



## Georgia Regents University's Literacy Center *Past, Present, and Future*

### Background on the Status of Literacy in Georgia

According to national figures, four million adults in the United States can neither sign their own names nor perform other rudimentary literacy-related tasks, and twelve million American children live in poverty (Payne, 2007). Yet, Payne's research indicates that only two variables have been found to move a person out of poverty: education and relationships. According to Georgia's Task Force on Adult Literacy, one out of three adult Georgians living in rural areas is functionally illiterate. Moreover, in the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) of Georgia, there are more than 65,000 adults whose basic educational levels are below eighth grade. These citizens have difficulty performing everyday tasks that most adults with higher literacy levels take for granted. These semi-literate hardships include reading road signs, completing job applications, reading directions on medicine bottles, reading their children a bedtime story, or assisting their children with their homework. Many of the homes where parents' literacy levels are limited lack basic school necessities such as books, paper, pencils, and access to the internet. When one in six children in the United States resides in poverty, the lack of literacy skills can bind the child and his family to poverty and its concomitant ills. Thus, literacy is a social justice issue that must be addressed on university campuses today.

### *Purposes of Augusta University's Literacy Center*

The Augusta University Literacy Center serves a dual purpose. The Center is designed to provide literacy assessment and instruction using research-based strategies to learners of all ages, while providing a myriad of opportunities for Georgia Regents University students and community volunteers to receive extensive literacy training on how-to-tutor followed by supervised literacy tutoring experiences.

Following the belief that learning is a life-long experience, the Augusta University (AU) Literacy Center provides highly individualized, one-on-one tutoring sessions under the auspices of certified teachers. At the AU Literacy Center learners of all ages often start their tutoring sessions with reading abilities below grade level. Through intensive tutoring sessions they improve their grades, raise their test scores, learn productive study skills, build their academic self-confidence, and develop a heartfelt enthusiasm for learning.

### **The AU Literacy Center serves all ages, pre-kindergarten through adults.**

Many of the learners are from the same families where intergenerational illiteracy is a problem. Yet, building literacy skills is the ticket out of illiteracy and ultimately out of poverty. Few of the children who first come to the AU Literacy Center for help possess the literacy skills to advance comfortably from one grade level to the next. Initially, many struggling learners who come for tutoring at the Literacy Center read, at best, with only partial comprehension of the materials they are being given to read at school or at work. Later, after intensive tutoring, their reading comprehension skills increase. As part of the Department of Educational Leadership, Counseling, and Special Education at Augusta University, the Augusta University Literacy Center has developed both on - campus and satellite - based literacy program sites. University students from a variety of disciplines and community



volunteers work side-by-side as they are trained to serve as literacy tutors/mentors in churches, YMCA's, and other settings.

The overall purpose of the Augusta University Literacy Center is to function as a catalyst for providing Augusta University students-both undergraduate and graduate from all three colleges on campus-extensive training and supervised practice in diagnosing/tutoring/mentoring/service learning to the community and its public/private school pupils as well. Students at AU who will become judges, social workers, ministers, community leaders, health professionals, and educators all profit from having tutored/mentored at the AU Literacy Center.

Through the AU Literacy Center both training and consultation services are provided to a myriad of community organizations that are engaged in the promotion of literacy. Overall, the AU Literacy Center's service mission to the community is a vital one-to help people become stronger members of the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) community by increasing their literacy skills in a comprehensive manner. As individuals increase their literacy skills, more positive life changes take place. During this process our student tutor/mentors become robust agents of social change as they recognize that illiteracy truly is a social justice issue and that all learners are special and have special needs. At the AU Literacy Center the belief remains: "Today a reader... Tomorrow a leader."

At the AU Literacy Center the thrust is not to wait to intervene until major reading difficulties occur but to pursue instead a developmentally based approach of preventing literacy difficulties through early intervention strategies. The philosophy at the AU Literacy Center is that no labels (e.g., dyslexic, ADD, ADHD, LD, etc) individual is having sufficient for the child, youth, or adult to be served by the AU Literacy Center. The individual is then diagnosed and tutoring is implemented to diagnosed areas of need. Tutors often mention that learners benefits the tutor by giving a "true" understanding of what learning really is and that tutoring at the Literacy Center provides the learners the true "gift of reading".

### *Tutoring/Mentoring Components*

Tutors/mentors must attend an orientation session to learn about a variety of tutorial programs offered at the Augusta University Literacy Center in order to find the "best" fit (e.g., Adult Literacy for New Readers, Adult GED, ESOL, Family Literacy, and Children/Youth Literacy). This session is followed by an in-depth and on-going training period. Resources are introduced and are available on-site. A two-hour minimum weekly commitment by a tutor/mentor is expected after the extensive training process.

