

New Virtual Disability and Policy Program Launched

By Charles Spencer

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AU's Derrick Cogburn conducts a videoconference from Bangkok to help launch the new master's program in disability and public policy. (Photo: Jeff Watts)

The world's first virtual master's degree program focused on disability and public policy for the Southeast Asia region — and American University's first entirely online degree — has been officially launched with a two-week student residency in Bangkok, Thailand.

The 10 students in the first class of the one-year master's program will have access to experts on the topic from around the world via a variety of online avenues. Many of those experts will come from AU.

The program is offered as one of AU's School of International Service's MA programs and administered through the Center for Research on Collaboratories and Technology Enhanced Learning Communities (COTELCO) and the Institute on Disability and Public Policy.

The class could grow in the next few weeks, especially considering that the program only recently formally began. Many more students applied to the highly selective program.

The Nippon Foundation, a Japan-based philanthropic organization, will fund up to 15 students per year, and a cohort of 25 students is expected in the master's program.

The foundation also supports the Institute on Disability and Public Policy through a five-year grant that will average about \$2 million per year.

“This is a wonderful day to be able to realize a dream we’ve been working on for almost two years,” said AU’s Derrick Cogburn, director of COTELCO, in thanking the program’s many partners.

Cogburn is also executive director of the Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP).

Speaking July 18 at a live videoconference from Bangkok attended by students from the program, Cogburn said, “We’re using technology that enables people to work together. Students will be able to take classes anywhere in the region or in the world.” Faculty members, too, will be able to teach from anywhere.

Technology development for the program focused on making it available to people who lack high bandwidth, are blind or visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, or mobility impaired.

The program “fulfills a very important global mission of American University,” said School of International Service dean Louis Goodman, who also spoke from Bangkok, where he applauded the program’s pioneering efforts in disability issues.

Two students in the new master’s program also spoke at the teleconference. Raphael Domingo of the Philippines, who is now coordinator for education access for the deaf at De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde in the Philippines, spoke through a sign language interpreter of his desire to be a role model as part of his motivation to join the program.

Master’s student Khy Huy of Cambodia, who holds several academic degrees, including a master’s degree in the International Legal Studies program at AU’s Washington College of Law, also spoke at the Bangkok conference.

Following his graduation from AU, he served at WCL’s Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law.

Other partners in the program include:

Mahidol University in Bangkok, Thailand

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore

National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology

University of Indonesia in Jakarta, Indonesia

University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

De La Salle Philippines

Ateneo de Manila University, Philippines

Also supporting the IDPP along with COTELCO, which is a joint initiative between AU's School of International Service and Syracuse University, are the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability in Bangkok and the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment.

Source: <http://www.american.edu/americanoday/campus-news/20110719-COTELCO-Disability-Policy-Program.cfm>