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In winning an international award for her research, [Professor Roberta O'Shea](#)'s work shows that [Governors State University](#) is a place where [Physical Therapy Program](#) students can learn innovative, research-supported techniques that bring life-changing benefits.

Recently named Honorary Conductor for the 10th World Congress of Conductive Education, Dr. O'Shea is only the second American to win the award from the International Pető Association. "This legitimizes Conductive Education and also puts Governors State on the map for producing globally recognized research," she said.

Conductive Education, based on the work of Hungarian Professor András Pető, was developed specifically for people who have neurologically based motor disorders including children with cerebral palsy and adults who have experienced a stroke,

traumatic brain injury or Parkinson's Disease. Clients are treated in small groups of similar ability, which encourages them to work together. The conductor's commands are rhythmic and given to an eight-beat count.

"The conductor gives learning commands in a unique format. For example, I might say, 'I need to put my feet flat; I need to straighten my trunk; I need to shift my weight forward; and I need to stand up.' Everything is repeated three times so it's embedded in the brain and learned by the participants," she said.

Generating data was key in validating Conductive Education as an effective approach to treat patients. "We're not just saying people have better outcomes, we've studied how and why it's better and showed how the brain changes," she said.

O'Shea is referring to her research performed with the help of a \$1 million grant from the Coleman Foundation and two [GSU](#) grants. With the first grant, O'Shea trained professionals who wanted to learn more on how to incorporate Conductive Education into their practices, and later, with Governors State Professor Renee Theiss, she led MRI testing that found changes in brain connectivity.

The research project was done at the Center for Independence founded by Patti Herbst, the only other American to win the Honorary Conductor Award. O'Shea serves on the Board of Directors for the Countryside-based center.

As one of two Americans to be recognized by the Hungary-based International Pető Association, O'Shea said she's humbled.

"This makes me one of a small number of researchers worldwide who have been trusted as a professional advancing evidence-based research in Conductive Education," she said. "This proves we can collaborate. We can break barriers and work with researchers in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Hungary."

Winning the 2020 Honorary Conductor Award also brings visibility to innovative teaching being carried out in Governors State's [College of Health and Human Services](#), as well as a growing need to support young adults with disabilities in the Southland.

O'Shea and Dr. Ann Jackson, who helped create the Physical Therapy Program at Governors State 20 years ago, hope to create a Conductive Education Center at the university for high school graduates who are not quite ready for college.

"This will marry Conductive Education with an academic program that would strengthen people at two levels—physically and cognitively," O'Shea said.

"For high school graduates working on college readiness because they lack the stamina, for instance, and/or need to improve their study skills, we can develop a program that addresses both issues. This is a holistic approach that keeps people motivated."