The Augusta University Literacy Center tutors follow a curriculum that is designed to bridge literacy theory to practice with learners who are at risk or have disabilities. Literacy tutoring at the AU Literacy Center is based on the Scientifically Based Research Process as identified by the National Reading Panel (2000). Tutors at the AU Literacy Center are trained to use high interest materials and media with current appeal to learners of all ages. For example, tutors at the Center implement the Newspaper in Education (NIE) program from the Augusta Chronicle and the Time to Read program from Time/Warner. Both programs are premised on the belief that the tutor should reward learners for success, rather than focus on failures.

Tutors/Mentors from all majors on campus have the opportunity to interface with the community through the AU Literacy Center. The AU Literacy Center promotes a participatory approach to literacy in which all tutors/mentors (from the campus and community) engage in shared decision making and act as agents of social change in the CSRA as they tutor/mentor. The most common method of referral to the Literacy Center is through suggestions from teachers, parents, school administrators, school reading specialists, and school counselors. In addition, individuals may contact the Literacy Center to request services for themselves. The school systems often recommend the AU Literacy Center to students and parents during Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings. Adults often note that they heard about the Literacy Center from others who are learners there.

### *Training for the Tutors*

In 1997, Congress charged the National Institute of Health and Human Development to convene a panel of national experts (known as the National Reading Panel) to evaluate approaches to teaching reading at the development, corrective, and remedial levels. At the AU Literacy Center training sessions follow the findings of the Report of the National Reading Panel. In fact, tutors/mentors are trained in all of the five major components essential to reading success (as deemed by the National Reading Panel, 2000). The five strategies addressed in that training include: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. These are known as the core literacy strategies based on the National Reading Panel's research and are referred to as Scientifically-Based Reading Research (SBRR) strategies.

Research and intensive training are provided on using high-interest materials from the popular culture (including those provided to the AU Literacy Center as a Time/Warner Time to Read national site). Following a research-based model designed for tutoring learners from early childhood to adult, tutors are taught an Interest Based Approach to Literacy Tutoring using what the International Reading Association refers to as a "non-intrusive approach to tutoring" (Edwards & Danridge, 2001).

At the AU Literacy Center tutors are taught to administer surveys that address the learner's interests and attitudes towards reading, writing, and learning. Interpreting the results of these surveys allows the tutor/mentor to determine how the learner perceives of him/herself as reader/writer/thinker/learner. In addition, all tutor/mentors are taught to use informal and formal measures to assess the learner's reading level (e.g., informal reading inventories and the Slosson Oral Reading Test-SORT). After training, the AU Literacy Center provides opportunities for working with at-risk readers under the supervision of certified teachers using proven methods of assessing/tutoring/mentoring.

### *One-on-One Tutoring with Students, kindergarten to 12th grade*

At the AU Literacy Center, tutoring is provided on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and, Thursday nights from 3 p.m.-8 p.m. Days are spent providing individual tutoring for adults and preparing evening sessions. Help is provided with reading skills as well as literacy-related support in all subject areas. A certified teacher is on duty for all sessions in order to maintain continued program quality.

### *One-on-One Tutoring with Adults*

Adults are tutored in individualized tutoring sessions. Adults are tutored in areas such as basic reading skills and GED preparation. The Laubach system, a nationally acclaimed series geared towards reaching adult beginning readers, is used. In addition, since being selected as a Time to Read National Center, even more extensive training is conducted in order for tutors to use the Time to Read materials that are then available for tutoring purposes. Training is provided by the director using the Training Manual developed for the AU Literacy Center. For tutor training purposes the manual consists of:

\*Engaging and Motivating Diverse Learners of Literacy

\*Literacy Fundamentals-Premised on Scientifically Based Reading Research

\*National Reading Styles Institute Resources

English language learning adults are welcomed as learners in the adult literacy program at the AU Literacy Center. Both global and cultural awareness of the tutor/mentor and learner are enhanced as literacy skills are taught and reinforced using the Laubach method for the non-native English speaker.

### *Composition of AU Tutors/Mentors*

Most tutors are either undergraduate or graduate students from all discipline areas offered at Augusta University. Many are from the College of Education, but others are also from the College of Business and other campus departments. All undergraduate special education majors spend time in training/tutoring/mentoring at the AU Literacy Center.

