

CALIFORNIA LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

+

JOHN TRACY CENTER

June 2026

California Lutheran University (CLU) and John Tracy Center (JTC) are proud to announce a formal partnership to deliver CLU's Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) Education Specialist Credential and Master of Science program. This partnership begins with the Summer 2026 cohort, and classes start June 22nd.

ABOUT CALIFORNIA LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY

Founded in 1959 and formally recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution since 2016, California Lutheran University is home to a vibrant community of students from 67 countries, representing a wide spectrum of backgrounds, faiths, and perspectives. CLU's graduate programs are led by dedicated, accomplished faculty who work with small cohorts, because the university believes that pursuing your passion and discovering your purpose is deeply personal work.

CLU's DHH Education Specialist Credential and Master of Science program is a rigorous, CTC-accredited two-year hybrid graduate program designed specifically for working professionals. Grounded in evidence-based research and practical fieldwork, it fully aligns with California's Teaching Performance Expectations for Education Specialists in Deaf and Hard of Hearing. After earning the credential, candidates can complete the Master of Science in the Education of the Deaf with just three additional courses, opening doors to career advancement across California's schools.

"The collaboration between the Cal Lutheran and John Tracy Center demonstrates the power of partnership in advancing innovative, practice-based preparation for educators of Deaf and Hard of Hearing students. We are excited to help in this shared effort to prepare the next generation of educators."

— Michael R. Hillis, Dean & Professor, Graduate School of Education

ABOUT JOHN TRACY CENTER

Founded in 1943, John Tracy Center is recognized as the national leader in early-childhood listening and spoken language education for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. JTC is a top center for pediatric audiology in the Los Angeles area, and the world's largest private provider of services to children with, or at risk of, hearing loss. What makes JTC unique is its approach: every intervention actively involves the family, because research consistently shows that family-centered care produces the strongest outcomes for children.

JTC's commitment to preparing DHH educators stretches back more than 70 years. Since 1953, JTC has partnered with some of California's most respected universities, including USC, the University of San Diego and most recently Mount Saint Mary's University, to train and credential teachers of the deaf. This partnership with CLU is the proud continuation of that legacy.

"This partnership brings together two institutions with deep roots, shared values, and an unwavering belief that children who are deaf or hard of hearing deserve the most exceptionally prepared educators in the field. This is the next chapter in a tradition we are deeply proud of, and the educators this program sends into the world will carry that with them for the rest of their careers."

— Cathleen Mathes, President & CEO, John Tracy Center

THE TEAM LEADING THE PROGRAM

Dr. Renee Polanco Lucero, PhD, LSLS Cert. AVEd.

CLU DHH Program Director & JTC Chief Academic Officer

Dr. Lucero brings more than 25 years of experience in deaf education, teacher preparation, and program leadership. Her story begins at JTC itself — as an infant, she was diagnosed with hearing loss and enrolled in JTC’s Parent-Infant program. She went on to earn her PhD in Special Education from a joint program at Cal State Los Angeles and UCLA, and is a Listening and Spoken Language Specialist, Certified Auditory-Verbal Educator. She identifies as Latina and DeafBlind. Her career has spanned LAUSD, JTC, the Presbyterian Ear Institute, Utah State University, and ECHO Horizon School. She is exactly the kind of leader this program has been waiting for.

Angela Stokes, MEd, MEd, LSLS Cert. AVEd.

CLU DHH Co-Program Director & JTC Director of Instruction & Teacher Development

Ms. Stokes brings over 35 years of experience in deaf education, bilingual family support, early intervention, and teacher preparation — more than three decades of which have been with John Tracy Center. She is Latina and fluent in Spanish, holding advanced degrees from the University of San Diego and USC. Her work at JTC has shaped hundreds of educators and the families and children they serve.

Mel Spence, Ed.D.

CLU Assistant Dean of Assessment & Accreditation, Program Liaison

Dr. Spence is a Professor in the Department of Learning & Teaching in the Graduate School of Education. As part of her role in assessment and accreditation, she also serves as the TPA coordinator for the department. Dr. Spence completed her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at CLU and her M.Ed. in Severe Special Needs at Boston College. She has 22 years of professional experience working with individuals with autism and spent 10 of those years as a teacher in Los Angeles Unified School District.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Program candidates will enter an interdisciplinary training environment unlike any other in California:

- Immersive access to JTC’s world-class network of audiologists, listening and spoken language specialists, speech-language pathologists, DHH educators, professionals and remarkable families, in person and remotely
- A CTC-accredited curriculum fully aligned with California’s DHH Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) and the Standards for the Teaching Profession
- Practicum and fieldwork integrated within JTC’s richly resourced clinical and educational environment, one of the most exceptional DHH training settings in the country
- Interdisciplinary coursework rooted in listening and spoken language (LSL) philosophy grounded in high expectations for every child, and preparation designed to help you meet that bar
- Small cohort sizes and close mentorship from practitioners who are actively shaping the field

We are building something important here, something that will shape classrooms, families, and children across California for decades. We are genuinely thrilled to be doing this together, and we are so glad you are part of it. Please do not hesitate to reach out to either of us directly with any questions.

With excitement and gratitude,

Michael R. Hillis Ph.D.

*Dean & Professor – Graduate School of Education
California Lutheran University*

Cathleen Mathes M.S. ED, LSLS

*President & CEO
John Tracy Center*