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Converse Providing Educators with Critical Skills to Benefit Students with Autism

SPARTANBURG, S.C. (May 8, 2023) – Aiming to better equip highly skilled educators for success and to support districts in their ability to retain top teaching talent, Converse University has launched South Carolina’s first Master of Education (MEd) program in Advanced Studies with a concentration in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). [The program](#) is offered entirely online, and certified teachers and educators can complete the degree in 12 to 16 months.

This first-of-its-kind program for South Carolina is designed to best serve students while making a positive impact on the education landscape in our state and beyond, explains Dr. [Elena Ghionis](#), Assistant Professor of Education and Director of Special Education Programs at Converse. “We strive to provide our candidates with a high-quality education so that teachers may serve their students and districts to their fullest potential,” Dr. [Kelly Harrison](#), Associate Dean of Education, says of the program’s objectives.

South Carolina is a great state with many opportunities for educators, Ghionis says. “With a growing teacher shortage, districts are struggling to fill their classrooms with teachers, especially those serving students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Given the varying nature of ASD and its symptoms, there is no ‘one size fits all’ approach for addressing children with ASD-specific needs. This is where Converse can make a difference.”

Autism is an early-onset neurodevelopmental disorder impacting socialization, communication, and learning. Current epidemiological data suggests 1 in 36 children has been identified with ASD, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([CDC](#)). ASD is reported to occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, and it is nearly four times more common among boys than girls.

An accurate understanding of ASD and individualization of learning and teaching is central to Converse University’s MEd program. To appropriately support the growing ASD population in schools, teachers must receive practical and field-based experiences and access to current research and best-practice teaching strategies.

The coursework in the ASD concentration brings together clinical practice and research within a developmental psychopathology framework; major topics in etiology, diagnosis and assessment, and treatment; and teaching methods and interventions. In addition, this coursework provides the knowledge and skills to help teachers build appropriate support for students with ASD.

After completing the program, educators will understand how to support cognitive processing delays, speech, language, and communication delays, sensory perception issues, social skills deficits, and emotional and behavioral problems of students with ASD.

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This is not the first time Converse has pioneered autism-focused education coursework in South Carolina. [In 2018](#), the institution awarded certificates to its first group of educators from Spartanburg school districts for a specialized course sequence on Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

About Converse University

Converse University empowers students to become transformative leaders who see clearly, decide wisely, and act justly. Converse was founded in 1889 by citizens of Spartanburg, SC, who aimed to create an educational experience for women, and in fall 2020 it welcomed its first undergraduate co-educational incoming class. The University encompasses the School of Humanities, Sciences, and Business; the School of the Arts; the School of Education and Graduate Studies; and the Converse College for Women. Converse students experience deep scholarship, transformative mentorship, experiential learning, and wonderful support for and belief in each other. Through this unique formula, Converse is a creator of opportunity for its students through a personalized education that also includes the professional and technical skills graduates need to be successful in their careers.

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