2025 SPRING NEWSLETTER

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Department of Education Specialties
Graduate Programs in Bilingual Education, Literacy, Special Education, and TESOL
On Campus and Online

Message from the Chair

Dear Colleagues, Students, and Friends,
This past academic year has been one of growth and achievement for the Department of Education Specialties. Our faculty and students have much to be proud of.
Faculty members have formed strong school partnerships, worked with global partners, and shared important research. In our key areas—Bilingual Education, Literacy, Special Education, and TESOL—we continue to meet the growing needs of schools locally and nationally.
Our team is focused on using proven teaching methods and the latest technology to prepare educators for real-world classrooms. Because of this, our graduates leave St. John's ready to make a difference.
As we face new challenges in education, we know that creativity, critical thinking, and teamwork will help us move forward.
To our graduates—congratulations! You've worked hard and achieved so much.
To our new and returning students—we're excited to welcome you to a great lineup of summer and fall classes.

Warm regards,
John Spiridakis, J.D., Ph.D.
Professor and Chair, Department of Education Specialties

> The field of education is filled with opportunities for affecting change and imparting knowledge – in a variety of ways and in a multitude of settings. For this reason, St. John's offers a wide range of programs designed to meet your unique career goals and the many evolving needs of the educational system.

From the Co-Editor's Desk: Protecting the Dignity and Humanity of All Students

As educators, we are called not only to instruct but to safeguard—to ensure that every student who enters our schools feels a sense of belonging, safety, and dignity. This charge is more critical than ever under the current presidential administration, whose policies have reignited racialized immigration enforcement and intensified trauma for immigrant communities across the country. In sanctuary states like New York, we must reckon with the contradictions between protective policies like NYS Executive Order 170 and local agreements that deputize police to act as immigration enforcers in New York. The multiple cases of U.S. citizens, residents, and visa holders wrongfully detained by ICE reminds us that language, race, and perceived immigration status are still dangerously conflated in public spaces, including our schools
At St. John's University, our Vincentian mission compels us to act with justice, compassion, and advocacy for the marginalized. This mission is not symbolic—it must animate our pedagogy and our school cultures. We must reject policies and rhetoric that cast undocumented students as threats and instead recognize their humanity, resilience, and right to education. Trauma-informed frameworks, grounded in the understanding that healing and learning are inseparable, provide us with the tools to support immigrant students navigating the compounded effects of migration, xenophobia, and systemic exclusion. Whether through affirming classroom environments, intentional SEL practices, Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Education, or partnerships with families and community organizations, educators play a vital role in cultivating schools as spaces of sanctuary and healing.
Let us not be passive in the face of harmful policies or emboldened hate. Let us instead model what social justice looks like—through our language, our curriculum, and our daily interactions. We owe it to our students, particularly those undocumented and traumatized by an unforgiving system, to create classrooms where their voices are heard, their identities are honored, and their safety is non-negotiable. This is not just an educational imperative—it is a moral one.

—Dr. Jordan González, Associate Professor of TESOL and Bilingual Education



St. John's Celebrates Education Leaders

At the 14th Annual Leaders in Education Awards Dinner on April 10, the School of Education honored alumni and faculty for their impact in the field.
Dr. Yvonne Pratt-Johnson, Professor in TESOL and Bilingual Education, received the Outstanding Faculty Award for her contributions to teacher preparation and student success.

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Faculty Highlights

Dr. Olivia G. Stewart

- Dr. Stewart and Dr. Midgette published: "*Designing a Critical Digital Literacies Virtual Exchange Experience to Engage and Reinvent Multimodal Texts*" in the Journal of Virtual Exchange.
- Dr. Stewart presented two sessions at AERA 2025 in Denver:
  - "*A Critical AI Media Literacy Framework*" with Devery Rodgers
  - "*Understanding the Practice of Virtual Exchange in Critical Literacy Projects"* with Dr. Midgette and Nataliia Safonova
- Upcoming: Dr. Stewart will present on AI Discourse, Literacy, and Criticality at St. John's Center for Faculty Success and Development's Generative AI Symposium in May.
- The Literacy Ph.D. Program welcomes a strong new cohort this fall.
- Ph.D. student Ciera Harris published a book: Read more here
- Ph.D. student Chevaunne D. Breland published in The Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy: "*Hushed brilliance: Maintaining African American language-speaking adolescent writers' rhetorical power*"

Dr. Eunhye Choi

Dr. Eunhye Choi, Assistant Professor of Special Education, presented at the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) conference in Baltimore this past March. Her presentation, titled "An Introspective Examination of the Efforts to Address Disability Discrimination," explored critical issues surrounding equity and advocacy in special education.

