

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Press Releases

Office of Communication and Marketing

3-12-2021

Ouachita's new M.S. program in applied behavior analysis addresses critical need

Trennis Henderson

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/press_releases



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), [Organizational Communication Commons](#), and the [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#)



For immediate release

Ouachita's new M.S. program in applied behavior analysis addresses critical needs

By Trennis Henderson

March 12, 2021

For more information, contact Ouachita's Office of Communications & Marketing at comm-mark@obu.edu or (870) 245-5206.

Establishing the first full master's degree in applied behavior analysis (ABA) in Arkansas is a significant milestone for Ouachita as well as for families across the state.

The university's Master of Science degree in ABA officially launched in May and is designed to address a critical shortage of trained Board-Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) throughout the region. Graduates of the program will be equipped to provide therapy options to treat such issues as autism, dementia and Alzheimer's.

The innovative low-residency program combines online and in-person instruction, carefully and efficiently aligning field experience with course curriculum to allow students to complete the program in just 15 months.

"What's different about Ouachita's program is that we have an intensive face-to-face component," explained Dr. Sheila Barnes, who serves as director of the new program. The program begins with five days of "bootcamp" on campus, followed by completely online coursework and in-person fieldwork that is overseen by adjunct faculty members, BCBAs in Ouachita's partner clinics.

Barnes, who is uniquely qualified to develop and lead the program, holds the highest academic credentials in her field and is a former president of ArkABA. She has extensive experience working in a variety of settings with infants and children with autism or other disabilities.

She explained that applied behavior analysis involves applying scientific principles of behavior to build useful skills and reduce common behavioral problems for at-risk populations ranging from children to the elderly.

ABA PROGRAM OFF TO A STRONG START

Even amid the unprecedented challenges brought on by a global pandemic, Ouachita's ABA program is off to a strong start with 30 students already over halfway through the 15-month program.

"Several of our students have started the intervention phase of their research projects with astounding results!" Barnes remarked. "Students are already sharing results, and I am truly in awe.

"Many of our students have tackled a 'resistant-to-intervention' behavior," she added. "Several students have taken on a very, very difficult-to-teach child. At my clinic, a child who never, ever made a spontaneous request was taught to ask for what he wants. This skill went from zero spontaneous requests to 150 in a five-hour therapy session. He also generalized to making requests at home!"

"SEVERAL OF OUR STUDENTS HAVE STARTED THE INTERVENTION PHASE OF THEIR RESEARCH PROJECTS WITH ASTOUNDING RESULTS!"

Dr. Sheila Barnes

Citing the acute shortage of BCBAs in Arkansas and the surrounding region, Dr. Monica Hardin, associate vice president for graduate and professional studies, affirmed the program's long-term impact.

"Families report being on waiting lists of as long as two years before being able to receive therapy for their kids," she noted. "During that time, a prime window for effectiveness passes.

"By offering a program that combines in-person and online elements in a rapid course sequence," she added, "we seek to train students who will

have both the academic knowledge and practical experience to be effective practitioners immediately upon graduation."

Watch more about ABA at Ouachita at obu.edu/aba,

including the story of one child's progress thanks to the work of Ouachita student Lakota.

CREATIVE PARTNERSHIP ENHANCES PROGRAM

Clinical settings that provide hands-on fieldwork and supervision for ABA students play a vital role in Ouachita's overall degree requirements. One key partner is Pediatrics Plus, owned by 1993 Ouachita alumni Todd and Amy Denton.

Ouachita has partnered with Pediatrics Plus to provide land for an \$8 million clinic construction project on the southwest corner of campus. In addition to working with ABA students, the clinic will provide internship and employment opportunities for undergraduate students in related fields as well as offering a convenient childcare option for faculty and staff.

During a groundbreaking ceremony in March for the new Pediatrics Plus clinic, Ouachita President Ben Sells noted that "for higher education, healthcare and rural communities, it's a disruptive time. But today is evidence that where there is disruption, there is also opportunity – for those who seize it." Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson also attended and spoke that day, voicing his support.

Describing the planning and implementation process for the ABA program and the Pediatrics Plus partnership as "a testimony to dreaming a larger dream, perseverance and collaboration," Dr. Sells expressed appreciation to several community and statewide partners "for seizing this opportunity and

your commitment to continue on this remarkable journey for the benefit of the people we're each called to serve."

Todd Denton emphasized that the program's "hands-on approach will allow the students to gain a deeper understanding of ABA concepts" and be "better prepared to serve as BCBAs after graduation."

With the growing demand for applied behavior analysis, Denton said Ouachita's commitment to train qualified professionals will enhance opportunities to "expand into underserved areas to provide these much-needed services."

Keeping her eyes clearly focused on the ABA program's big picture, Dr. Barnes concluded, "Not only are we preparing future BCBAs, but in the process, we are changing the lives of children."



Trennis Henderson, former vice president for communications at Ouachita, has served since 2018 as a national correspondent for Woman's Missionary Union.