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**New Anne E. Fowler Literacy Fellowship at Fairfield University provides tuition-free Master’s for PreK-3 teachers to address widening achievement gap**

FAIRFIELD, Conn. (June 25, 2014) – Only 20 percent of Connecticut children from minority, poor or otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds are reading at grade level in the fourth grade. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, the state ranks 50th in the nation in closing the achievement gap. In an effort to address this gap and to promote social equity and increased social mobility, Fairfield University’s Graduate School of Education and Allied Professions (GSEAP) is undertaking a new and innovative tuition-free program to better prepare classroom teachers to become master teachers and reading experts.

The University, in partnership with the Anne E. Fowler Foundation, announces the Anne E. Fowler Literacy Fellowship, an initiative to significantly raise literacy levels among low-performing elementary school populations. The fellowships will be awarded annually beginning in September 2014, and are funded, in part, by a gift from the North Haven, Conn.-based Fowler Foundation and a grant from The Grossman Family Foundation of Cos Cob, Conn.

The need for such programs is evident. Teachers report a desire for stronger pre-service preparation and in-service support to address Connecticut’s growing achievement gap. The University, which also hosts a National Writing Project dedicated to strengthening the teaching and learning of writing for both students and teachers, is well positioned to improve these conditions through a comprehensive approach.

“We’ve long known that reading deficits manifest very early in a student’s life,” said Robert Hannafin, Ph.D., incoming dean of GSEAP. “If not remediated, these deficits prevent students from learning increasingly complex -- yet foundational – concepts, thus widening the achievement gap. We are very excited that the ‘Fowler Fellows’ will have the tools and support necessary to make a difference with these neediest of learners.”

Anne Campbell, Ph.D., associate professor of education who will coordinate the program, said, “The relationship of literacy to success in all content areas and the importance of early literacy to academic achievement has been well documented. The Fowler Literacy Fellows will learn and apply evidence-based literacy practices that support all students as they become proficient readers and strive to reach their full potential.”

The Anne E. Fowler Literacy Fellows program, named for the late Haskins Laboratories reading researcher and co-author of Connecticut’s Blueprint for Reading Achievement, will offer up to 10 teaching fellowships in 2014-15, recruiting teachers initially from Norwalk, Bridgeport and other partner districts. The Fairfield program will provide teachers with coursework and field practica leading to an advanced degree in Teaching and Foundations with a concentration in literacy, language and culture. The fellowship will provide full tuition support, living stipends and health insurance for PreK-3 educators in public, private, and Diocese of Bridgeport schools who wish to receive advanced, specialized training in evidence-based literacy instruction. Over three semesters (fall, spring, summer), students will engage in full-time course- and fieldwork toward a master of arts degree centered on literacy. The partner districts will agree to offer teachers a leave of absence and the teachers will return to their districts ready to use their advanced training and participate in assessment and professional development for three years after graduation and complete their capstone projects on a part-time basis. The program welcomes partnership with increased numbers of eligible Connecticut school districts in hopes of providing professional development to teachers statewide.

“Fairfield has been chosen to take the lead in this important work because of the very high standards that we have established for teacher training, and our existing commitment to literacy training and teacher mentorship in our neighboring communities,” said University President Jeffrey P. von Arx, S.J. “Educating our youth and giving them what they need to reach their full potential is the most effective way to ensure a brighter future for all of us.”

“Early literacy plays a critical role in closing the achievement gap,” said Dr. Manuel Rivera, superintendent, Norwalk Public Schools.  “In Norwalk, we’re committed to making sure that all our students are reading at or above grade level by the end of Grade 3. High-quality training and professional development opportunities are essential components of the comprehensive literacy plan we now have in place, and as a result, we’re very pleased to partner on offering this fellowship opportunity for teachers selected to the program.”

“There is no more important job than teaching a child to read,” said Margie Gillis, Ed.D., president and founder of Literacy How, Inc. “I have worked with Connecticut’s Black and Puerto Rican Caucus to support the implementation of some of the best reading legislation in the country. I believe that the program’s approach to teacher preparation is what is needed to close our reading achievement gap. It will provide essential knowledge about how literacy develops as well as guidance in translating research into effective classroom practice – Anne E. Fowler’s and Literacy How’s long-held vision for empowering teaching excellence so that *every* child learns to read by grade three. The curriculum will teach the most current research and will include a research agenda to guide necessary changes each year. All data will be transparent so that we are held accountable for the results. We are honored that so many equally committed partners have joined together to offer evidence-based educator preparation.”

Linda Franciscovich of The Grossman Family Foundation, a Cos Cob-based trust, said The Foundation was pleased to be a part of this innovative approach to teacher preparation that aligns best practices with rigorous metrics.

Fairfield will host a Graduate Information Session on Wednesday, July 9 at which interested teachers may learn more about the Fowler Fellow program. The event will be held from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at the Aloysius P. Kelley, S.J. Center in the center of campus. For more information and to RSVP, visit [www.fairfield.edu/gradinfo](http://www.fairfield.edu/gradinfo). For directions, visit [www.fairfield.edu/directions](http://www.fairfield.edu/directions).

For more information on the program, contact Dr. Campbell at (203) 254-4000, ext. 2873 or visit [www.fairfield.edu/literacy](http://www.fairfield.edu/literacy).

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Vol. 46, No. 316

*Fairfield University is a Jesuit University, rooted in one of the world’s oldest intellectual and spiritual traditions. More than 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students from 36 states, 47 foreign countries, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico are enrolled in the University’s five schools.  In the spirit of rigorous and sympathetic inquiry into all dimensions of human experience, Fairfield welcomes students from diverse backgrounds to share ideas and engage in open conversations. The University is located in the heart of a region where the future takes shape, on a stunning campus on the Connecticut coast just an hour from New York City.*