Georgia Southern University has been selected to be part of a new mentorship program that is designed to increase the pool of available teachers, especially teachers from a broader and more diverse background.

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, schools across America suffered from a national teacher shortage, says the Center for Public Education. And according to national figures, only 2% of all teachers in the United States are Black males, so a particular focus of this new initiative is the recruitment and mentoring of Black males in teacher education programs.

Georgia Southern is now one of three higher education institutions in Georgia that offers the mentorship program named Call Me MISTER, an acronym that stands for Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models. The program originated at Clemson University and will be offered at Georgia Southern’s Armstrong Campus in Savannah. Calvin Walton, Ph.D., lecturer in the College of Education (COE), has been named the program director.

“Our goal is to have a major impact on Savannah-Chatham County Schools,” said Walton. “We have to do a better job in the area, the state and the nation to recruit and properly develop Black males to become teachers. Black students with Black teachers perform better. Research shows that. So we need to do what we can to allow diverse students to see themselves reflected in their teachers and have the opportunity to perform at the highest levels.”
Participants in the program will be accepted in cohorts each fall. Each MISTER participant will have a mentor within the University or Savannah-area community to provide additional support outside of their academic performances.

“The program is co-curricular,” explained Walton. “While these young men will be studying to become elementary school educators, they will also receive additional experiences to support them for college success as well as their future careers as Black males teaching in Chatham County. It is our goal that the MISTERs will remain in Savannah to teach, and therefore we want to provide them with all the tools and understanding necessary to perform their very best in the classrooms in Chatham County.”

Georgia Southern has also uniquely partnered with the Georgia Army National Guard in efforts to support the program through a joint opportunity for students to participate in Call Me MISTER and enlist in the National Guard.

“Having a partnership with the College of Education makes our recruiters more aware of what a full-time career in education for the state of Georgia and a part-time state of Georgia National Guard career can look like,” explained Sgt. 1st Class Todd Friedel of the Georgia Army National Guard. “As recruiters, we touch the lives of many Black males in the state, and this allows us to share with them the opportunity to serve your community both as a soldier and educator.”

COE Associate Dean for Administration and Faculty Affairs Tracy Linderholm, Ph.D., spearheaded the initiative to bring Call Me MISTER to Georgia Southern after she was approached by Friedel and the University’s Military and Veterans Services Director Col. George Fredrick with the idea.

“The College of Education has wanted this program for a long time but now we have the support of the College and University to bring it to the Armstrong Campus,” Linderholm said.

The first MISTER participants will be accepted by the University for attendance in fall 2022.

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