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English Graduate Degree Program to Shift to Online, Cohort Model in Fall 2014

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C.—The Gardner-Webb University Gayle Bolt Price School of Graduate Studies is unveiling a revised Master of Arts (MA) in English program, to include concentrations in English education, literature studies and writing studies.

L to R: Duffus, Buckner,
Hartman

Administrators have announced the online-only teaching model for the program will begin in the fall semester of 2014. University officials are excited about the shift and believe the changes will help Gardner-Webb provide a quality education that meets the needs of modern professionals.

“Adding a concentration in writing studies and moving to a fully online mode of delivery are two indications of the spirit of innovation and creativity that characterize the GWU Department of English Language and Literature,” said Dr. Jeff Rogers, dean of the Gayle Bolt Price School of Graduate Studies. “It’s an exciting group of faculty and an exciting new venture for a department that has already been quite creative in its adoption of new technologies for teaching and learning.”

The program will be led by English professors Jennifer Buckner, Dr. Cheryl Duffus, and Dr. Shana Hartman, who will head up the writing studies, literary studies, and English education concentrations, respectively. The redesigned curriculum will be offered exclusively online and students will join a cohort. Hartman believes both elements will result in benefits for the participants.

“By organizing the program in cohorts, students will find it easier to connect, collaborate, and support each other throughout the duration of the program,” Hartman explained. “Ideally, the cohort model will also allow students to build lasting networks with colleagues in their discipline and career areas.”

The Gardner-Webb University Department of English Language and Literature has offered a MA in English and MA in English Education on the Boiling Springs campus for over 10 years. In an effort to build upon the strengths of the existing programs and meet the growing demands for a writing-specific program, the reengineered degree will offer a nine-credit hours foundational core along with 15 hours of concentration-specific work. A thesis or capstone project representing six credit hours will round out the degree program.

“In writing studies, students will develop a knowledge of current practices in major fields associated with writing,” Buckner shared. “We want these students to have a balance of theory and practice that will enable them to pursue a variety of professional and scholarly tracks.”

Duffus noted the shift from conventional classroom teaching to an online experience is both exciting and a little intimidating. “I am most excited about the switch from a more traditional, professor-centered classroom to a more collaborative experience where the students will develop into leaders,” she stated. “Because so much of it will be new, it will require patience and creativity on my part. I want the online experience to be engaging, personal, and creative, so I will have to push myself to find the tools to deliver that.”

Hartman concurred. “While I cannot predict all of the ways the revised program will manifest itself or what each course will look like, I am more excited about the possibilities for growth as a department and the opportunity to pioneer a humanities program in an online environment than I am nervous about the inevitable challenges we will face,” she reflected.

To effectively prepare for the changes, Buckner, Duffus, and Hartman are actively engaging in training sessions to build upon their current knowledge of digital teaching tools and to equip them for the online teaching format. “I am considering different aspects of teaching and what kinds of resources (such as videos, discussion boards, and social media networks) would best afford the kind of learning that needs to happen,” Buckner shared. “We are a department that works very closely together. We’ve already started discussing and sharing different tools and resources that will suit our teaching needs. Our department aims to develop relationships with our students and create personal learning experiences in this new format. I am confident that we will do so.”

Ultimately, officials believe the revised program will benefit not only graduate students, but also the University as a whole. “I think the online format will provide the flexibility that many graduate students are seeking,” Duffus offered. “Many people are interested in grad school, but they are unable to attend face-to-face. This program will encourage more graduate education and professional development and provide opportunities for intellectual, personal, and professional growth. We aim to lead the way in online education in the humanities, and to show it can be done with high standards.”

For more information on the new Master of Arts in English graduate degree program, click [here](#).

Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 major and minor professional programs of study, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.