

June 24, 2010

ASU to offer Master of Social Work Degree this fall

Albany State University will begin offering the Master of Social Work Degree (MSW) beginning this fall. The program, which will focus on the development of the advanced generalist scholar/practitioner, will provide students with opportunities to enhance the depth and breadth of their knowledge and skills in working with vulnerable children, families and adults.

“We are excited that we’ve been given permission by the Council on Social Work Education and approval from the Board of Regents to offer this program,” said Dr. Marilyn Spearman, chair of the Department of Behavioral Sciences at ASU. “There is a great need in Southwest Georgia for people with the clinical background, experience and education that this program will provide.”

Kwandelyn Wright, a case manager at Worth County DFCS who participated in the title IV-E BSW program at ASU, said she looks forward to pursuing a master’s degree through the new ASU MSW program.

“I am on the waiting list for the program,” she said.

As a case manager for children in foster care, Wright is on the front lines in intervening with vulnerable children and families and understands the unique challenges.

“I enjoy making a difference in the lives of these children and families,” she said. “I try to reunite the children with their parents, if that’s possible. If not, I try other options to improve the children’s situations.”

Supported by the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), the ASU MSW degree program will help meet the growing demand for social work specialists with credentials for direct client services. It will also meet the needs of students interested in obtaining a master’s level social work degree without having to travel a great distance.

The master’s degree program will allow us to be responsive to the need for persons in-place who are interested in continuing their learning,” said Levetta Jefferson, Title IV-E coordinator at ASU.

ASU currently has a title IV-E grant funded by the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services. That grant pays for tuition, fees, books and mileage for persons interested in a career in public child welfare or for current DFCS staff who wish to upgrade their professional skills and training. Once the students graduate from the program, they will usually be expected to work with DFCS a year for each year of academic training paid for by the DFCS.

Dr. Barbara Nowak, associate professor of social work, said the MSW program will ensure that students are prepared before being licensed.

“In order to sit for the license exam, students must have three years in practice and 120 supervised hours over a three-year period,” Nowak said. “Initially, the MSW classes will be held during evening hours, which are convenient to most practicing professionals.”

The MSW curriculum objectives, derived from the Council on Social Work Education’s Explicit Curriculum Educational Policy, requires 950 hours in field practicum experience. The 64-semester credit hour program consists of 32 credits of foundation followed by 32 credits of advanced coursework in prevention, intervention and treatment methods with vulnerable children, families and adults.

Takierra Dawson, MSW, a practicing social worker and current employee at Worth County DFCS, earned her master’s degree at a South Georgia university while working as a case manager.

“I’m glad that I was able to apply the things I learned in class to real cases,” she said. “That helped my learning a great deal. It was beneficial in that way. We need more workers with master’s level qualifications who know the theory and practice.”

The ASU program will provide another avenue for social workers in the area to obtain those qualifications. ASU’s is the sixth such program in the University System of Georgia. Other universities in the system offering a similar degree are Georgia State University, Kennesaw State University, Savannah State University, the University of Georgia and Valdosta State University.

ASU expects 20 students will be admitted to the MSW program in its first year. In the second year and every year thereafter until the program enters full accreditation, the program will maintain a steady total enrollment of 40 students.

The needs in the community dictate that vulnerable families need these services and that ASU provide them, Spearman said.

“The university’s strategic plan requires the social work program to help underserved communities and families,” Spearman continued.

ASU is currently enrolling students in the MSW program to begin this fall. Interested students may begin the application process by contacting the Graduate School at (229) 430-4862.

For more information on the ASU’s Master of Social Work Degree, contact the Department of Behavioral Sciences at (229) 430-4896.

Contact: Joseph West