobs/most popular industries/most popular companies?

Aerospace companies (this was pre-merger so there were many more of them), and large consumer companies (especially with large research labs—Polaroid, IBM, GE, Bell, Kodak, Western Electric, Battelle—sadly, most of these don't exist or are only shadows of their former selves). The national and military research groups as well including NASA and JPL. There were

fewer small companies and that didn't seem to be the thing to do. It was before the entrepreneur boom in technology companies. Remember this was before the PC, the internet, even things like solid state sensors. Photonics did not exist (at least by that name).

What was your first job after graduation?

Camera Technology Lab in the Physics Division of the Eastman Kodak Research Labs in Rochester, New York. Was at Kodak for 10 years before returning to OSC in 1991 as a faculty member.

What was the most significant world event during your time in graduate school. How were you affected by this event?

1978 Jim Jones' followers committed mass suicide in Jonestown, Guyana (I stopped drinking Kool-Aid after that); and the 1979 Iran Hostage Crisis.

Was there a campus or community event in Tucson that was especially important to you?

The Fall OSC picnic. It was a don't-miss-event and everyone was there. I miss it now, but we were a much smaller department back then. I remember going to basketball and football games back when UA was a proud member of the WAC (before Lute Olson).

What advice would you give to this year's graduating class?

While you are a student take as many classes as you can—even or especially in areas outside your specialty. There have been many times in my career when I was the only person in a meeting who knew the tidbit we needed—you don't always need to be an expert to contribute. You will do numerous theses and dissertations during your career, but the time in school is really the only time when you have easy access to classes.

Get involved in the professional societies. It is a commitment to your profession and a way to give back. You will meet and become friends with so many people that you would not have otherwise.