Dr. Kristin Anderson

Dr. Kristin Anderson, Adjunct Associate Professor of Literacy, continues to support educators beyond the classroom. In addition to teaching literacy courses at St. John's and serving as a Literacy Specialist in Great Neck, she recently delivered a professional development session for reading teachers in the West Hempstead School District.

TESOL Faculty to Present at CLACS XIV Multidisciplinary Conference

The Center for Caribbean and Latin American Studies (CLACS) will host its XIV Multidisciplinary Conference on Tuesday, May 6th, and Wednesday, May 7th. The TESOL faculty—**Drs. Pratt-Johnson, Figueroa-Murphy, and Gonzalez**—will present on the multifaceted challenges associated with the current immigration crisis.

Dr. Eleanor X. Mehta

- Chaired a symposium and presented "Guided by Qi: Counter-Story of In(ter)dependence with A Chinese Immigrant Autistic Youth" at AERA 2025 in Denver, CO.
- Co-led two virtual workshops with Dr. Lei Huang: "*Besides Intervention, What Else is Critical to Help Children to Grow*?" (Chinese American Association for Autistic Community, April 2025) "*ABCs of Parental Advocacy*" (Federation for Children with Special Needs, March 2025)
- Co-led an ADHD workshop at St. John's Prep School, Astoria, NY, titled "*Supporting Learners with ADHD in Regular Classrooms*."

A Few Notes To Remember

- **Jun Yan**, Literacy Ph.D. student, presented at St. John's Graduate Research Conference in April. Her talk, *"Using AI Tools to Improve Chinese Immigrants' English Reading Proficiency*," explored how AI supports bilingual literacy and multicultural meaning-making in community settings.

- Literacy Ph.D. Student Awarded Scholarship Megan Schumacher, a Ph.D. student in Literacy, received an Endowed Scholarship from St. John's University. The award supports her research on dyslexia and early reading. Megan shared her work at the Literacy Research Association Conference and credits her professors and the University's mission for inspiring her goals in education. Read more: St. John's Endowed Scholarship Helps Literacy Student Achieve Her Dream.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Empowering Educators: Strengthening Family Literacy for Multilingual Learner Success conference

- Hosted by TESOL & Bilingual Education Programs
- Sponsored by USED Grant Project LEADER
- Keynote: Dr. Jasmin Varela, Superintendent, Eastern Suffolk BOCES
- Panel discussion on MLL family literacy
- Presentations by Project LEADER Scholars and community partners
- 6 CTLE credits available
- Breakfast, lunch, and book giveaways

Time: 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Date: Friday, June 6, 2025
Location: D'Angelo Center, Room 416, Queens Campus

Register here



Project LEADER Research Team Updates

The Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER) has accepted the following research for presentation at its 27th Annual International Conference on Education, to be held May 19–22, 2025, in Athens, Greece

Accepted Paper Presentation:
Title: *A Cross-Cohort Comparison of a Dual-Certificate Professional Development Project: Examining Early and Sustained Impacts on Emerging School Leaders Working with English Learners*
Presenters: **Dr. Gulnur Ozbek, Dr. John Spiridakis, and Dr. Seokhee Cho**
A full manuscript is currently being finalized for submission to the Athens Journal of Education (AJE).

Publications:

- Ozbek, G., Spiridakis, J., & Cho, S. (submitted). A longitudinal investigation on preparing diverse school leaders for equity and achievement of English learners. TESOL Quarterly.
- Ozbek, G., Spiridakis, J., & Cho, S. (in preparation). Cross-cohort impacts of a dual-certificate professional development project on emerging school leaders working with English learners. Athens Journal of Education.



"The TESOL program at St. John's gave me strong theory and real teaching skills. It prepared me to be a confident, culturally responsive English teacher ready for today's classrooms."

— Lieyu Meng, TESOL alumna

Department Graduate Programs: in-person and online options

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