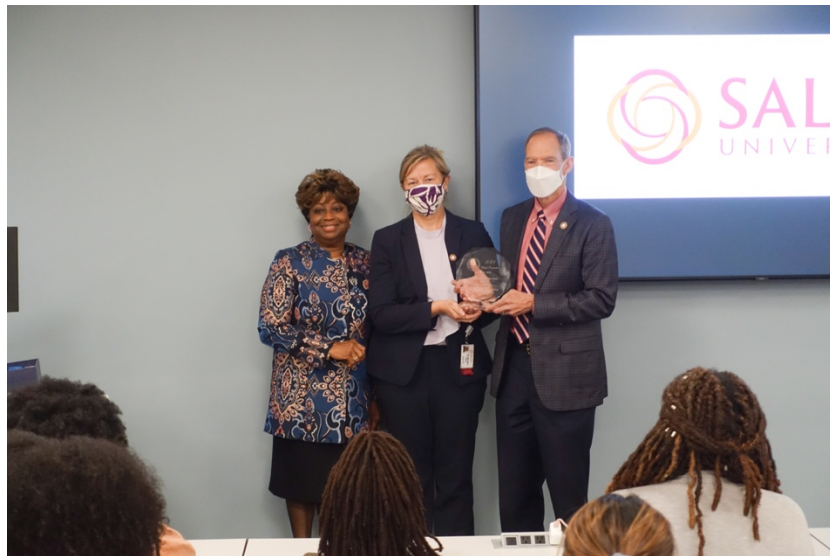




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Salus University Earns National Optometry Award for Commitment to Diversity



(From left) Dr. Paula Harmon Boone, director of the NOA’s “Visioning the Future” HBCU mentorship program and NOA trustee, presenting the NOA 2021 School of the Year award to Dr. Melissa Trego, dean of PCO/Salus and Salus President Dr. Michael Mittelman at the University’s DEI Speaks event October 21.

Elkins Park, Pa. — The Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) at Salus University was recently named the National Optometric Association (NOA) 2021 School of the Year during the NOA’s 51st convention, which took place virtually this year. Recognized for its strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, particularly its focus on recruiting and enrolling underrepresented students of color, the award was officially presented to PCO/Salus by Paula Harmon Boone, OD, director of the NOA’s “Visioning the Future” HBCU mentorship program and NOA trustee, during the University’s DEI Speaks event October 21.

Dr. Boone, who also keynoted the event with a talk titled “Diverse Representation Matters in Healthcare,” nominated PCO/Salus for the award and according to her, PCO/Salus received the honor for advancing the recruitment, enrollment and retention of a diverse student body. The other factor was the high level of support by the Office of Admissions at Salus for the University’s diversity and inclusion efforts.

“This is indicative of the leadership of a diversity sensitive administration, who realizes the significance of cultural competency and cultural humility,” she said.

Founded in 1969 during the Civil Rights era by the late Drs. C. Clayton Powell, John Howlette and 25 other Black optometrists in Richmond, Virginia, the NOA was the first national organization to represent the professional interests of Black doctors of optometry. For more than 50 years, the NOA’s mission of “Advancing the Visual Health of Minority Populations” has included the recruitment of students of color into schools and colleges of optometry, with the goal of creating better delivery of optometric care for all communities.

“The commitment of PCO/Salus to increasing the number of graduating underrepresented minority optometrists is a shared priority with the NOA’s mission,” Dr. Sherrol Reynolds, former president of the NOA, said.

The NOA School of the Year recognition coincides with a pivotal time for PCO/Salus. The University’s efforts to increase diversity were reinforced by the new incoming class this fall, admitting 13.8 percent of first-year Doctor of Optometry (OD) students, the largest Black enrollment at PCO/Salus in more than 30 years. In support of creating an inclusive University community, Salus continuously implements and deploys strategies related to recruitment, retention, student leadership development, academic success, didactic and clinical training, and proactive campus-wide diversity and inclusion education as part of its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) mission.

Dr. Boone said the University’s commitment to underrepresented students of color aligns with the NOA’s purpose to help underserved communities and decrease vision health disparities.

“This should be the modus operandi of all colleges of optometry,” Dr. Boone said. “Recruitment is the start of the process and academia is the place of preparation. With broad exposure and support during matriculation, some students will pursue a pathway to academia to create an increase in Black faculty; others will pursue various modes of practice to increase a more diverse representation in the eye care industry.”

Salus also has several different initiatives on campus designed to help students know they have a place of support, and to highlight the voices of people from various backgrounds, including race, gender, LGBTQ+ identity, and religious and spiritual beliefs, along with others. Some programs include a DEI committee, an ongoing series of events featuring speakers and various diversity and inclusion topics as well as a resource page on the University’s website dedicated to DEI education, covering books and articles to read and topics such as how to raise anti-racist children.

In 2020, the University also hired a DEI special assistant to the president, Juliana Mosley-Williams, PhD, who leads the school’s DEI efforts. As a diversity leader, Dr. Mosley-Williams works to ensure DEI practices remain central and not ancillary to the University’s mission.

“Today, we are one of the most diverse colleges of optometry in the country, with women as the majority and the largest Black student enrollment among all 24 schools nationwide,” she said. “I was elated to hear that PCO/Salus was selected by the NOA as the School of the Year, due to our demonstrated commitment to increasing the number of Black and African American students entering the profession of optometry. While it is always an honor to be recognized for hard work, it is more important that we continue our efforts because it is our identity, mission and responsibility.”

PCO/Salus also recently relaunched its Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) for high-achieving students of color, renaming it the Robert E. Horne SEP as a tribute to its founder who originally established the program in 1977. The original intent of SEP was to introduce disadvantaged students and underrepresented prospective students to the curriculum at PCO/Salus. Since reestablishment of the program after a six-year hiatus, the goals include improving the matriculation, attrition and graduation rates of Black and other underrepresented applicants of color while fostering a safety net of support and mentorship to meet the increasingly diverse nation’s optometric needs.

The program’s reinstatement was also recognized by the NOA.

“Recruiting a diverse student body results in a more diverse healthcare workforce,” Dr. Boone said. “A diverse workforce ensures improved health outcomes for all. Patients will have greater access to culturally competent healthcare providers who understand their lives, their challenges and their needs.”

To learn more about the University’s commitment to diversity and inclusion, visit salus.edu/DEI.

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.

About National Optometric Association

The National Optometric Association (NOA), founded in 1969, is dedicated to the profession and service to underserved communities through the mission of, “Advancing the Visual Health of Minority Populations.” With the student organization (NOSA), it is the nation’s largest professional organization representing minority optometrists. The NOA has provided millions of dollars in scholarships over the years, including to HBCUs students through the “Visioning the Future” HBCU mentorship program. It has delivered quality educational programs, such as the Three Silent Killers and the A.C.H.I.E.V.E: All Children’s Health Initiative for Eye and Vision Excellence initiatives. For more information, please visit www.nationaloptometricassociation.com.