Stage 1: New Program Preliminary Proposal Review

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I. Suggested Name of Proposed Program:

*Infants, Toddlers and their Families: Interdisciplinary Master’s Degree Program*

II. Suggested Program Administrative Home

*Graduate School and Professional Programs*

III. Program Type

*Graduate Master’s Degree*

IV. Mode of Delivery

*Distance Education: Hybrid (more than 50% of classes distance education)*

V. Intended Audience

1. Students seeking a master’s degree who have or who are pursing a professional license or accreditation in a related area
2. Students currently enrolled in another graduate program at Gallaudet seeking to enroll in a second master’s degree program
3. Students currently enrolled in another graduate program at another university
4. Professionals from different disciplinary backgrounds working in early intervention

VI. Degree/Product

*Master’s Degree*

VII. Rationale for Program

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Infants, Toddlers and their Families Interdisciplinary Certificate Program (ITF) is a hybrid program (online and on-campus instruction) that provides professionals with current evidence-based knowledge and skills for working with families and their very young children who are deaf or hard of hearing. The ITF is an 18-credit hour program approved by the Council on Graduate Education in the spring 2011. The first cohort of students graduated with Certificates in summer 2012. The second cohort will graduate in summer 2013.

The proposed program is a new master’s degree that would provide an option for students who are seeking a more extensive program of studies than they receive through the ITF Certificate program. The new master’s degree program would provide additional coursework in content needed by early intervention specialists (e.g., infants and toddlers with disabilities, research, and guided field experiences). This proposed program is designed for practicing professionals or individuals who hold or are pursuing a professional degree or license in a related field of study and who are eager to earn a master’s degree from Gallaudet University. This program will attract professionals who are working in early intervention as well as professionals in leadership and policy positions who have the potential to advocate for changes in the system that will benefit deaf and hard of hearing children.

The ITF Certificate was awarded to 8 students in the summer of 2012, the first year of the program. There are 13 students expected to receive the Certificate in the summer of 2013. At the time of the preparation of this proposal, we have received 16 graduate school applications and 5 applications through the Center for Continuing Studies. The ITF program expects to enroll approximately 18 new students who will begin in May 2013. We expect 5 of the students would elect to complete a master’s degree if this option were available. The proposed program would not replace the Certificate program but provide an option for students who would like to continue their studies and receive a master’s degree.

Program evaluation data indicate that students would like the option of a Master’s degree or a Certificate. Students enrolled in master’s degrees program are able to access financial assistance, and many employers will increase the salaries of specialists who have a master’s degree and/or 30 credits beyond a master’s degree. Program directors and other experts agree that there is a need for more extensive preparation in the area of early intervention. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) expects states to ensure that professionals working with the birth-to-three population have the background knowledge and skills required, however, there are very few university programs that provide specialized preparation in this area for children who are deaf or hard of hearing (Compton, Nieymer & Shroyer, 2001; Jones & Ewing, 2002; Sass-Lehrer, Stredler Brown, Hutchinson, Tarasenko, 2010; Moeller & Clark, 2010). Programs indicating that they prepare specialists in this area generally lack course work and field experiences in the birth-to-three age range (Harrison, 2004 & Sass-Lehrer, et al. 2010). The proposed master’s degree would add field experiences to the program.

Gallaudet University has been preparing graduate students to work with infants, toddlers and their families since 1984. Most professional training programs that are available focus on spoken language and exclude or minimally address American Sign Language and Deaf Culture/Community. Specialists from the fields of audiology, speech language pathology, counseling, education, psychology, and social work are unable to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to promote bimodal bilingual acquisition of language during the infant and toddler years. The ITF program includes coursework in ASL-English Bilingualism for very young children. There is also an increased need for researchers in the area of early intervention to identify effective practices, especially in the area of bimodal bilingual language acquisition. The proposed master’s degree program would extend the training in interdisciplinary coursework and experiences by adding coursework in research and opportunities for field experiences to work with interdisciplinary teams of researchers (e.g., VL2, SOL).

