

## **RIVIER TO OFFER NEW SPECIAL EDUCATION MASTER'S WITH AUTISM SPECIALIZATION**

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**Office of Marketing & Communications, Rivier College**

**R**ivier is proud to offer a new master's program in special education with autism specialization, which will focus on Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs). The program will launch this fall but Rivier will offer the first class this summer, during summer term 2. Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Comorbid Disorders will be offered in a one-week intensive program from July 16 to 20, and is designed to serve as the foundation for subsequent courses in the ASD sequence using a combination of lecture, video, class activities, invited speakers, and an individual project. Taught by renowned autism expert **Dr. Teresa Bolick**, this course will provide an overview of ASDs, including the common characteristics of the autism spectrum disorders and co-occurring conditions. The course will provide an overview of accommodations, modifications, and interventions for academic and social functioning. The course will emphasize evidence based practices as well as commonly accepted educational methodology.

"Students with ASDs present unique challenges for educators," said Dr. Bolick. "For these students, it's not enough to teach academics. We must also address self-regulation, social cognition and interaction, and associated problems with anxiety, mood, and interfering behavior."

"As a psychologist and board certified behavior analyst, I frequently encounter wise and dedicated professionals who are eager for guidance in working with students on the spectrum," she added. "It is quite exciting that Rivier has introduced a concentration in ASD into the master's degree program in special education. I believe that I speak for many special education directors who are eager for more professionals who aspire to work with students with autism spectrum disorders."

Dr. Bolick is a licensed psychologist and board certified behavior analyst in New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Vermont. She received her bachelor's in psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, followed by master's and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology from Emory University. Since 1989, she has held a private practice in clinical psychology where she provides evaluation and treatment, consultation to families and schools, and workshops for professionals, paraprofessionals and parents.

The M.Ed. in Special Education with Autism Specialization is designed for students who hold a bachelor's degree, certification in early childhood, elementary, or secondary education, and who wish and to become certified in special education or current teachers who want to hone their skills in working with this population. This program prepares students to work specifically with students with autism spectrum disorders in a program or classroom setting. Courses include Characteristics of Autism Spectrum Disorders and Comorbid Disorders, Applied Behavior Analysis I: Assessment and Monitoring, Applied Behavior Analysis II: Curriculum for Children with ASD, Applied Behavior Analysis III: Challenging Behaviors, and Social Skills and Communication.

According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) web site, 11 percent of 8 year olds, or one in every 88 students, has an autism spectrum disorder (2008 CDC statistics). It is more prevalent in males, with one in every 54 boys being diagnosed with this disorder nationwide and 1 in 252 for girls.

“These statistics suggest that every grade in every school is likely to have at least one student ‘on the spectrum,’” said Dr. Bolick.

More children are being diagnosed at earlier ages, a growing number by age 3 – however, most children are still not diagnosed until after they reach age 4. The demand on budget and resources in school districts is intense.

Rivier’s program is unique in that students will have the opportunity for hands-on experience working directly with children with autism spectrum disorders. ■

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