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NCATE continues accreditation of teacher preparation at Georgia Southern

MAY 14, 2007

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has continued its accreditation of Georgia Southern University's College of Education. This national approval indicates that the College and its teacher education programs meet rigorous professional standards set by the professional education community. The NCATE accreditation applies to both initial and advanced teacher preparation levels.

'We were delighted to hear this good news," said Lucindia Chance, dean of the College of Education. 'Although our faculty and staff constantly strive to develop exceptionally competent classroom teachers, it is affirming to know that our teacher preparation program meets NCATE's stringent national standards."

Georgia Southern's teacher preparation curriculum has been accredited by NCATE since 1954. With the current endorsement, the next accreditation review for the College of Education will take place in 2013.

In 2006, the College of Education produced 305 graduates with a Bachelor of Science in Education, 70 graduates with the Education Specialist degree, and 58 graduates with the Doctor of Education degree. As of fall 2006, more than 2,700 Georgia Southern students had declared a major in the College of Education.

The College of Education currently partners with 30 schools in southeast Georgia to provide undergraduate field experiences for teacher candidates. Under a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, the college is part of a Professional Development District that also includes Screven County's three public schools, the district's alternative school, and the Savannah River Challenge Program (the state-run residential minimum security juvenile facility located in the county).

The College of Education also partners with the National Network for Educational Renewal, and it is home to the Georgia Center for Educational Renewal. It is a member of the International Learning Community (ILC), which encourages global exchange of students and faculty and sharing of best practices, and iNET, the International Network for Educational Transformation, which encourages transformation of learning through innovation.

Through a National Science Foundation PRISM (Partnership for Reform in Science and Mathematics) grant, the College of Education offers courses for classroom teachers designed to help increase science and mathematics achievement for all P-12 students.

NCATE currently awards professional accreditation to only 623 institutions in the U.S., and those institutions produce two-thirds of the nation's new teachers each year. NCATE currently revises its standards every five years to incorporate best practices and new research and to ensure that its standards reflect a consensus of what is important in teacher preparation today.

At NCATE-accredited colleges, teacher candidates must demonstrate in-depth knowledge of their subject matter and the skills necessary to convey that knowledge to their students. NCATE colleges must have partnerships with P-12 schools that enable candidates to develop their teaching skills, and candidates must be prepared to work with diverse populations. Meeting NCATE's high standards ensures that all of Georgia Southern's newly prepared teachers will meet the rigorous licensing standards of all states.

For more information about Georgia Southern's College of Education, visit the Web site at <http://coe.georgiasouthern.edu/>.

Geisler receives \$135,000 grant for study of evolution of dolphins and porpoises

MAY 14, 2007

Jonathan Geisler is a paleontologist at Georgia Southern University who teaches a course on dinosaurs, so it should come as no surprise that he has a special interest in evolutionary biology.

Geisler has channeled his curiosity into a project that will try to answer some lingering questions about the evolution of Delphinida, a group of marine mammals that includes dolphins, porpoises, beluga whales and narwhals.

Supported by a \$135,000 grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF), Geisler will travel to museums on four continents during the next three years to analyze the skeletons of fossil and living dolphins and porpoises.

An assistant professor in the Department of Geology and Geography and the curator of paleontology at the Georgia Southern Museum, Geisler is collaborating with John Gatesy, a molecular biologist in the Department of Biology at the University of California Riverside.

Gatesy is collecting DNA data for the study, which aims to resolve evolutionary relationships among living and extinct species.

‘Evolution is the thread that really ties all disciplines of biology together,’ Geisler said. ‘So, in many ways, to gain a basic understanding of a group, one needs to understand how they are related to each other through evolution.’

To gather data for his part of the project, Geisler will visit some of the nation’s most prestigious museums, including the National Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C., and the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

As they are today, dolphins and porpoises were distributed across the Earth’s oceans in the geologic past, so Geisler will be traveling to museums in Argentina, China, France, Italy, Japan, Peru, and the Republic of Georgia to study the most important fossil specimens.

In addition, Geisler will be teaching a course at Georgia Southern that engages undergraduates in the research aspect of his project. The students will study the teeth and skulls of actual specimens and casts in the Georgia Southern Museum’s paleontological collections.

Using the data they collect, the students will assist in reconstructing part of the evolutionary tree of dolphins and porpoises. The students will be coauthors on a manuscript that the class will submit for publication.

With the assistance of Lori Marino, a senior lecturer in the Neuroscience and Behavior Biology Program at Emory University in Atlanta, the project also seeks to determine if behavior influenced the evolution of large brains in dolphins.

‘Scientists are currently studying the evolution of brains in primates, with particular emphasis on the development of the human brain,’ Geisler said. ‘One of the problems with this area of research is that there is little to compare the evolution of primate brains to.’

‘Cetaceans mammals that live their entire lives in the water have relatively large brains, and our work will provide a case study with which to compare to the evolution of brains in primates.’

Geisler’s grant from the NSF will be distributed over three years at \$45,000 per year. The project is expected to run through March 2010.