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This is her second grant from the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority



Professor Ciara Leydon, left, uses a manikin to show students how to perform a flexible endoscopic swallow study in SLP classes at the Center for Healthcare Education. The CHEFA grant will be used to purchase high-fidelity, high-tech simulation equipment that will provide a more realistic and comprehensive learning experience for students. At right is Professor Jill Douglass.

Ciara Leydon, associate professor in Sacred Heart University's College of Health Professions, has received a \$70,000 grant from the Connecticut Health and Educational Facilities Authority (CHEFA) to benefit students in the speech-language pathology (SLP) program.

The grant will go toward a high-fidelity, full-body manikin that will help train students in a range of professional competencies, according to Leydon. This is the second consecutive year Leydon has received a grant from CHEFA. CHEFA is a quasi-public agency that provides access to tax-exempt financing and other financial assistance, including grant programs, to educational institutions, healthcare providers, childcare providers, cultural institutions, and other eligible non-profit entities. CHEFA derives its revenues from the annual loan servicing fee it charges its clients and operates without any state or taxpayer funds.

“Students in speech-language pathology will benefit from high-fidelity simulation activities to practice clinical skills and gain confidence, while completing a variety of simulation scenarios pertaining to speech, language and swallowing impairments,” Leydon said. “What is particularly exciting about this collaborative work is that we will focus on more than the teaching of technical skills.”

“CHEFA is pleased to provide this impactful grant to Sacred Heart University. The grant award will support student education in the field of speech and language therapy. By working on a realistic manikin, students will be prepared for working with patients in the community and entering the workforce with real world skills and training,” said Jeanette Weldon, CHEFA’s executive director.

Jill Douglass, assistant professor in SLP, will oversee the use of simulation to support students’ skills acquisition and their effective implementation of counseling techniques. Professor Taryn Rogers, director of clinical education in SLP, will work with community partners, such as employers and clinical supervisors, to monitor student preparedness for clinical practice. Jason Blando, lead simulation technologist in SLP, will assist with the logistics of implementing simulation into various parts of the program’s curricula.

“We were delighted to receive funding from CHEFA to expand simulation-driven coursework in our undergraduate and graduate programs in speech-language pathology,” Leydon said. “This grant will allow us to implement high-fidelity simulation and systematically assess the benefits of simulated clinical experiences in supporting our students’ effective transition from the classroom to clinical practice in speech-language pathology.”