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Special ed continues to be central to EMU mission Department has 9 units

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Eastern Michigan University has a long history of offering teachers opportunities in special education.

It dates to 1923, when the State Board of Education designated the Michigan State Normal College as the state's approved program for the preparation of teachers of special education.

And it continues today.

"The Department of Special Education ... is currently the only university in the nation to provide professional preparation for special education personnel across all areas of disability," said Lynne Rocklage, special education department head.

Over the years, the State Board of Education has approved EMU's Department of Special Education to provide professional preparation for teachers of students in nine areas:

- Cognitive impairment, in 1923.
- Physical/health impairment, in 1925 and 1930.
- Hearing impairment, in 1925.
- Visual impairment, in 1928.
- Speech/language impairment, in 1955.
- Emotional impairment, in 1960.
- Learning disabilities, in 1965.
- Special education supervisors and directors, in 1975.
- Autistic impairment, anticipated in 2007.

Rocklage said the department annually provides professional preparation for more than 2,000 undergraduate, graduate and specialist-level majors in all areas of special education, including speech/language pathology.

All programs in the Department of Special Education hold the highest levels of national accreditation from the Council for Exceptional Children, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the Council

on Education for the Deaf, she said.

With the evolution of the field, the Department of Special Education has developed to become the nation's largest producer of professional personnel for special education, Rocklage said.

The program combines classroom preparation with field work, said Linda Polter, program area coordinator for hearing impairment.

This summer, she said, she took a group of students to a one-week camp for hearing-impaired students. The EMU students were with the children, ages 6-16, around the clock.

"They were able to work with the individual student and their family," she said.

In addition, the program is designed so students work closely with faculty on research projects.

"It's almost peer-to-peer," she said.

The Department of Special Education has had five faculty members receive EMU's Distinguished Faculty Awards - three for Excellence in Teaching and two for Excellence in Service, Rocklage said.

Four of the department's faculty have received the Michigan Association of Governing Boards awards for Teaching Excellence, and four faculty members have received the EMU Alumni Teaching Excellence Award.

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