Saint Rose speech pathology program will be taught at Russell Sage

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Before the College of Saint Rose closed, local residents who needed help with speech could go to clinics at the campus and receive treatment from grad students. Now, Russell Sage has reopened the Winkler Clinic and will offer an undergraduate speech-language pathology program beginning this fall. Graduate programs are still at least four years away.
Lori Van Buren/Times Union

TROY — Russell Sage has received approval to open a speech pathology program, replacing the one offered by the now-closed College of Saint Rose.

Russell Sage hired three speech pathology professors from Saint Rose when that college closed. They reopened Saint Rose's Winkler Center, where hundreds of local residents received speech therapy, but they couldn't simply import the bachelor's program. They needed to create one and then wait for approval from the state Education Department, a process that was projected to take months.

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They used the time to improve upon the program they ran at Saint Rose, said professor Jack Pickering.

“We used our experience to try to create a program that might even be a little better,” he said.

In the new program, seniors will earn up to 50 hours of assessing and treating people who have a speech disorder.

They will work under a licensed speech-language pathologist and will focus on just one of the eight major speech-language disorders.

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The goal will be for the student to be working “as close to independent as possible by the end” of the school year.

The hours working will count toward the 400 hours they must acquire for their license. They must also get a master’s degree.

“We think our students are going to look really good to (graduate-level) programs across the country. We think we’re giving people a head start at the undergrad level,” Pickering said.

In addition, he said the new program has a “richer set of speech-language pathology courses.”

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Among them are courses not offered at Saint Rose, in medical terminology and neurological disorders.

“The health science and education combination at Sage really fit in a collaborative way,” he said.

Pickering also wants to add a speech pathology master’s program at Sage, but the accrediting body, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, only allows a certain number of new programs. Officials at Sage think they’ll get to the top of the list in about four years — just in time for the first class of undergraduate speech pathologists to graduate and move into the master’s program.

Those graduate students are eagerly awaited in the region. At Saint Rose, those students provided essential speech treatment at schools and hospitals.

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Although they must be supervised by a licensed therapist, they help manage the increasing need for speech therapy.

“The need has gone up. After COVID especially, we’ve seen an increased need at pediatrics,” said Kristin Seaburg, executive director of patient therapies at St. Peter’s Health Partners. “We do need that graduate program. We need licensed therapists coming out.”

St. Peter’s Health Partners is the biggest speech-language therapist employer in the area and provides speech therapy to Headstart students. But nearly every school district also employs speech therapists, either on a part-time or full-time basis, and some say that they do not have enough therapists to meet the need.

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