

Proposition: 04-14/15

Title: Proposition to Establish a Graduate Certificate Program in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)

Proposition Sponsors: Linda Spencer (College of Education)

Proposed Committee: Academic Affairs

Actual Committee: Scholastic Affairs

Prior Approvals (if appropriate):

Department:	2/05/2014- unanimous
College:	2/05/2014- unanimous
Associate Deans Advisory Council:	7/28/2014 - unanimous
Academic Deans Council:	NA
Graduate Council	4/3/2014 - unanimous

Proposition:

To offer a 12-credit certificate program in autism spectrum disorders for graduate students in special education. The details of the proposed program are provided in the Appendix.

Rationale:

This certificate program will not require new resources and have no cost to the university. It will, however, prepare educators and related services personnel to have the knowledge and skills required to provide a high quality education using research-based practices which will improve outcomes for culturally and linguistically diverse children with ASD and work effectively with their families.

With increasing numbers of children and youth identified with autism spectrum disorders – approximately 183 percent increase in five years – K-12 education is challenged in addressing the educational needs of these students. It is estimated that 1 in 88 children have an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) (CDC, 2012). By current standards, ASD is the second most common serious developmental disability after intellectual impairment (Center for Disease Control, 2011). According to Easter Seals Disability Services data for New Mexico for the 2010-2011 school year, there were 138 children with autism between the ages of 3-5, 781 children ages 6-11, 542 children between the ages of 12-17, and 84 children between the ages of 18-21, totaling 1545 children with autism in the state of New Mexico. According to Ms. Glenda Rodriguez, director of special education for Las Cruces Public school, there are currently over 200 students with ASD in the district.

One of the challenges faced by New Mexico school districts is employing teachers who have the unique training to work with students with ASD. For example, at the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year, there were 24 openings for special education teachers in six school districts (Las Cruces Public Schools, Alamogordo Public Schools, Hatch Valley Public Schools, Truth or Consequences Municipal Schools, Deming Public Schools, Gadsden Independent School District) surrounding NMSU, and five of these vacancies were specific to autism specialists. As the numbers of students identified with autism spectrum disorders

increase, the need for trained personnel to work with them will continue to increase. At this time, NMSU SPED/CD Department has a contract with LCPS to provide teacher training in the area of autism for 20 teachers over the next three years.

There is a critical need to prepare teachers with the foundational knowledge and practical skills for educating diverse learners on the autism spectrum. This can be accomplished by blending the most up-to-date theory and research with effective practices to ensure that every child with ASD receives the high-quality education he or she deserves. There are many variables affecting children with ASD such as communication deficits, social skills impairments, and behavioral challenges. Children with ASD require educators who possess the unique skills needed to provide clear and functional instruction. Every teacher will work with a child with autism sometime in his/her teaching career and must have the knowledge and skills to work effectively with this growing population.

As the educational leader in southern New Mexico, it falls to New Mexico State University to provide educators with the tools they will need to effectively teach learners on the autism spectrum.

Appendix I
Description of the Proposed Graduate Certificate Program
in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD):

The proposed Graduate Certificate Program satisfies the definition and requirements of a Graduate Certificate Program at NMSU as given in the Graduate Catalog:

The graduate certificate program of study is designed to develop or enhance a focused area of expertise. The primary purpose of a graduate certificate program is to provide specific skill training to meet employment needs locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.

A graduate certificate is a focused collection of courses, consisting of 12-18 credits, successfully completed by a student in a given discipline or a set of related disciplines.

The course descriptions and educational outcomes for each course in this certificate program are as follows:

SPED 585 Introduction to Autism (3 credit hours)

Course Description: This course will provide an overview of autism spectrum disorders as a triad of impairments, including historical and theoretical perspectives, assessment issues, and characteristics of autism, intervention programs, and family issues.

