



For Immediate Release

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## **Pennsylvania State Appropriation Funding Made Big Impact on Pennsylvania College of Optometry Doctor**

**Elkins Park, P.a. - [Brandy Scombordi-Raghu, OD '98, Resident '99](#)** grew up in a small town in northeast Pennsylvania. Historically a coal mining area, her school district, was one of the lowest performing in the state.

"I had to get a job in high school, as most of us did. During my junior year of high school, I started working in an optical store selling and fixing glasses," said Dr. Scombordi-Raghu. "I had never had an eye exam until working at the optical store, it was not something that our parents thought about or had access to."

Unbeknownst to her, this seemingly insignificant job would plant a seed for her future career in optometry.

She attended Temple University, on full scholarship, for her undergraduate degree, becoming the first member of her family to attend college and the only person in her high school class to travel outside their hometown area for school. Entering Temple, she had her future mapped out as a teacher, but after working as a student teacher during her junior year, Dr. Scombordi-Raghu decided she wanted to take her career in a different direction.

Because of her optical background, she thought optometry school would be a good fit for her, which led her to the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) at Salus University.

Although optometry and PCO/Salus seemed like the perfect fit at the time, graduate school was an expense Dr. Scombordi-Raghu had not prepared for, and presented an obstacle for her and her family. "I knew nothing about taking out loans because I did not have to do that in undergrad," said Dr. Scombordi-Raghu. "When I was applying to optometry schools, the reason I chose PCO/Salus was because I knew I was going to receive the money from the Pennsylvania State Appropriation. Otherwise, I would not have been able to afford graduate school."

The Pennsylvania State Appropriation funding awards Pennsylvania residents who remain in Pennsylvania for higher education an annual scholarship to help offset tuition costs. As the only optometry school in the commonwealth, PCO was a recipient of this generous funding from 1961 through 2009. This past year, the state of Pennsylvania reestablished Salus University as a recipient. The funding will continue to allow Pennsylvania residents, similar to Dr. Scombordi, to once again have the opportunity to pursue an Optometry education at Salus with an offset cost.

As a result of state funding, Dr. Scombordi-Raghu attended PCO/Salus and has had a successful and fulfilling career as a Doctor of Optometry. In 2001, she returned to PCO/Salus and is currently using her education to give back to underserved communities, similar to her hometown, in the Philadelphia geographic area.

As director of the school vision program at [The Eye Institute \(TEI\)](#), she oversees and assists with vision screenings at approximately 53 schools in Philadelphia and other school districts in Pennsylvania. As a part of the program, when a student fails a vision screening, the nurse sends home a note recommending them for an eye exam. If the parent can't get the child an eye exam, a team from TEI goes to the school with the [Big Red Bus](#), the University's traveling eye clinic, to perform eye exams. Or they are bussed to TEI for care. After the exam, students are given two pairs of glasses; one to keep at school and the other to bring home with them.

TEI and Dr. Scombordi-Raghu are also working to expand community outreach services to adults, currently the University participates in two to three events a year where they provide complementary vision screenings to adults in the greater Philadelphia area.

"My history is very similar to the children we serve. They have parents or guardians at home that love them but simply don't have the means, the time, or the knowledge to provide the basic healthcare that many others take for granted," she said. "I am blessed to be able to play a part in improving health equity in our community. The School Vision Program, by providing an eye exam and a pair of glasses, removes an obstacle to those marginalized in our community and allows them to succeed academically. I will not let children in our community fail because of their vision."

The impact of the State Appropriation funding has not been forgotten by Dr. Scombordi-Raghu, and she emphasized how important this funding is for future generations of students from Pennsylvania who now have better access to pursuing higher education opportunities.

### **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, Speech-Language Pathology and Orthotics and Prosthetics. 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.ed](http://www.salus.ed)