

School of Applied Sciences Adds Three New Master's Programs

Contributed by Lindsey Phillips
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OXFORD, Miss. - The graduate curriculum at the University of Mississippi expands this fall with the addition of two new master's programs in the School of Applied Sciences, plus a third that began in the spring.

The two new programs offer graduate degrees in food and nutrition services and in social work. A criminal justice graduate program became available in January. The programs meet a need in Mississippi, according to the school's dean and department chairs.

"Increasing graduate enrollment is a universitywide goal, and these programs will have an immediate positive impact in this area," said Linda Chitwood, dean of applied sciences. "More importantly, each of these programs will produce well-trained professionals in fields that have critical shortages in Mississippi. The graduates of these programs will be prepared for careers that create a healthier environment in the state of Mississippi."

The food and nutrition services program allows students to concentrate in either clinical nutrition, focusing largely on child and adolescent nutrition, or food service administration, said Teresa Carithers, chair and associate professor in the Department of Family and Consumer Sciences.

"Years ago, nutrition was not recognized so much as a strong science," she said. "Now, because of the research that has been done over the decades, we know that nutrition is related to the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases. With obesity becoming an epidemic, I believe it is an area that the medical profession and the whole public now recognize to be a critical health care player."

The program requires 36 semester hours, and flexibility in electives allows students to focus on areas of study such as sports nutrition, Carithers said.

The program will also help registered dietitians and nutritionists in the area advance professionally while at the same time providing specialists for a field that is expected to grow, said Kathy Knight, associate professor of family and consumer sciences and coordinator of the program.

"With the prevalence of obesity, diabetes, hypertension and heart disease in Mississippi, having strong degree programs that train future registered dietitians is vital for the health and welfare of our state," Knight said.

The master's of social work program is aimed at nontraditional students working in the community, said Carol Boyd, chair and professor of social work. It offers students the opportunity to pursue a clinical specialty such as therapy.

"The MSW degree prepares students with advanced skills to work with individuals, families, groups, communities and organizations," Boyd said. "However, with a clinical specialization, students will be able to do therapy with individuals, couples, families and groups and administration in health and mental health settings and/or private practice."

After obtaining the master's degree, students must meet the state's licensure requirements to practice as a clinical social worker. The degree program is geared toward those already working in the field to enable them to meet the needs of

generalist social workers who have not yet trained for a specialty. All 17 of the accepted students have worked in social work-related fields, and 16 have undergraduate degrees in social work, Boyd said.

"Mississippi is generally at the bottom in terms of just about every index of social, emotional, physical and financial well-being, and the MSW-trained individual can assist filling a key niche in helping individuals and society in regard to these areas," she said.

The program offers a three-year, 60-hour track designed to meet the standards of the Council of Social Work Educators and the accrediting body, Boyd said. However, in 2009 the department is to offer a two-year, 36-hour option for students who have completed a bachelor's of social work within five years of enrolling in the graduate program.

The master's of criminal justice program offers the only homeland security graduate concentration in the state and focuses largely on the development and application of new technologies, said Stephen Mallory, associate professor of legal studies and program director.

"We're kind of in the age of homeland security now," Mallory said. "Today's law enforcement, especially on the administrative and mid-management level, has to be a little more educated and a little more prepared. To run a department today it takes a lot more than it ever has."

A homeland security concentration is an important offering in Mississippi because of the constant challenge of natural disasters, as well as the shipbuilding and telecommunication industries, said David McElreath, chair and professor of legal studies. Homeland security also encompasses other work areas such as the business and medical fields.

"We want to be on the cutting edge of information," McElreath said. "As global threats and domestic threats have changed, a body of knowledge has come together, and we want to offer our students access to that."

The 36-hour curriculum is policy-oriented and emphasizes community policing, Mallory said. It offers study on topics including fraud, scams, intelligence planning and terrorism and prepares students for work with law enforcement, private security and homeland security agencies, as well as in careers as policy analysts. The curriculum also preps graduates for doctoral programs and teaching at the community college level, McElreath said.

Since the program was implemented in January, 20 students have enrolled.

For more information on programs in the School of Applied Sciences, go to http://www.olemiss.edu/depts/applied_sciences .