Educational outcomes to be achieved in the *Introduction to Autism* course include:

1. Explain the historical changes regarding the diagnosis and treatment of autism
2. Identify the diagnostic characteristics of autism
3. Infer the possible etiology of autism as suggested by recent neurobiological studies
4. Compare and contrast several different behavioral and educational programs
5. Describe issues related to CLD parents and siblings

SPED 586 Behavior and Autism (3 credit hours)

Course Description: This course will cover the first of the triad of impairments. Students will gain an understanding of the behaviors of children with autism. Students will examine several behavior management philosophies and research based interventions and how they can be applied in the educational setting. Attention will also be given to play skills. The family perspective and participation in the proactive behavior management process will be incorporated throughout the course.

Educational outcomes to be achieved in the *Behavior and Autism* course include:

1. Identify evidence-based interventions for children with autism
2. Explain the elements of applied behavior analysis and develop an ABA program
3. Explain the elements of structured teaching and visual supports
4. Explain the elements of pivotal response training

5. Explain behavioral interventions used in other countries and compare similarities with US programs

SPED 587 Social Skills and Autism (3 credit hours)

Course Description: This course will cover the second of the triad of impairments. Using a blend of researched based models and evidenced based practical applications, students will gain an understanding of the social skill deficits often associated with autism spectrum disorders. Review a variety of social cognition theories and explore effective social skill interventions for children functioning at a variety of levels along the autism spectrum. Prerequisite: Introduction to Autism or Consent of Instructor.

Educational outcomes to be achieved in the *Social Skills and Autism* course include:

1. Explain the patterns of socialization and play in individuals with ASD
2. Identify appropriate assessments for determining social and/or play/leisure skills
3. Identify appropriate intervention strategies for social and/or play/leisure skills
4. Explain the differences between the different approaches for increasing socialization

SPED 588 Communication and Autism (3 credit hours)

Course Description: This course will cover the third of the triad of impairments. Students will gain an overview of communication characteristics and difficulties often associated with autism spectrum disorders. Review current tools and strategies used to assess speech, language, and interaction skills. Use assessment results to identify needs and implement appropriate interventions. Explore a variety of intervention strategies aimed at building receptive, expressive, and pragmatic language of children functioning at a variety of levels along the autism spectrum.

Educational outcomes to be achieved in the *Communication Skills and Autism* course include:

1. Culturally and linguistically diverse assessment instruments that are most frequently used with children and adults on the spectrum and the areas of communication evaluated by each test
2. Identify behaviors that reflect communicative attempts and how to analyze the behaviors
3. Evidence-based interventions used in the area of communication
4. Basic strategies which can be utilized in motivating and acquiring new communication skills with individuals on the ASD spectrum
5. Knowledge and use of assistive technology
6. Understanding of the international context of autism

The students who will benefit from this certificate program include special education teachers, general education teachers, speech-language pathologists, social workers, school psychologists, educational diagnosticians, developmental specialists, behavioral specialists, administrators, and all other individuals work with individuals with ASD.

The Special Education/Communication Disorders department will be responsible for the delivery of the four courses required in the certificate program.

The autism courses have been taught every semester since Spring 2009. These courses have been part of the *New Mexico: Preparing Autism Spectrum Specialists (NM-PASS)* personnel preparation grant. There is support from the Las Cruces Public Schools and Gadsden School District in recommending these classes to their in-service teachers. In fact we are in the process of signing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in the amount of \$100,000 with the districts to provide these courses to their teachers. Please see the MOU attached. As a member of the Hearts for Autism Advisory Board, there is a network in place to inform the community of the educational opportunities we have here at NMSU.

All courses can transfer into a graduate degree program. These courses have been approved as a graduate specialization for the MA degree, MSW degree, EdS degree, and Ph.D.

Admission requirements are the same requirements for admission to the university. Students do not have to be accepted by the SPED/CD department in order to enroll in classes. Students who are not enrolled in a degree program may be admitted with a separate classification called "Graduate Certificate Student."