



November 7, 2007

Contact: Jennifer Beaulieu, 956-4388

UH College of Education Special Education Faculty Receives Grant to Prepare Educators of Students with Autism

Jenny Wells, assistant professor in the College of Education Special Education Department (SPED), is the principal investigator of a four-year, \$800,000 grant from the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education. Project Manawa Kupono (Opportunity) focuses on preparing educators to improve outcomes for students with autism.

“We are one of only seven institutions nationally to receive a teacher preparation grant that is specific to autism,” Wells said. The project adds new emphasis to the severe disabilities track of the established Masters of Education in Special Education (SPED) at UH. Faculty have developed new courses and retooled existing courses with a focus on autism spectrum disorders for this program.

The grant will support two consecutive cohorts with the second cohort starting in the summer of 2009. Each masters student will receive \$10,000 a year plus money for books. One goal of the program is to get educators from paraprofessional roles, such as skills trainers, into professional teaching roles. Educators will be trained to develop the specialized knowledge, skills, and professional dispositions necessary to teach students with autism, including individuals who are culturally and linguistically diverse.

Interest was so great, Wells said, that there were three times more applicants than they could support. “We took in an additional five students who were willing to use their own funds,” she added. At the end of four years, 35 highly qualified special educators will have graduated.

This grant has enabled neighbor island students, such as Sandrina Redfearn, to participate through distance learning. “Participating in the Project has afforded me the opportunity to further my knowledge and formal education in the area specific to my chosen profession,” said Redfearn. “Having access to direct teaching, modeling and feedback from professionals in the field of autism and access to current research lends additional credibility to my work and, as a member of the Maui District Autism Team, enhances my ability to collaborate effectively with families, educators and professionals.”