



New Grants Focus On Preparing Special Education Personnel

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DURHAM, N.H. – With the startling increase over the past 20 years in diagnoses of children with autism, developmental issues, and other disabilities which affect the ability to learn, significant attention has been given to the overall lack of properly qualified special education teachers. In New Hampshire, special educators are in short supply, especially those with expertise in the areas of early childhood special education (ESCE), augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), and the education of children with low-incidence developmental disabilities.

The Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire, in collaboration with the departments of education and communication sciences and disorders at UNH, hopes to address this critical shortage through three new graduate-level certification programs supported by three U.S. Department of Education grants totaling \$2.4 million. These funds, to be received over four years, will aid in master's level training for 120 teachers. More than 60 percent of all funding will be used to support graduate students' tuition and fees associated with completing the programs.

The Preparing Excellent Teachers for All Young Children grant, a community-University partnership, will prepare 40 New Hampshire-certified ESCE teachers and develop a teacher education program that could be applied nationally. Participants in this two-year master's of education degree program will gain the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to serve the needs of young children with disabilities and their families. Participants will benefit from seminars via distance technology, a full-year internship experience, and a mentoring network for support in the program and after graduation. This grant is a partnership between the Institute on Disability and UNH department of education.

For many students with significant disabilities, the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) techniques, including the use of assistive technology, is a part of daily social interaction and learning. Yet there are few university degree programs in New England that prepare teachers and therapists to teach the general education curriculum to students who use AAC. The Preparation of Speech Language Pathology Personnel in AAC grant will support more than 40 master's level graduate students in speech language pathology, specializing in AAC assessment and intervention, to apply AAC techniques to promote the learning of core academic content by students with disabilities. Participants will benefit from full-time coursework at UNH, advanced content modules available via distance education at several other New England universities, and hands-on classroom experiences which promote increased membership, participation, and learning within the general education classroom by students with disabilities.

The Beyond Access for Teacher Education grant will support the preparation and certification of 40 teachers who will collaborate with families, general educators, related service providers, and other school personnel to assure that students ages 6-21 with low-incidence developmental disabilities learn core academic content from the general education curriculum and achieve their Individualized Educational Program (IEP) goals. Innovative coursework will focus on developmental disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, augmentative communication, literacy, and positive behavior supports, as well as effective collaborative teaming and facilitation skills.

The Institute on Disability at the University of New Hampshire was established in 1987 to provide a coherent university-based focus for the improvement of knowledge, policies, and practices related to the lives of persons with disabilities and their families. Its mission is to advance policies and systems changes, promising practices, education, and research that strengthen communities to ensure full access, equal opportunities, and participation for all persons. For more information about the Institute on Disability and its programs, visit www.iod.unh.edu or call 603-862-4320.

