

OCTOBER 07, 2016

ST. CATHERINE UNIVERSITY'S CATIE CENTER RECEIVES \$6 MILLION TO LEAD NEW ASL INTERPRETING EDUCATION INITIATIVES



Graduating students in the University's American Sign Language and Interpreting Programs pose with 2016 Commencement Speaker Habem Girma, (fourth from left, front) a nationally recognized advocate for disability rights. Photo: ByRebecca Studios.

FACULTY, STUDENTS



St. Catherine University's CATIE Center was awarded two U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration grants totaling \$6 million to advance interpreter education.

The CATIE Center was selected as the only winner in the Administration's \$4 million competition to establish an Experiential Learning Model Demonstration Center.* The second grant awarded is to increase the number and diversity of certified interpreting specialists to work in behavioral health settings.

The goal for the Experiential Learning Model Demonstration Center is to increase the certified interpreter workforce. A known barrier to increasing the workforce is the gap between graduation and certification. National studies have shown that despite the proliferation of baccalaureate interpreter education programs, the number of graduates who pass the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) National Interpreter Certification is declining. In 2015, of the 890 individuals who took the test, only 173 – 19 percent – passed. A goal for the center is to investigate, pilot and evaluate evidence-based practices from within the field and from other professional fields to decrease the amount of time between graduation and certification from 18-24 months to 9-12 months and increase certification pass rates.

“The number of certified interpreters has a significant impact on deaf people’s access to communication in crucial aspects of their lives,” said Laurie Swabey, CATIE Center director. “It inhibits their ability to find jobs, access postsecondary education and vocational training as well as to access healthcare. We will offer a model program that can be replicated at partner universities and around the country. The possibility of changing interpreter education could be groundbreaking.”

The second grant** addresses an acute need for interpreting professionals specializing in behavioral health settings. In a survey conducted in 2008 by the National Consortium of Interpreter Education Centers, deaf people reported that healthcare was the most difficult setting in which to obtain a qualified interpreter. The lack of qualified interpreters in these settings limits deaf Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) consumers’ opportunities for gainful employment.

The CATIE Center is partnering with the non-profit, ADARA, and the Alabama Department of Mental Health to expand its existing education program. Offered jointly, the Mental Health Interpreter Training program and Qualified Mental Health

Interpreter (QMHI) credential educates and certifies interpreting professionals for the behavioral health specialization. Currently there are only 76 interpreters with the QMHI credential in the nation.

“This is a tribute to the great work of our CATIE Center, its Director Dr. Laurie Swabey and her team,” said Colleen Hegranes, Executive Vice-President and Provost. “The award solidifies the Center's sustainability and development as the go-to center in the country for educating ASL/English interpreters.

St. Catherine University has a documented history of providing innovative and quality education for interpreters. Both its Interpreter Education Program (IEP) and the CATIE Center's focus on addressing the nationwide shortage of qualified, certified interpreters to serve the communication needs of deaf people. It was the first institution to establish a medical interpreter program in 1983, and has continued to be a leader in healthcare interpreting education.

In addition, St. Catherine is one of 13 baccalaureate degree interpreter education programs in the nation accredited by the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE). In 2016, the University launched the first master's degree in interpreting studies and communication equity.

* This funding covers 85 percent of the total project costs; the remaining 15 percent, \$624,104, will be financed by non-governmental sources.

** This funding covers 94 percent of the total project costs; the remaining 6 percent of the project costs, \$138,181, will be financed by non-governmental sources.

The ASL grant team (left to right): Andrea Olson, Rosa Ramirez, Laurie Swabey, Richard Laurion.

More on this topic



National disability rights advocate challenges students

St. Kate's hosts meeting of Minnesota leaders on advocacy for DeafBlind community

St. Kate's ASL/Interpreting program receives excellence award
