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SEHS offers online course on autism

By **Jeff Samoray** OU Web Writer This semester, Oakland University's **School of Education and Human Services** is offering its first online course – Special Education 550, Introduction to Autism Spectrum Disorders.

The course is part of the **Autism Collaborative Endorsement (ACE)**, an Internet-based partnership between OU and five other state universities designed to produce more state-endorsed teachers for autistic children. The program is supported by a grant from the Michigan Department of Education.

"There is a clear need across the state for teachers of students with autism," said Carol Swift, chair of human development and child studies in the School of Education. "There are currently no teachers in the Upper Peninsula certified to teach autistic children. The ACE program allows students to complete an entire endorsement program online. The six schools received over 80 initial applications from students. We have a total of 15 students in our course, which is a good enrollment level for an online course in autism."

Candidates for the ACE program must choose one of the participating universities – OU, Central Michigan, Eastern Michigan, Grand Valley State, Northern Michigan or Wayne State – as their "home university" to complete a plan of study and practicum. Students complete just one application form and register for classes online. The program requires that students complete 18 credit hours of coursework, including a final three-credit practicum.

The online format of the course allows students to take courses offered at any of the six participating institutions. Students may complete the entire program online with the exception of the practicum. Students must also pass the Michigan Test for Teacher Certification in the area of autism before the state will issue an endorsement.

The program courses offered come from the following categories: introduction/overview, collaboration/consultation, instructional interventions, language/communications, behavioral issues and interventions, and the practicum.

OU plans on developing at least four courses and eventually offer the full endorsement program online, Swift said.

"In designing these courses for the online program, we've tried to take a programming approach and set the stage for more advanced courses," Swift said. "We wanted to provide a solid foundation in the introductory course to support the specialty courses that come later."

Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life. It affects the normal development of the brain in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Children and adults with autism typically have difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions and leisure or play activities. In some cases, more aggressive and/or self-injurious behavior may be present. It is four times more prevalent in boys than girls and affects over a half million people in the United States today.

For more information on the program, including a guide to online studies, visit the **ACE** Web site or contact Carol Swift at (248) 370-3067 or swift@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

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