



For Immediate Release  
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### **Salus, Hampton Universities Label New Partnership ‘Historic’**

**Elkins Park, Pa.** — Salus University Pennsylvania College of Optometry (PCO) recently partnered with Hampton University, one of the nation’s historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) based in Hampton, Virginia, to offer a new articulation agreement to address the shortage of Black student representation in optometric education and the healthcare profession. Paula Harmon Boone, OD, director of the National Optometric Association (NOA) “Visioning the Future” HBCU Mentorship Program and NOA trustee, helped initiate and lead the effort.

“It is important to recognize that the agreement comes at a time of the Black Lives Matter movement. The goal of the NOA has always been to advance the visual health of minority populations; to uphold the ideals of cultural diversity, equality and inclusivity in eyecare,” Dr. Boone said. “The agreement between Salus PCO and Hampton University will help ensure comprehensive eye and vision healthcare, and decrease health disparities in the Black community as it increases the number of Black optometrists in the U.S.”

Mirroring the goal of the NOA’s mentorship program to address the lack of diversity among optometry students, the partnership was established to give students who successfully complete a Bachelor of Science degree at Hampton a pathway to earn a Doctor of Optometry (OD) degree through the 4+4 program at Salus PCO. Under the agreement, students enrolled in the program will receive both financial and academic assistance from the NOA, advisement from the Pre-Health program at Hampton and mentorship from a Salus PCO faculty advisor.

“This is a unique opportunity to work directly with the school’s advisors in nurturing relationships and providing a pathway for their best students to pursue their optometry degree,” Salus PCO assistant professor **Ruth Shoge, OD ‘06, Resident ‘07, MPH**, said. “We look forward to this relationship and the doors it may open with other HBCUs.”

She added that the collaboration is historic for both schools, recognizing that the partnership with Hampton will help Salus PCO continue to recruit a diverse student body.

According to the Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO), statistics show minority races have increased more than 30 percent in enrollment at optometry schools nationwide, while Black student enrollment has stayed around three percent. The pipeline created by the partnership aims to increase the number of Black students pursuing an optometric education, creating accessible equitable care – and improved health outcomes for all patients – according to the NOA and officials from both schools.

Spearheading the partnership, **Monae Kelsey, MS, associate director of Student Engagement and assistant director of Admissions**, and **Shanae Johnson, MBA, Admissions officer**, started recruitment efforts with Hampton on behalf of Salus several years ago. The agreement was also driven in part by Michael Druitt, Pre-Health program director at Hampton, who emphasized that the NOA and Dr. Boone have already helped several Hampton students pursuing an optometric education.

“Developing special relations such as this can take some time,” Druitt said. “However, the catalyst behind this partnership is my friend, Dr. Paula Boone from the NOA, Indiana University School of Optometry and Virginia Union University alumna – and the first African American female optometrist in the state of Virginia.”

Founded during the 1969 Civil Rights Movement by Dr. C. Clayton Powell, the late Dr. John Howlette and 25 other Black optometrists in Richmond, Virginia, the NOA promotes optometrists of color. The NOA creates opportunities, both professionally and academically, delivering education programs, such as the “Three Silent Killers” initiative, to increase awareness and decrease visual impairment from diseases like diabetes and glaucoma. The organization has provided nearly \$25 million in scholarships throughout its history and remains committed to addressing eye health disparities for underserved communities.

Salus partners with colleges and universities on a local, regional and national scale to offer specialized opportunities to students who want to accelerate their academic careers in health science.

For more information about the agreement or any of the University’s academic partnerships, contact the Office of Admissions at 215.780.1305 or visit [salus.edu/admissions](https://salus.edu/admissions).

### **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, and speech-language pathology services. The University has more than 1,200 students, and more than 14,000 alumni worldwide. For more information, please visit [www.salus.edu](https://www.salus.edu).

### **About Hampton University**

Founded in 1868 along the banks of the Virginia Peninsula near the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, rich in history and steeped in tradition, Hampton University is a dynamic, progressive institution of higher education, providing a broad range of technical, liberal arts, and graduate degree programs.

One of the top historically black universities in the world, Hampton University is dedicated to the promotion of learning, the building of character, and the preparation of promising students for positions of leadership and service. Hampton University is a tight knit community of learners and educators, representing 49 states and 25 territories and nations.