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For Immediate Release

U.S. Department of Education grant to Governors State University addresses critical shortage in speech-language pathologists

University Park, October 29, 2004 – African American, Latino and other minority children are at risk of being overrepresented in special education classes because of a shortage of culturally knowledgeable and bilingual professionals in speech-language pathology.

A new grant awarded to the College of Health Professions at Governors State University will help change that.

The \$788,592 personnel preparation grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services will assist bilingual and culturally competent minorities who are earning their Master's in Communication Disorders degree through Governors State. The students will meet the Illinois licensure requirements for speech-language pathologists once they graduate from the program.

According to an Illinois State Board of Education survey, speech-language pathologists rank second in the state for unfilled positions, with shortages in 440 school districts. The survey also reports a shortage of minorities in the profession.

The shortage is critical. Dr. Sandra Mayfield, professor of Communication Disorders at Governors State, said, "Ninety percent of the professionals in the field report feeling unprepared to service culturally and linguistically diverse communities." Yet Mayfield explained that at least 8.8 million five to 17-year-old children, nationwide, speak a language other than English.

The GSU program will prepare speech-language pathologist who are better able to handle the needs of the students they serve in Illinois schools.

Over the next four years, the grant will provide tuition, fees, books, tutorial services, and other academic supports for students while they work on their Master of Health Sciences degree in Communication Disorders. "The grant provides an opportunity for qualified bilingual, minority, and ability-challenged students to participate in a unique program for developing culturally competent and bilingual speech-language pathologists," Mayfield said.

She added, "The program costs reflect the built-in support systems for ensuring students' successful completion of the program, especially those with families and limited finances."

When these students graduate, they will serve over 1,000 young and school-age children annually in public school and early childhood programs.

Students eligible for the assistance will be selected from Governor State University's undergraduate and graduate programs, as well as undergraduate communication disorders programs across the state.

The students will attend classes in the Governors State University Communication Disorders master's program in University Park and at the Pilsen community's El Valor Center, in Chicago.

Mayfield, who wrote the grant for the college, teaches on GSU's campus and at the El Valor site. Her expertise extends beyond the classroom. She is a certified and licensed speech-language pathologist and works with children who have oral language disabilities.

She has a particular interest in the social, cultural, and political aspects of educating children with speech-language disabilities. Mayfield stresses that "It is important to accurately distinguish between cultural communication variations that should be addressed in the school curriculum versus communication disorders that warrant special education services."

Interested students can apply for scholarships under the grant at www.govst.edu/chhs/grants/cdis/. For more information, contact Dr. Sandra Mayfield at 708-534-4598.