There is a strong and documented need for specialists prepared to work with infants and toddlers who are deaf or hard of hearing. As a result of the effectiveness of newborn hearing screening programs, there has been a surge in the number of young children needing early intervention services over the past decade (White, 2006). The number of infants identified as deaf or hard of hearing has increased in the last decade, accounting for 2 to 3 infants for every 1000 births or between 8,000 – 12,000 infants annually (http://infanthearing.org/resources/fact.pdf). Some programs find that the number of infants they serve has doubled in the last ten years, and they struggle to find adequately prepared professionals (Marge & Marge, 2005; White, 2006. Approximately 30-40 percent of infants and toddlers who are deaf or hard of hearing also have a disability. The proposed program would coursework in the area of disabilities and young children.

Although research data suggest that outcomes are better for children and their families when they receive services from professionals who have specialized knowledge and skills (Kennedy, McCann, Campbell, Kimm & Thornton, 2006; Moeller, 2000; 2007; Yoshinaga-Itano, 2003), few professionals have adequate preparation. Best practice documents and position statements concur that recent developments in research and technology demand professionals with knowledge and skills that come from a range of disciplinary areas and that training should be interdisciplinary. The proposed program is designed to prepare graduates with this critical knowledge and the skills to work in collaboration with others on an interdisciplinary team.

Universal Newborn Hearing Screenings currently reach 95% of all babies born in the United States (http://infanthearing.org/resources/fact.pdf). Sadly, only 50% of these infants are currently receiving follow-up services (JCIH, 2007). Failure to provide timely early intervention services to families and their babies is in part due to ineffective follow up through state screening and evaluation systems (Nelson, Bougatsos, & Nygren, 2008). Other challenges include the lack of appropriate support for families to ensure that they understand the importance of receiving services early and have the resources to follow up on recommendations (Sass-Lehrer, 2004; Young & Tattersall, 2007). Failure to provide effective early intervention services is also due to a shortage of professionals with sufficient knowledge and skills (JCIH, 2007) to address the early developmental needs of deaf and hard of hearing infants and their families.

Many practicing professionals lack the specialized knowledge and skills they need and are often required to obtain training after they have been hired for a position (Sass-Lehrer, et al., 2010). This proposed master’s degree program is designed to fill this training gap and be accessible and attractive to learners from many disciplinary areas throughout the country and around the world through online learning and on campus instruction. It is critical that the University maintain its leadership role in preparing early intervention specialists to meet the growing need for well-prepared professionals.

Gallaudet University Mission

Gallaudet University, federally chartered in 1864, is a bilingual, diverse, multicultural institution of higher education that ensures the intellectual and professional advancement of deaf and hard of hearing individuals through American Sign Language and English. Gallaudet maintains a proud tradition of research and scholarly activity and prepares its graduates for career opportunities in a highly competitive, technological, and rapidly changing world.

Gallaudet University Graduate School Mission

The Graduate School at Gallaudet University draws on Gallaudet's rich heritage, distinguished faculty and staff, and ASL-English bilingual environment to carry out its multifaceted mission to:

1. Prepare deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing scholars, leaders, and practitioners from diverse backgrounds to excel in their professions and disciplines; and

2. Generate knowledge, via research and other scholarly activities to inform theory and practice in the professions and disciplines represented by graduate programs.

The knowledge, skills, and dispositions addressed in the various graduate programs are aligned with professional accreditation standards as well as the Graduate School's own high academic expectations.

Gallaudet University Strategic Plan

*Goal A:* Grow Gallaudet's enrollment of full-time undergrads, full- and part-time graduate students, and continuing education students to 3,000 by 2015.

*Goal B:* By 2015, increase Gallaudet's six-year undergraduate graduation rate to 50%.

*Goal C:* By 2015, secure a sustainable resource base through expanded and diversified funding partnerships and increased efficiency of operations

*Goal D:* By 2015, refine a core set of undergraduate and graduate programs that are aligned with the institutional mission and vision, leverage Gallaudet's many strengths, and best position students for career success.

*Goal E:* Establish Gallaudet as the epicenter of research, development and outreach leading to advancements in knowledge and practice for deaf & hard of hearing people and all humanity.

The proposed program specifically addresses Strategic Plan Goals A, D and E above.