### *Composition of Community Volunteer Tutors/Mentors*

The AU Literacy Center relies on both AU students and community volunteers to tutor the learners. Individuals from throughout the CSRA are trained as volunteer literacy tutors. They make a real difference in individual lives as they give generously of their time and talents. All of our volunteer tutors are trained by the Director of the AU Literacy Center. Criminal background checks are required of all community volunteer tutors. Many volunteers are retired educators.

### *Learners at the Augusta University Literacy Center*

The basic goal of the Augusta University Literacy Center remains to inspire learners (individuals of all ages and from diverse backgrounds) to achieve academic success along with bolstered self-concepts. Tutors respect the dignity of all learners and meet learners with excitement and enthusiasm. Many of the learners have special needs including ADD/ADHD, autism, emotional/behavioral disorders, gifted but learning disabled in reading, and other learning-related disorders. Tutors learn to diagnose learning problems and to tailor a program to the individual learner. All learners commit to at least two hours of tutoring per week at the AU Literacy Center. Learners frequently provide unsolicited testimonials as to the overall life changes that occur as a result of their studies at the AU Literacy Center.

Many courses have lab experiences conducted at the AU Literacy Center. Future school principals often conduct their civic projects at the AU Literacy Center where they learn for future reference through hands-on experiences how to establish literacy centers in communities all over the world.

## ***Valued Partnerships***

### ***Satellite Centers***

Through dynamic partnerships and collaborations with the Richmond County School System, Burke County Schools, the Augusta – Richmond County Public Library, and others, satellite adult literacy centers have been established in other needed sites. Prudent and judicious use of human and fiscal resources (including integration of technologies) to improve literacy skills in the satellite centers is recommended. The goal of each satellite center is to provide guidance in initially setting up the facility and training tutors, leading to each community growing its own center in order to meet its individualized needs.

### ***Partnership Literacy Programs***

Born to Read, Read to Rover, and Rev Up to Read are just a few of the AU Literacy Center partnership literacy programs that appeal to the whole family. Summer Literacy Camp and The Family Fun Fair give AU students a chance to lead literacy efforts through planning and executing these exciting literacy programs.

*Born to Read* is a program in which the AU Literacy Center partners with the Women's Center at University Hospital to offer each new mother (approximately 3500-4000 new mothers per year) information on what to do from birth to develop a child who will love reading. Tapes, CDs, DVDs, packets, a child's first bookmark, a child's first book, and information about the AU Literacy Center are a part of the package that the new mom receives while still in the hospital from a volunteer trained in Born to Read. The impetus behind this program stems from the joy of sharing books as a gift the new mom can give her child from birth. The new mother is encouraged to stimulate the child's oral language by singing songs, chanting nursery rhymes, and reading stories to the new baby. The belief is that a child's brain develops at an incredible rate and that early language stimulation provides the foundation for early reading.

*Read to Rover* is a program that is used at the AU Literacy Center to improve oral reading fluency through practice, but not just through any kind of practice. Learners read aloud to a dog, but not just

any kind of dog. The dog is a READ (Reading Education Assistance Dog). This dog is a registered therapy dog which works with the dog's owner as a team in pet therapy. The dog has been trained and checked for issues such as health, safety, appropriate skills and temperament. The dog becomes the non-intimidating companion to the learner who is reading aloud to the dog. The dog listens attentively, never judging, laughing nor criticizing. The AU Literacy Center is fortunate to have a tutor who leads the Read to Rover program with her dog.

*Global Cultures through the Arts: A Summer Literacy Camp* is an annual literacy camp provided through the AU Literacy Center free of charge to young children from our community. Students

develop and implement the camp under the supervision of the director of the AU Literacy Center. All of the arts are integrated in activities that result in children loving to read and succeed.

*The Family Fun Fair* is an annual literacy event for the entire CSRA. Children are invited to come to the AU Literacy Center accompanied by their parent(s). Interactive literacy activities are enjoyed by all, and parents take home copies of all of the activities. The AU Literacy Center and the Augusta Chronicle's Newspaper in Education program collaborate each year for the success of this event.

*Literacy Plays* are part of the Augusta University Literacy Centers' multi-faceted approach to literacy. Part of a comprehensive approach to literacy is exposure to live theatre by a professional theater company (Patchwork Players). From young children to the elderly seeing and discussing the plays helps plant the seed for learning, curiosity, and appreciation of the arts. It is the goal for all of AU Literacy Center learners to become life-long friends of literacy. The AU Literacy Center partners with the Patchwork Players to present literacy plays for young children on a monthly basis at the AU Grover C. Maxwell Performing Arts Theatre. The players are acclaimed performers who specialize in audiences of young children. They have performed for audiences all over the United States and Europe and provide follow-up activities for teachers, parents, and caregivers.

