

## Abstract

### **Rehabilitation Counselor Training Program with Specialization in Assistive Technology (RC-AT)**

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There is a critical shortage of qualified Rehabilitation Counselors of diverse backgrounds to provide services to clients of the state-federal vocational rehabilitation (VR) system. The need for training in assistive technology (AT) is an on-going issue, as AT influences almost all aspects of rehabilitation services, career counseling, vocational training, job development and most important employment (deJonge, Scherer, & Rodger, 2007). A 2006 survey of certified rehabilitation counselors indicates that they have concerns about their role in providing assistive technology services for consumers (Barros-Bailey, Benschhoff, & Fischer, 2009).

According to Hayward and Schmidt-Davis (2005) (the most recent study available), about 20% of state-federal VR counselors has a CRC, 57% possesses a master's degree, and 42% has a bachelor's degree (though 43% of rehabilitation perceived formal education as an important determinant of effective job performance). In 2012, LRS employed 109 rehabilitation counselors. However in order to adequately serve consumers, the agency is projecting to hire 41 rehabilitation counselors in the next five years. The number of vacancies may increase as a result of promotions of rehabilitation counselors to higher positions. E.g., projected vacancies until 2018 for field managers are eight, district supervisors are 14, and administrators are 13. In its FY 2014 State Plan, LRS has explicitly identified the need for training of its current and future rehabilitation counselors and the crucial role the two CORE accredited graduate programs in Louisiana play in addressing that personnel need.

In order to address this national need, the Rehabilitation Counseling Program (RCP) in the Department of Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (DRDS) at Southern University (SU), Baton Rouge, is requesting for five-year funding (CFDA Number: 84.129B) of the **Rehabilitation Counselor Training Program with Specialization in Assistive Technology (RC-AT)** at the master's degree level. The **goal of Project RC-AT** is to provide master's level training in areas of personnel shortage to assist in increasing the numbers of qualified personnel trained in serving to individuals with disabilities under the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, as amended. This goal will be accomplished:

**Objective 1:** To increase the number of qualified rehabilitation counselors of diverse origins through innovative/dynamic

recruitment, retention, mentoring, training, and career counseling efforts by awarding RSA Scholarships to the most qualified 5 first year and 5 second year master's students every year. **Objective 2:** To modify and implement a 18 hour specialty curriculum in assistive technology leading to an M.S. degree and further infuse assistive technology, ethics, evidence-based practice, advocacy, and placement techniques, in the existing CORE accredited master's degree program in rehabilitation counseling. **Objective 3:** To graduate 5 students every year, beginning in 2015, for a total of 25 during the project period, and place them in LRS and other state-federal VR agencies to improve employment outcome for clients. **Objective 4:** To develop and archive seminars (via GoToMeeting video conferencing) on current topics in AT, and provide those Web-based programs to RSA Scholars and practicing rehabilitation counselors for CEU credit.

The goal and objectives will be accomplished via a Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE) accredited 48 hour master's degree curriculum that focuses on preparing a diverse body of students and professionals in evidence based approaches in assistive technology, independent living, group and family counseling, advocacy, vocational evaluation and assessment, career counseling and job placement, mental health counseling, case management, and benefits counseling. Project RC-AT, a collaboration among DRDS, Louisiana Rehabilitation Services, and the Louisiana Tech Center for Rehabilitation Engineering, Science and Technology will provide culturally sensitive recruitment, orientation, retention, training (didactic and practical), mentoring, and post-graduation placement services. Three special courses will be developed for this specialization in assistive technology: 1. Study of AT for sensory impairments, to include case studies, 2. Study of AT for physical impairments, to include case studies, and 3. Case Studies of AT for worksite applications, conducted in collaboration with Louisiana Tech Center rehabilitation engineers. A total of 75% percent of the budget has been allocated to student support. The **final outcome of Project RC-AT will be:** (1) an increase in the number of person-years of service provided to state-federal VR by 25 graduates during their tenure of at least four years required for complete payback, i.e., a total of 100 person years of VR service; and (2) increase the pool of applicants for employment by state VR agencies of individuals who have completed a specialized training track on assistive technology in vocational rehabilitation.