



For Immediate Release
January 8, 2019

Contact: Macy Zhelyazkova
215-780-1284

Bird Box Challenge Vs. Reality: Salus University Breaks Down The Latest Viral Challenge

Elkins Park, Pa. – [Salus University](#) has been doing the Bird Box Challenge *safely* since the 1980s.

The University's founding college; the Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) was the first institution in the country to offer a graduate degree and certificate program in Vision Rehabilitation. Today, the University's College of Education and Rehabilitation is the only institution to offer four graduate degree and certificate programs in the following areas: [Low Vision Rehabilitation](#); [Orientation and Mobility](#); [Education of Children and Youth with Visual Impairments](#) and [Vision Rehabilitation Therapy](#).

Just three weeks after the movie Bird Box - a Sci-Fi thriller about a mother who flees with her children down a river in search of safety while blindfolded - made its debut on Netflix, a new viral challenge has taken over social media by storm. People are blindfolding themselves doing everyday tasks. While the challenge may appear to be lighthearted, it is a concerning trend to trained professionals - and even to Netflix itself - who want to note that it can lead to unsafe conditions.

The mission of the [Blindness and Low Vision Studies](#) (BLVS) graduate programs at Salus is to prepare highly qualified professionals to support individuals with blindness and low vision through the education and rehabilitation process, by creating an interprofessional environment of practitioners committed to lifelong learning, critical thinking, and dedication to the individuals and communities they serve.

"One of the staples of our instruction is that our students learn to do skills while blindfolded," said [Fabiana Perla](#), EdD, COMS, CLVR, chair of the Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies (BLVS) and associate professor. Students spend about twelve hours per week for 10 weeks blindfolded learning skills to help them work with individuals who are blind or have low vision. Throughout the year, BLVS students can be seen walking down streets, crossing complex intersections throughout Philadelphia, taking subways, going to stores, preparing food, reading and

writing - all while blindfolded. "What is important to point out is that our students take on these tasks in a safe way, with instruction and guidance," Dr. Perla said.

While the challenge begs "what can you do blindfolded?," Dr. Perla thinks the question should be "what *can't* you do blindfolded?" "People who are blind or have low vision can do anything that sighted people can do, just in different ways and by having the right training," she said.

"If people find themselves drawn to working with those who are visually impaired, we highly encourage them to check out our [programs](#) at Salus," said [Kerry Lueders](#), MS, COMS, TVI, CLVT, director of the University's Low Vision Rehabilitation program and assistant professor.

[Erin Kenny](#), OD, FAAO, chief of the [William Feinbloom Vision Rehabilitation Center](#) housed at The Eye Institute (TEI) of Salus University in the Oak Lane section of Philadelphia, also points out that she is not a fan of the Bird Box Challenge.

"I understand why people would want to try this challenge on their own, but they need to realize that those who have low vision or are blind have adapted to their impairment and most likely have been trained by specialists," she said. "We're very lucky to have great vision rehabilitation specialists here at the William Feinbloom Center who help patients navigate safely in their environment."

Dr. Kenny does acknowledge, however, that the movie did parallel some important tactics that she and other specialists use daily to help those who are blind and visually impaired. This includes auditory clues, such as when the characters in the movie use a bell or the chirps of birds to guide them; in addition to the use of tactile approaches - when the characters used a rope to guide them through the woods.

While stressing that no one should try mimicking driving while blindfolded as one scene depicted, Dr. Kenny notes that self-driving cars may one day allow those who are blind to drive again. "It's a hot topic at many low-vision conferences recently," she said.

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, Public Health, Blindness and Low Vision Studies, Biomedicine, Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology. Salus operates four clinical facilities in the Philadelphia area that provide highly specialized vision, hearing and balance, and speech-language pathology services. The University has more than 1,200 students,

and more than 14,000 alumni worldwide. To celebrate our centennial anniversary, and for more information, please visit www.salus.edu.