

Continuing the Effort

The Vision Studies program at Pitt is one of the longest running university programs of those that were begun in the 1960s. Following the retirement of Dr. Peabody in 1988, Dr. George J. Zimmerman has provided leadership.

Over the years, many vision professionals have provided instructional and lecture support that has added to the substance and richness of the courses offered. At the risk of missing those who have helped in this way, we wish to acknowledge: Mary Moore, Verna Hart, Ruth Hawkins, Marge Ward, Rick Welsh, Audrey Smith, Diane Wormsley, Kathy Daugherty, Joe Wassermann, Tony Evancic, Janet Klineman, Andy Frazier, Debby Holzapfel, Mike Pini, Felicity Mensache, Christine Roman-Lantzy, Ellyn Ross, Lynn Fox, Rebecca Renshaw, Frances Mary D'Andrea, JoAnne Devine, Brenda Loughery, Justin Kaiser, etc.

As federal funding diminished, the program has adapted by providing the opportunity for many more students to participate through the introduction of distance learning. Hybrid online classes for TVIs were first offered in 2003, and for O&M in 2005.

The Vision Studies Program is an excellent example of how the University of Pittsburgh has fulfilled the ideal mission of a university to provide teaching, research, and service to the community in which it exists. As professionals dedicated to assuring that children and adults who are blind or visually impaired have every opportunity to lead full and productive lives, the members of the Penn-Del Chapter of AER express our sincere appreciation to the University of Pittsburgh, its officers, and its staff in the School of Education and in the Vision Studies program for all that you have done to support our mission and the community of children and adults who are blind or visually impaired.



Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the University of Pittsburgh's Vision Studies Program

April 24, 2014

Best Western Premier the Central Hotel and
Conference Center, Harrisburg, PA

History

The 1960s a decade of social change, focused on the civil rights of minority citizens including people with disabilities. In 1963 PL 88-164 provided funding for the professional preparation of personnel for all categories of children with disabilities. This funding was used for stipends to attract students and for faculty positions.

Dr. Jack Birch of the School of Education obtained a grant to bring some of this funding to Pitt. He recruited Dr. Ralph Peabody from Michigan for the faculty position. Staff of the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) had recommended Dr. Peabody for his success in integrating young children who were blind into public day schools. In the fall of 1964, the first full-time students supported by federal stipends began classes at Pitt.

Participating in summer workshops for orientation and mobility (O&M), Peabody met O&M leaders Stan Suterko and Dick Hoover and was convinced of the value of adding O&M to the Pitt program. Funding for an O&M faculty position was included in the 1968 grant, and subsequently Dr. Bruce Blasch was hired. The first students began their training in the fall of 1969. Pitt was the one of the first university programs to provide both O&M and teachers of the visually impaired (TVI) training for its students.

Community concern was growing about the needs of children who were deafblind or multi-handicapped, which were entering school programs in increasing numbers in the 1960s as a result of the rubella epidemic. This led the Pitt program to conduct summer programs, one funded by AFB, demonstrating that these children could benefit from formal instruction.

In the 1970s Dr. Mary Moore worked with inventors of the Optacon device that enabled individuals who are blind to read print without Braille. She was the first in the country to train other university professors in the use of the Optacon.

Contributions to the Field

In addition to training more than 800 TVIs and O&M specialists, Pitt developed a leadership-training program in vision studies at the doctoral level. Many of the graduates went on to develop and/or coordinate personnel preparation and leadership programs at other universities where they have extended Pitt's influence in the training of many more TVIs and O&M specialists. Those universities are located in Ohio, Arizona, Colorado, New York, North Carolina, and the Canadian Province of British Columbia

Graduates of the Pitt program have made innumerable contributions to the literature of the field both as authors and editors. Several Pitt graduates are developers of or contributors to some of the primary textbooks in university programs for vision personnel.

Graduates have also contributed research, which has fundamentally changed some of the methods and procedures used in serving children and adults who are visually impaired. These changes have taken place in early intervention, O&M, cortical visual impairment, braille literacy, the evaluation and certification of professional personnel, and other areas as well.

Graduates of the leadership program as well as many teachers have also provided the backbone and support of our professional associations. Many Pitt graduates have served as officers, and board and committee members on both the national and local levels.

***APH Hall of Fame
plaques honoring 50
years of the Pitt Vision
Studies Program***



University of Pittsburgh

With gratitude to the
Personnel and Leadership
Preparation Program

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