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NEWS



For immediate release

New Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction emphasizes "teaching as a calling"

By Kiki Schleiff Cherry

May 24, 2022

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

Ouachita's new Master of Education degree in curriculum and instruction program launched this semester as the latest post-baccalaureate offering in the university's growing graduate studies menu. The 12-month program, designed to help teachers enhance skills and increase earning potential, prepares educators to become curriculum specialists and instructional coordinators as well as grow their skills in the classroom.

"This program is for every teacher with a heart for students and a heart for Christ," explained Dr. Gail Hughes, director of graduate studies in education. "In addition to designing effective curriculum for diverse students, we'll look at current issues in culture, discuss how to approach them in the classroom and reflect on how faith guides our work as teachers. We will use data to plan strategies that will close achievement gaps and determine the best technology tools to engage students."

Hughes said she has adopted a motto for the program that embodies all she hopes the degree is about: "Live for God, love others and teach all students."

The fully online program offers classes asynchronously so that students can complete course work on a schedule that best works for them. There is even an optional weekly Zoom session that will allow students to engage more deeply with the program director and connect with one another.

The courses are designed without prerequisites so students may enter the program at any of five terms throughout the year and work through the 10-course rotation without interruptions. Full-time students, who complete two courses per term, will be able to graduate in one year.

The pandemic has created unique challenges for teachers, especially those just starting out in their careers, Hughes noted. Many confess feeling overwhelmed by the pressure to juggle both online and in-person instruction while tailoring lessons to meet individual needs. Some are so discouraged that they are choosing to leave the profession completely.

According to the Learning Policy Institute, beginning teachers who feel inadequately prepared are “two and a half times more likely to leave the classroom after one year compared to their well-prepared peers.” Hughes said she hopes Ouachita’s new program will provide teachers with that critical support.

“It’s an important degree for any teacher, especially new teachers,” observed Dr. Jeff Root, dean of Ouachita’s Huckabee School of Education and School of Humanities. He explained that the program will equip teachers with strategies to improve classroom instruction and give graduates the qualifications for promotion within the academic structure of a school system.

“THIS PROGRAM IS FOR EVERY TEACHER WITH A HEART FOR STUDENTS AND A HEART FOR CHRIST.”

Dr. Gail Hughes

Root said, “I am particularly excited that our ‘Teaching as a Calling’ course will focus on the reason we chose to teach in the first place—as a ministry and service to future generations. It’s very challenging to be a teacher in today’s world, and it’s important to be reminded of the eternal importance of the work.”

Curriculum and instruction is a rapidly growing discipline. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “employment of instructional coordinators is expected to grow 6 percent” over the next eight years, which is faster than the average for all occupations.

“Adding the Master of Education degree in curriculum and instruction is a natural extension of the legacy of our undergraduate teacher training program,” explained Monica Hardin, associate vice president for graduate and online education. Hardin expressed gratitude for Dr. Hughes and her vision for the program, adding that under Hughes’ leadership, “we will meet the needs of teachers who seek to view their calling as teachers through the lens of faith.”

Hughes, an award-winning professor and early adopter of online instruction, joined Ouachita’s faculty in 2021 to lead the new program. As a licensed teacher with an emphasis in secondary mathematics, Hughes has worked with undergraduate and graduate students in remedial mathematics through doctoral courses, across the disciplines of research, statistics and education. Hughes has more than 100 scholarly contributions to her name and serves as a site visitor for the Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs (CAEP).

The Master of Education program builds on Ouachita’s strong undergraduate foundation in education. “We have seen unprecedented growth in our undergraduate teacher education program in recent years,” Root said. “Our students are highly motivated and ready to devote their working lives to the betterment of students. We believe like-minded teachers will show the same enthusiasm for our graduate program, and we believe they will complete the degree with a stronger base of knowledge and mindset to make a difference in the lives of their students.”



For more information or to apply, visit obu.edu/curriculum-instruction.

By Kiki Schleiff Cherry, marketing manager for graduate and online education