9-20-2012

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Teaching a Global Community

09.20.2012 | Campus and Community, Education, Culture and Society, International

The University of Dayton is developing new programs to serve a growing population of students on campus — and in the Dayton community — for whom English is not their first language.

The University's School of Education and Allied Professions hired two language education professionals this summer to design and implement programs in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). One program will prepare teachers as well as students in other majors to teach English. The other program will offer support services on campus for faculty, staff and students.

Colleen Gallagher, clinical faculty in TESOL, will oversee curriculum development of course programs leading to either a TESOL endorsement or certificate. She was most recently the TESOL coordinator at the University of Maryland.

The endorsement is an add-on to a state teaching license for teachers. The certificate program will require fewer credit hours and will be open to all students, particularly those who intend to travel abroad to teach English. Gallagher expects to offer the first TESOL courses this January.

"The population of immigrant students in Ohio and across the U.S. is growing rapidly," Gallagher said. "More and more teachers will have English language learners in their classrooms, and our teachers should have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to support these students."

Between 1997 and 2008, enrollment of English language learners in Ohio schools increased 174 percent, with most of the growth coming in 2007-08, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics.

"There has been a dramatic increase in the number of children in P12 schools who have difficulty speaking English. As a Catholic, Marianist university, we want to eliminate barriers to education, which is a critical component of social justice," said Kevin Kelly, dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions. "Our goal is that any teacher graduating from the University of Dayton will be prepared to support English language learners. We also want to be poised to meet the increased demand for English-as-a-second-language teachers."

With more than 1,400 international students from 40 different countries on campus, the University benefits from rich cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. Lisa Varandani, coordinator for TESOL initiatives, is tasked with ensuring that diversity promotes learning on campus and doesn't hinder it.

"As part of the University's global mission, we are committed to developing inclusive learning communities on campus," Varandani said. "We want to help faculty teach in a way that doesn't lose their international students or bore their domestic students."

With 18 years in the field teaching, training, writing textbooks and in program administration, Varandani is responsible for developing on-campus workshops and resources for faculty and staff working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. She will also develop programs to support students.

She began offering faculty workshops this summer, adding more in the fall semester. Faculty learn tips such as using multiple modes of input — verbal, written and visual aids — varied assessments and not relying heavily on cultural references and metaphors.

More information on these programs, as well as tips and resources for working with international students is available online at the Teaching a Global Student Community (TAGS) website. (See related link)

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