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## NSU's Legnon shares experiences in 'Fundamentals of Autism' course

One of the defining characteristics of a university is its faculty, and Northeastern State University is no exception.

The experiences, qualifications and talent of faculty can enhance the educational journeys of the students and one teacher making her personal mark on NSU's College of Education is Jodi Legnon.

As an adjunct instructor for Curriculum and Instruction, Legnon teaches "Development of Early Childhood Programs," "Language Arts in the Elementary Schools" and "Introduction to the Exceptional Child."

But a course she created, "Fundamentals of Autism" or EDUC 4811, is proving popular with NSU's education majors.

"It is a Friday evening and all-day Saturday course on the Broken Arrow campus," said Legnon, who has served as adjunct faculty at NSU since 2007.

With Legnon's assistance, NSU's College of Education offers "Fundamentals of Autism," a one-hour credit course that regularly draws 30-40 students. It teaches the history and definition of autism, methods to include autistic children with typically developing students in a classroom setting, classroom strategies and ways to support parents of children with autism.

"Students who complete this course tell me they know they will have a child with autism in their class and they feel somewhat prepared to teach these kids after attending the class," Legnon said. "It is my desire for 'Fundamentals of Autism' to turn into a 3-hour credit course. There is enough information for us to study autism for a 16-week semester."

Autism is a poorly understood neural development disorder usually appearing in very early childhood. Children with autism often exhibit impaired communication skills and social interaction and engage in repetitive behavior, but symptoms and their severity vary. Diagnosis can be difficult, but the Center for Disease Control believes as many as 1 in 110 Americans could suffer from the disorder.

Legnon's personal experience enhances her credentials to teach the course. Her 7-year-old son, Kade, has autism, and she said she is rarely just a parent or just an educator.

"Both are who I am and what I do," she said. "Having the public school teaching background, the experience of parenting a child with autism and the knowledge of education and special education law allows me to inform my students of their responsibilities as educators."

Legnon began her career as an elementary school teacher. When her twin sons, Kade and Karter, were born she stayed home, then pursued her master's degree at NSU. The semester before graduation she was asked to teach a class by Dr. Denise DaRos-Voseles while she was away on a book-writing **sabbatical**.

"I was very excited and I am still very excited by be a part of NSU's adjunct faculty," Legnon said.

Legnon, 32, graduated from NSU in 2000 with a bachelor's degree and earned her master's in December 2007 in Early Childhood Education. She is dedicated to cultivating awareness of autism inside and outside the classroom. She lives in Tulsa and teaches "Parenting Children with Autism" courses at Tulsa Technology Center and is an educator and adviser for the Center for Early Childhood Professional Development. She is also on the board of directors for the Autism Center of Tulsa. Her first-hand accounts allow her students insights unavailable in any textbook.

"I have sat on both sides of the table during an Individualized Education Plan meeting and the view is different on each side," Legnon said. "I hope my personal experiences that I share with my classes help the students understand the parents' challenges, fears and concerns."

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