



Project ALLIES - Autism Language and Learning in Inclusive Educational Settings*

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ABSTRACT

It is widely acknowledged that children on the autism spectrum need intensive, comprehensive, and coordinated services. Service integration is especially important for children from minority families who are at increased risk for receiving insufficient, disjointed, or culturally/linguistically inappropriate services. Since social-communication is a core challenge in autism, an important service integration link is that between Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) and Special Educators. SLPs bring specialized knowledge in communication, language, and speech development while Special Educators offer expertise in learning and curricular needs. Although SLPs and Special Educators are expected to collaborate, they are rarely given the opportunities and the systematic guidance to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for successful collaborative practices.

Project ALLIES, a 2-year Masters-level training program, focuses on preparing Communicative Disorders (CD) and Special Education (SPED) scholars to work collaboratively to provide high quality, evidence-based services to school-aged students on the autism spectrum with significant social-communication needs (especially those from minority communities) in inclusive educational settings. The program aims to recruit CD and SPED scholars from traditionally underrepresented communities to participate jointly in: 1) the attendance of four autism-focused courses in addition to their respective Master's and Credential curricula; 2) a respite service learning experience with a family of a child on the autism spectrum; 3) a service learning experience with adolescents/adults on the autism spectrum; 4) a shared practicum in the SFSU Autism Social-Communication Clinic with a focus on inclusion (i.e., [Integrated Play Groups \[IPG\] model](#)); and 5) a shared school internship/student teaching experience.

The program will be guided by the best practice standards and evidence-based guidelines for SLP and SPED professionals working with individuals on the autism spectrum, with a focus on the following:

- Understanding the core characteristics and challenges of learners on the autism spectrum
- Collaboration with families and other team members for assessment and intervention
- Naturalistic, culturally/linguistically responsive, and developmentally-appropriate learning
- Use of evidence-based practice through the evaluation of scientific evidence
- Promotion of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), neurodiversity and inclusion with typical peers in diverse learning and social contexts

The proposed program will train 16 scholars annually (including 8 scholars from CD and 8 from SPED) over 5 years, yielding a total of 80 highly qualified and credentialed professionals. Support for trainees will account for 65 percent of requested funding. CD scholars will meet the requirements for an ASHA-accredited Master of Science degree in CD, the California Credential in SLP Services, and the California state license in SLP. SPED scholars will meet the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Special Education and the California Education Specialist Credential. Both groups of scholars will receive the Autism Spectrum Graduate Certificate issued by San Francisco State University.

**Project ALLIES – Autism Language and Learning in Inclusive Educational Settings: Interdisciplinary Preparation of Highly Qualified Speech-Language Pathologists and Special Educators to Support Diverse Students on the Autism Spectrum with Significant Social-Communication Needs; Personnel Preparation in Special Education, Early Intervention and Related Services (CFDA 84.325K) U.S. Department of Education (OSERS)*