*Workshops* - Seminars and workshops for administrators, teachers, childcare providers and parents participating in literacy programs are provided. In addition, the AU Literacy Center co-sponsors the annual Central Savannah River Area Reading Conference held annually on the AU campus during National Literacy Awareness month in February.

*Home-School Links* - The National Reading Panel (National Institute of Health and Human Development, 2000) points out the need for parental involvement in developing reading vocabulary and fluency. Yet, most parents are not teachers, and they need training as provided by the AU Literacy Center in ways to provide activities at home that build reading skills. The AU Literacy Center provides that kind of empowerment to parents.

*Speakers Bureau* -The director is willing to address CSRA organizations about improving literacy in the area by recruiting and training volunteers.

*Literacy Resource Library* - Materials, books, and related items are available for check-out by those who use the AU Literacy Center. The AU Literacy Center is a repository for award-winning books for children and adolescents. We highly recommend reading aloud by parents, teachers, and caregivers.

### *External Funding/Supporters*

The Augusta University Literacy Center thanks the many supporters and patrons who have helped the AU Literacy Center make a difference in the lives of citizens in the Central Savannah River Area. Some of these include: The Augusta University Foundation, Georgia Power, Comcast, Barnes and Noble, Community Foundation of the CSRA, Club Car, Dollar General, First Book. Junior League of Augusta, Phi Kappa Phi, Sam's Club, Time-Warner and its Time to Read program, Westminster Schools, Central Savannah River Area Reading Council and its Metro Adult Literacy component, the Augusta Chronicle and its Newspaper in Education program, First Book, America Reads and America



Counts, University Hospital's Born to Read and other Born to Read programs, Phi Delta Kappa, the American Association of University Women and many more!

## Vision

The AU Literacy Center seeks to ensure its ability to expand its mission. One of the most important ways for that to occur is by pursuing additional funding opportunities. In addition, the Augusta University Literacy Center should increase its visibility by seeking accreditation by SACS (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools) and CITA (Commission on International and Trans-regional Accreditation) as a certified learning center. In conjunction with the federal "No Child Left Behind" Act, the AU Literacy Center wishes to continue its initial year as a Georgia Approved Supplemental Education provider. The AU Literacy Center has always required that a certified teacher is present to supervise all hours of tutoring, and that practice will continue. Expanded opportunities for faculty and AU students to conduct on-going research at the AU Literacy Center related to literacy learning will occur. The AU Literacy Center should serve in an expanded role of resource and referral whereby the director refers learners to allied professionals in such areas as speech, vision, and hearing, as appropriate. The AU Literacy Center will continue to increase its services as a hub for the America Reads Challenge program at AU and to disseminate more information on literacy research, proven instructional practices, and technology application to literacy for the benefit of literacy educators, parents, and caregivers. Continued community support including donations of new book and magazine subscriptions and usable materials and supplies should be welcomed. The AU Literacy Center was recognized as the first university site for the Time/Warner Time to Read program.

As an integral part of the programs offered in teacher leadership and educational leadership in the Department of Counselor Education, Leadership and Research in the College of Education of Augusta University, the vision for the AU Literacy Center must include addressing future budgetary needs. Present needs have been addressed through the generosity of the AU Foundation. Future provisions would require that the Literacy Center Director receive reassigned time for supervising an expanded AU Literacy Center and would necessitate the assignment of an Office Manager to the AU Literacy Center to manage the telephone, mailings, schedules for tutors/tutees, copying, technology, safety, and more. Graduate assistants and certified teachers will continue to serve on-site during all hours of tutoring and will continue to need to receive small stipends for doing so. External funding opportunities will be pursued aggressively.

## Conclusion

The Augusta University Literacy Center provides valuable opportunities for AU students from all campus disciplines to participate in a myriad of literacy awareness activities. The AU undergraduate or graduate student who is trained as a tutor/mentor has the chance to act as an agent of service learning social change. Through a dynamic partnership between the campus and the community the tutor/mentor is able to assist others in reaching literacy goals while the tutor/mentor is receiving valuable experiences as well. Assisting another as one serves as tutor/mentor allows the act of literacy tutoring to become a tool for personal and social transformation, and after all, the purpose of a university education is not only to learn how to make a living, but rather to learn how to make a life. Making lives better through literacy is what the AU Literacy Center achieves. The Literacy Center serves as a true community of learners on the Augusta University campus and be

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