

Part-time Distance Learning Master's Degree Program in Speech-Language Pathology

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Personnel preparation and service delivery go hand in hand as we prepare young professionals to meet the needs of children with communication disorders and delays enrolled in exceptional student education programs. Throughout the country, the greatest shortage of personnel to work with exceptional children with communication disorders is in the public schools. These positions are either vacant or filled with out-of-field or under-qualified persons (often with individuals with undergraduate degrees, who lack academic preparation and clinical experiences in diagnostic evaluation and treatment with this increasingly diverse population).

The state of Florida, recognizing the limits of preparation available at the undergraduate level, passed legislation in 1989 requiring a Master's degree to be certified as a speech-language pathologist in the public schools. Due to the shortage of master's level personnel in the schools, superintendents and administrators lobbied and altered the legislation to allow persons to be conditionally employed with the requirement that they be accepted into a graduate program within two years. Problems of program accessibility and the necessity of part-time enrolment for these employees immediately arose.

In response to this need, the Department of Communication Disorders at Florida State University instituted a part-time distance learning Master's degree program in the rural Panhandle area of the state for **currently employed, under-qualified personnel serving exceptional children with communication disorders in the public schools**. Twenty-four distance learning students, from 10 school districts, are currently enrolled in this 10 semester program. This cohort began in June 1999 and will complete their course of studies in August 2002. Courses are transmitted via two-way audio and video from the Florida State University main campus site in Tallahassee to the University of West Florida Main Campus in Pensacola.

If you have further questions about this initiative, please contact Linda Gessner, Department of Communication Disorders, 107 Regional Rehabilitation Center, The Florida State University, Tallahassee, Florida, 32306-1200, (850) 644-9141, lgessner@garnet.acns.fsu.edu.

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