SHU Anticipates Launch of New Master’s Degree in Speech-Language Pathology

Rhea Paul
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Professor Robin Danzak teaches a speech-language pathology course.

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Sacred Heart University’s College of Health Professions plans to inaugurate a new master’s degree program in speech-language pathology. Aiming for a start in fall 2014, the program is designed to require five terms of study to be completed in two years.

“The physical therapy and occupational therapy programs in SHU’s College of Health Professions place a lot of graduate students in various agencies throughout the state, and we kept hearing from them that there was a shortage of speech pathologists, especially in educational settings,” says Rhea Paul, a professor of speech-language pathology and director of the new program. “We became convinced that a third program in the state would be valuable to our students, our clients and the university.”

Sacred Heart will be the only university in the state offering degrees in occupational therapy, physical therapy and speech-language pathology. “Those are the three related allied medical professions, and we’ll have them all in one school,” Paul says. “That means we will have the opportunity to do a lot of pre-service inter-professional education that really isn’t present in other programs in Connecticut.”

Paul says that demand for speech-language pathologists is high nationally and across the state. “About 60 percent of speech-language pathologists work in schools, and schools are finding it very difficult to fill all the positions because of increased demands for these services in autism and literacy programs,” she says. “The competition to get into this field is so high that there aren’t enough seats in the existing academic programs to accommodate everyone who is interested in entering the field.”

Two new professors have been hired for the program and three more will be added. Robin Danzak, an assistant professor of speech-language pathology, was recently awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study in Italy this spring.
Though the master’s program is not anticipated until fall, some undergraduate students are currently enrolled in prerequisite basic science courses to prepare them for the graduate work.

Coursework for the degree will include learning to work with speech and language disorders in young and school-age children, as well as with adults in medical settings. Students will also learn to deal with stuttering, voice problems, mispronunciations, language and reading disorders, traumatic brain injuries, autism, cerebral palsy and swallowing issues. The inaugural class will be made up of 25 students.