*Strategic Goal A*:

The proposed program anticipates increasing enrollment in Graduate Programs from the following populations: 1) current undergraduate students who choose to continue graduate studies at Gallaudet to pursue a professional degree so they will be eligible to enroll in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Infants, Toddlers and Families (ITF): Interdisciplinary Master’s Degree program; 2) students enrolling in a graduate program at Gallaudet because they can pursue a certificate and/or specialization, minor etc. through a selected discipline (e.g., Counseling, Education, Social Work, Hearing, Speech and Language Sciences); 3) students enrolled in a graduate program at Gallaudet and who would like to pursue a dual master’s degree in Infants, Toddlers and their Families; 4) students enrolled at other universities around the country and the world who do not have this unique focus of study available to them and would like to pursue a master’s degree in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Infants, Toddlers and Families (ITF): Interdisciplinary Program in addition to or after they have completed their professional studies at another university; and 5) professionals in the field who are working in programs with infants, toddlers and their families who do not have sufficient background knowledge, need to update their knowledge, or would like to obtain a master’s degree.

Adult learners are a rich resource for recruitment. This program aims to attract deaf and hard of hearing learners and to increase the number of deaf and hard of hearing adults (traditional as well as non-traditional and continuing education learners) providing services to the birth-to-3 population. A master’s degree option would also make financial support available (through financial aid and grants) to students who are unable to afford a graduate degree. The program will be easily accessible to potential candidates both locally and throughout the country and world through a combination of on-line and summer on-campus experiences. All courses will be accessible through a bilingual approach using ASL and spoken English. All online course materials are designed for visual learners and are available through print and/or video. Use of ASL and English is integrated through all courses. Participants will have opportunities to respond to assignments using ASL or English.

Gallaudet has been the program of choice for potential students interested in working with young children and their families since 1984. A new graduate certificate program will keep Gallaudet University “top of mind” for all deaf and hard of hearing and hearing individuals who value the unique learning experiences provided through Gallaudet.

Early intervention is a key high growth area with improved tools for screening hearing at birth and better systems to ensure that children and families are referred for early intervention in the first few months of life. Grant funding is limited to programs that confer a terminal degree such as a master’s degree. Funding for this program is highly probable given the target audiences and the interdisciplinary and innovative design. Student financial support would be more accessible to students enrolled in a program that awards a master’s degree. Graduates of the program may be eligible for career advancement opportunities that might not be available after completion of a certificate program alone.

This interdisciplinary and hybrid program provides an innovative approach that will attract visual learners and expand the current online offerings at Gallaudet.

*Strategic Goal D*:

The proposed program is aligned with the Gallaudet University mission through its infusion of bilingualism and diversity. Program teaching and learning experiences will be provided through American Sign Language and English and will ensure the intellectual and professional advancement of deaf and hard of hearing individuals through challenging coursework and assessments. Course materials integrate research and best practices and will promote a community of scholarship including an emphasis on professional involvement and leadership. Candidates will be required to take a research course and for students who have experience in early intervention, they will be encouraged to participate on a research team, pursue the development of scholarly and creative works, and become actively involved in national organizations and initiatives that can improve the opportunities for young children and their families.

*Strategic Goal E*:

The proposed program can serve as a springboard for integrated research and practice in programs and services for young children and their families. The master’s degree program will provide many potential opportunities to expand research and outreach activities and expand the communities of learning and scholarship throughout the country to benefit deaf and hard of hearing children, youth and their families.

VII. Goals of the Program

Goals of the program include the following:

1. To provide candidates with an option to expand the knowledge and skills obtained through the ITF Certificate Program and earn a master’s degree at Gallaudet University.
2. To provide candidates of the master’s degree to be effective consumers of research in the field of early intervention that leads to improved quality of early intervention services for deaf and hard of hearing infants and toddlers.
3. To provide candidates of the master’s degree with a mentored field experience individually designed to: 1) improve the candidate’s ability to work effectively with deaf and hard of hearing infants, toddlers and their families; 2) develop leadership skills on the local, state or national level in the area of early intervention; or 3) to implement and/or participate on an interdisciplinary team-based action-based research project to improve the quality of early intervention for deaf and hard of hearing infants, toddlers and their families.
4. To provide candidates with knowledge that enhances their understanding of how to work in interdisciplinary teams with infants and toddlers who are deaf plus.
5. To enhance graduates’ opportunities to obtain or advance their careers in early intervention.