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SHU Hosts First Literacy Conference

Karen C. Waters, *Sacred Heart University*

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The Literacy Conference was conceived by Karen Waters (right), clinical assistant professor and director of the Connecticut Literacy Specialist Program, and Eleanor Osborne, adjunct professor of advanced literacy methods courses.

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On April 13, Sacred Heart University's Farrington College of Education conducted its very first Literacy Conference. The event was free and open to the public and was attended by more than 100 people. It was facilitated by SHU's Karen Waters, clinical assistant professor and director of the Connecticut Literacy Specialist Program (CLSP), a state-approved advanced reading certification program.

Waters and Dean Jim Carl welcomed participants as they enjoyed a continental breakfast before attending a morning of interactive and innovative workshops conducted by this year's reading certification candidates graduating from the CLSP. The theme of the conference was "Uncommon Teaching in a Common Core World," embracing the new Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted by 46 states across the country.

Waters said the event was a "capstone experience for our reading candidates, as well as community outreach and staff development for anyone attending." Candidates received a commemorative lapel pin for their accomplishments and will earn advanced state-endorsed reading certification as a reading consultant.

The CLSP program was created in 2002 by Edward T. Murray, professor of education at SHU for the past 33 years. Murray is also responsible for the design and implementation of several masters programs within the College of Education. The conference itself was conceived by Waters and Eleanor Osborne, adjunct professor of advanced literacy methods courses. Osborne oversaw the work of the candidates for the past two semesters as they developed their presentations through two courses leading to advanced certification.

"We wanted our candidates to have the experience of presenting to an audience with a scope larger than the one that a traditional classroom presentation would provide," Waters said. "As

reading consultants, they will be called upon regularly to conduct staff development within their schools and districts. We wanted them to be prepared for this type of work. A conference format prepares them to become established reading professionals, and this authentic forum gives them visibility."

Workshop sessions encompassed many aspects of literacy instruction, including phonological awareness, interactive read-aloud in the elementary and secondary school, research-based interventions to support the struggling reader and narrative writing using mentor texts, conferring, differentiating instruction and poetry. Additionally, there were several workshops pertaining to the Common Core State Standards emphasizing close reading strategies and text-dependent questions. Dr. T.J. Leonard, adjunct instructor at SHU, also conducted a presentation entitled "Awakening Your Inner Poet." Other adjunct instructors of literacy courses in attendance included Bonnie Campbell, Mary Dolan Colette, Mary Misovich and Janine Goss, who teach the foundational certification courses required for reading certification.

Event invitations were extended to the Bridgeport and Fairfield Public Schools, the University of Bridgeport, Catholic Diocese of Bridgeport, SHU's MAT candidates and the Stamford Cohort in Literacy. MAT candidates that attended received a certificate of completion for attending their first formal professional development activity.

"We did not anticipate such an incredible response to our invitation and are very excited to have had our first conference. We are planning to make this an annual event and are grateful to Dr. Carl for his enthusiastic support in helping to make this event possible," Waters concluded.