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THE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM OF GEORGIA

BACCALAUREATE AND MASTER'S DEGREES

NEW PROPOSAL FORMS
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LETTER OF INTENT

Institution: Armstrong Atlantic State University

Institutional Contact: Dr. Ellen Whitford, Vice President for Academic Affairs

Date: 7-29-09

School/Division: College of Education

Department: Adult Education

Name of Proposed Program: Master of Education for Reading Specialist Degree (Advanced)

Degree: Master of Education

Major: Reading

Degree Inscription: Master of Education for Reading Specialist Degree

CIP Code: 13.1315 Anticipated Starting Date: Fall 2010

Program Classification: Graduate

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M. MIDDLETON

This advanced master of education degree is designed to develop a reading specialist who can work to improve the literacy skills of individuals from pre-school through adulthood. The range of training for this degree will produce a reading specialist who is highly marketable because s/he can serve multiple constituencies. The recipient of this degree will be able to work collaboratively within grades pre-K through 12 in public schools as a reading teacher, literacy coach, or literacy program leader. He or she will be capable of working consultatively within school districts to help improve literacy skills on a district wide scale. In addition, this reading specialist will be capable of working directly with community agencies that foster literacy skills development for adults through program planning and tutor training. The reading specialist developed through this degree program can serve as a resource in reading and writing instruction for educational support personnel, including teachers, administrators, and community agencies. He or she will also serve as an advocate for struggling readers at all levels.

"Creating A More Educated Georgia"

www.usg.edu

This program will be aligned with the *Standards for Reading Professionals, Revised* as published by the International Reading Association (IRA) as well as the *Standards for Literacy Coaches* as prepared by the IRA in collaboration with the National Council of Teachers of English, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, the National Science Teachers Association, and the National Council for the Social Studies. These standards reflect the current trends in the field of reading as well as the preparation of reading professionals.

The program is designed to meet the following goals:

- Develop reading specialists who have a deep understanding of literacy and best practices for improving literacy skills.
- Develop highly skilled reading specialists who can
 - serve a broad spectrum of constituencies.
 - serve the literacy skills needs of individuals within the AASU service area in southeast Georgia.
 - reduce school dropouts resulting from limited mastery of literacy skills.
 - prevent early learning difficulties that may ultimately lead to school failure.
 - support area communities' efforts to improve the literacy skills of their citizenry.
 - support efforts to increase the literacy skills of the area's labor force.

Currently, the Georgia Department of Education cites the high school drop out rate for Chatham County as 8.1 %, a figure that is significantly above the state target rate of 5.8%. Chatham County is the sixth largest county in Georgia and lies within the Armstrong service area. In 2008, 14.3% or 307 of Georgia's public schools failed to make appropriate yearly progress (AYP).

Academic tutoring and coaching have helped the majority of Georgia schools meet appropriate yearly progress. It is not anticipated that the need for trained literacy coaches and tutors will decrease. The reading specialist developed through the AASU program will be prepared to train literacy coaches and tutors and to personally coach literacy success in individual schools or across school districts.

The United States Census revealed that the median household income for the City of Savannah is \$28, 883. The 2008 Self-Sufficiency Standard for Georgia report stated that 38,000 people in Chatham County live below the poverty line. Similar numbers are high for Bryan and Effingham counties that also lie within the Armstrong geographic service area. Seventeen percent of adults in Georgia test below basic literacy levels.

Adult Literacy Rates by County 2003 U.S. DoE Institute of Education Sciences Report

County in Georgia	Literacy Rate Below Basic	County Population
Camden	13%	29,999
Chatham	15%	174,411
Effingham	14%	31,591
Liberty	18%	37,311
Long	22%	7,587
Macintosh	20%	8,146

The Georgia Budget and Policy Institute's analysis of a recent study found that one in three Georgia workers or 900,000 individuals failed to graduate from high school or earn a graduate equivalency diploma (GED). In the same report, the institute noted that 1.7 million adult Georgians who completed high school did not go on to either technical school or college. Large numbers of these individuals reside within southeast Georgia and within Armstrong's geographic service area. The need for improved literacy skills is evident. The reading specialist developed by the proposed program will be prepared to assume a leadership role in agencies that seek to improve the literacy skills of the Georgia workforce.

In October 2008, the College of Education conducted an online survey of 144 principals in the AASU geographic service region. The survey received a 15% return rate. One hundred percent of the respondents answered in the affirmative to the following two survey questions:

1. Armstrong's College of Education is interested in developing a master level program in reading. Is this a program that would be helpful to your school?
2. If Armstrong's College of Education offered such a master level program in reading, would you encourage your teachers to pursue this degree?

This new program will support the following two tenets of the mission statement to which Armstrong Atlantic State University is committed:

- Providing students with intellectual challenges, professional experiences, and extracurricular activities that prepare them for citizenship, leadership, career success, and a lifelong passion for learning.
- Advancing teaching, scholarship, creative endeavors, service to the community by supporting the collaborative initiatives of students, faculty, and staff.

This program is a priority because it specifically supports a key goal of the AASU strategic plan which is as follows: **Goal 2. Establish Armstrong Atlantic State University as a leadership institution and a dynamic partner in advancing the success of the coastal region.** The program will support the institution's commitment to serve the coastal region through its production of reading specialists who are thoroughly trained to improve literacy skills of children, adolescents, and low literacy adults.

The Master of Education for Reading Specialist degree program consists of 36 semester hours of course work plus numerous field based experiences. It will fully integrate the College of Education's Conceptual Framework and will embody its six tenets: respect for diversity, the essentials of professionalism, the importance of collaboration, the value of authentic assessment, the merit of reflection, and the utility of technology.

The College of Education at Armstrong offers both Master of Arts in Teacher Education degree programs leading to initial certification as well as advanced Master of Education Degrees appropriate for advanced graduate level studies. A Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia and Georgia Professional Standards Commission approved reading endorsement is also offered by the College. This new degree program will not require expansion of resources or the addition of new personnel at the program's start up. At this time, the College of Education employs five full-time faculty and two part-time faculty members who hold the credentials necessary to provide the program's literacy course work. In addition, existing courses from the College of Education and the College of Liberal Studies will be part of the program of study thus reducing the number of new courses. No additional resources will be needed for program start-

up. Additional resources will be required, of course, as the program grows and student demand increases. There is the expectation that additional faculty, supplies, library materials, equipment, and instructional materials will be required following the program's first two years of operation as more students enter the program.

The College of Education plans to recruit an initial cohort of twenty students with the expectation that it will graduate a minimum of twenty reading specialists per year. Students will be recruited from among the graduates of the College of Education's teacher education programs as well as from the population of certified professionals in the AASU service region. Courses will be offered in formats typical of other AASU graduate programs to include traditional, combined online and traditional, and fully online courses. The program will be housed in the College of Education through its existing departmental arrangement and will not require additional or new organizational units. The addition of this program of study will not require a SACS substantive change report or visit.

Based upon the cited areas of need along with the clear indication of school administrators' interest in and support of such a degree program, the College of Education faculty members believe that there will be significant student demand. The proposed degree program will result in a highly skilled professional who can serve multiple constituencies each of which shares the goal of improving literacy skills. The degree recipient's specialized skill set will make him or her highly marketable to individual public schools, school districts, and community agencies such as Goodwill, Royce Learning Center, or community-based rehabilitation programs that strive to improve the literacy skills of persons entering or attempting to remain in the job market. This program will produce professionals highly skilled in serving the immediate literacy needs of the communities in the university's geographic service area as well as those of the state.