

## A Web-based Doctoral Program to Develop Culturally Responsive Special Education Faculty

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**Abstract:** To increase the number of culturally responsive special education university faculty, NAU developed distance education doctoral programs, Faculty for Inclusive Rural/Multicultural Special-educator Training (FIRST) and Leaders in Exceptional-education Addressing Diversity (LEAD). These faculty will be able to effectively address Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Exceptional (CLDE) student issues by conducting research, developing policies, and preparing special education teachers to appropriately serve the needs and ultimately improve the lives of Mexican-American and Native American students with disabilities.

### Shortage of Special Education Faculty

There is a critical shortage of special education faculty in U.S. universities who are available to meet the demands of preparing special education teachers, implementing research which leads to improved practice, and developing 21<sup>st</sup> century policymakers and administrators (Dil, Geiger, Hoover, & Sindelar, 1993; Pierce, Smith, & Clark, 1992; Sindelar, Buck, Carpenter, & Watanabe, 1993; Smith, Pion, Tyler, Sindelar, & Rosenberg, 2001; Smith & Salzberg, 1994). The demand for faculty in special education in the United States is greater than the current supply of doctoral level persons available, and 30% of the university faculty position vacancies in special education go unfilled (Smith et al., 2001). In addition, Smith et al. (2001) report that since 1992, although the number of faculty vacancies has not changed, the pool of applicants to fill these vacancies is much smaller today. In special education, 255 doctorates are conferred annually, but over 50% (130) of these doctoral graduates do not become faculty members or are only in faculty positions for a short time (Smith et al., 2001).

### Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) Faculty Need

By the end of this decade, the number of culturally diverse children ages 6 – 16 will have increased to 20% Hispanic, 17% African American, 5% Asian, and 2% Native American (Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003). In contrast, Futrell et al. cite the percentage of culturally diverse university faculty as only 5%. Focusing on the need for more Hispanic and Native American faculty, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports in 2001 that there were only 3.3% Hispanic and .7% Native American full-time instructional faculty and staff at U.S. colleges and universities. The Digest of Education Statistics (NCES, 2000) also reports a lack of doctorates conferred for CLD persons with only 3.2% of all doctoral degrees in 1998 for Hispanics and .5% for Native Americans. Clearly more CLD doctoral students and faculty are needed to increase the diversity in higher education compared with the growing numbers of diverse students in the school-age population. Related to the field of special education, comparatively few Hispanic and Native American students are receiving doctoral degrees. For example, in Spring 1998 Smith and Tyler (1998) report only 8 Hispanics received a doctorate in special education. Out of 1,015 students enrolled in special education doctoral programs, only 46 were of Hispanic background (Smith & Tyler, 1998). As of 2003, less than 20 Native Americans hold doctorates in special education (R. Gilmore, personal communication, January 20, 2003). It is important to increase the numbers of Hispanic and Native American faculty in special education so that they can effectively address diversity issues as well as provide mentorship to Hispanic and Native American future teachers who will in turn teach students with disabilities from Hispanic and Native American backgrounds (Dieker, Voltz & Epanchin, 2002; McSwain, 2002; Obiakor, 2001).

### Rural Need

The national shortage of special education teachers and general education teachers with training in special education is especially critical in rural areas (Westling & Whitten, 1996). Izzo (1999) reported that 1/5 of all rural special education teachers will leave their jobs annually to pursue employment in larger districts and communities. Few teacher education programs focus on the preparation of teachers for rural and remote areas (Eigenberger, Sealander, Peterson, Shellady, & Prater, 2001; Helge, 1984; Helge, 1991; Heimbecker, Medina, Peterson, Redsteer, & Prater, 2002; Peterson, Medina, Gilmer, Prater, & Stemmler, 2002).

### Doctoral Program Solutions

The FIRST and LEAD programs, funded by the U.S. Department of Education – Office of Special Education Programs, provide funding for tuition, books, travel to Flagstaff, Arizona, and family campus housing in the summer, and nominal research stipends. They also fund faculty research mentors, doctoral student mentors, and

enrichment seminars with nationally known researchers in bilingual special education. These innovative programs allow doctoral students to keep their positions in local school districts or universities during the school year while taking courses through web-based distance education. During the summers the students come to the Flagstaff NAU campus for intensive doctoral studies.

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