



With its first cohort set to graduate this year, Salus University Pennsylvania College of Optometry's Accelerated Scholars Program has proven to be a success. This three-year program is the first in the United States. In fact, this inaugural group of 10 students secured a 100% pass rate on Part 1 and 2 of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry.

While the Accelerated Scholars Program is 36 months in duration and the Traditional Program is 44 months, equivalent credits are earned. The difference? The credits are distributed in a unique way, and by using a quarter system, the Scholars Program is compressed and therefore more demanding with fewer breaks. The academic year for the Traditional Program is divided into three terms/semesters.

The Scholars program was conceived after the release of the 2010 Carnegie Report, "Educating Physicians: A Call for Reform of Medical Schools and Residency," which highlighted how higher education is changing, group learning is becoming more important, and the issues of cost and time associated with earning a medical degree, according to Salus PCO interim dean Dr. Melissa Trego. She noted other fields such as dentistry, pharmacy and law have already made the accelerated switch.

Before the first Scholars Program cohort began in July 2014, a small pilot group of Traditional Program students were given the opportunity to accelerate their clinical skills and enter The Eye Institute, the University's main clinical facility, five months earlier than usual. The scholars program emphasizes guided independent learning, lecture and laboratory instruction, small group and case-based learning, as well as web-enhanced instruction.

A focus on individual student learning styles and inherent leadership skills guides the path for Scholars students. "The goal wasn't to create a better product or a better clinician. It was to create the same clinician in a shorter amount of time," said Dr. Trego. "I think we're able to create a great product. The program allows for strong mentorship with the students because of the size of the program. There has been a traditional way in which Optometrists are trained and therefore many believe that there's a certain way that training should occur. What we're finding is that students

have different expectations now.”

For more about the Accelerated Scholars program, [click here](#).