UA to help narrow achievement gap

The College of Education and Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences have received a nearly $2 million, five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education to improve the quality of instruction that teachers provide to K-12 English language learners (ELL) in Northeast Ohio. UA is one of only two institutions in Ohio to receive this prestigious national professional development grant this year.

The research-based grant, Project ACHIEVE, will focus on increasing the proficiency of general and special education teachers, particularly those specializing in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The teachers will work with ELL students to accelerate the academic language and content knowledge as measured by the Ohio Achievement Assessments and other academic entities. An important part of the project is to create Web-based courses for the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Endorsement and modules for specific licensure areas that can be incorporated into teacher preparation programs.

The grant objectives align with the following goals:

» Increase the number of in-service teachers who complete the TESOL Endorsement;

» Increase the effectiveness of STEM, special education, and general education teachers who work with ELLs;

» Increase the academic performance of ELLs in participating districts; and

» Improve system support for the professional development of teachers who serve ELLs.

Malone University, Akron Public Schools, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Lakewood City School District, Parma City School District, Stark County ESC and Youngstown City School District are partnering with UA for this major grant.

For the past 31 years, UA has prepared preservice and in-service teachers to teach English to ELL students through the TESOL Endorsement, an interdisciplinary program offered by the Department of Curricular and Instructional Studies in partnership with the Department of English. The program has a history of excellence and Project ACHIEVE is an outgrowth of insights gained from many years of experience.

Dr. Lynn Smolen, principal investigator and professor of education; Dr. Wei Zhang, co-principal investigator and assistant professor of English; and Dr. Shernavaz Vakil, co-principal investigator and professor of education, collaborated to make this interdisciplinary grant a reality.

“Our goal is to strengthen what school districts in Northeast Ohio are already doing to narrow the achievement gap for English Language Learners,” says Smolen.