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Salus University Low Vision Rehabilitation Program Earns Major Accreditation



Elkins Park, Pa. — Salus University Low Vision Rehabilitation (LVR) program recently became the first LVR program to ever be accredited by The Association for Education and Rehabilitation (AER) of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

“It acknowledges the discipline, I think that’s the main thing,” said Kerry Lueders, MS, COMS, TVI, CLVT, director of the LVR and Education of Children and Youth programs at Salus. “It’s also a testament to the quality of our LVR program that has a longstanding history at this University, that it’s been reviewed by peers and a comprehensive evaluation of the program.”

The AER accreditation program reviews personnel preparation programs at colleges and universities throughout the U.S. and internationally on administrative, faculty, clinical and curricular standards. Historically, the AER has accredited Adaptive Technology (AT), Orientation & Mobility (O&M), Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TVI) and Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (VRT) programs until recently expanding eligibility to Low Vision Therapists (LVT) programs. The University's LVR program, in the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies (BLVS), earned the distinction of "AER Accredited" by adhering to high-quality standards that lead to top learning experiences, job preparation and related certifications.

The Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) at Salus was the first institution in the country to offer a graduate degree and certificate program in LVR starting in 1983. BLVS students who come through the University's LVR program are often working in the field and want to add certifications to upgrade low vision skills. Some of them might be in an eye care-related field — working as an optician or an ophthalmic assistant — looking to vary their experience for employment. Additionally, PCO/Salus Doctor of Optometry students can opt to take the low vision master's or certificate program concurrently while other LVR students who received their optometric training abroad generally want to add LVR certification.

"I hope that other programs crop up and follow suit," Lueders said. "I think we definitely see the need for low vision rehabilitation at The Eye Institute (TEI), the clinical training facility for PCO/Salus."

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 12 million people 40 years and over in the U.S. have vision impairment, including 1 million who are blind, 3 million who have vision impairment after correction, and 8 million who have vision impairment due to uncorrected refractive error. In 2012, the CDC also reported the 4.2 million Americans aged 40 years and older who suffer from uncorrectable vision impairment is predicted to more than double by 2050 to 8.96 million due to the increasing epidemics of diabetes and other chronic diseases and the rapidly aging U.S. population.

Furthermore, an estimated 6.8 percent of children younger than 18 years in the U.S. have a diagnosed eye and vision condition. Nearly 3 percent of children younger than 18 years old are blind or visually impaired, defined as having trouble seeing even when wearing glasses or contact lenses.

The College of Health Sciences, Education and Rehabilitation (CHER) at Salus offers a Master of Science (MS) degree and certificate program in LVR. The interdisciplinary programs in the BLVS department prepare professionals to work in clinical rehabilitation and educational settings with people of all ages who have low vision. Emphasis is placed on implementing low vision assessments and interventions.

"We address the education and rehabilitation system — we are addressing working with individuals with multiple disabilities," Lueders said. "I think our programs go beyond just the low vision core. We definitely cover quite a bit of ground maybe other programs might not."

About Salus University

Salus University, founded as the Pennsylvania College of Optometry in 1919, today is a diversified, globally recognized professional academic center of learning that offers a wide range of degree programs in the professions of Optometry, Audiology, Physician Assistant, Blindness and Low Vision Studies, Biomedicine, Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology. Salus operates four clinical facilities in Philadelphia and Montgomery counties that

provide highly specialized vision, hearing and balance, speech-language pathology and occupational therapy services. The University has more than 1,200 students, and more than 14,000 alumni worldwide. For more information, please visit www.salus.edu.