

# Free support for literacy

## Grad students at Old Westbury to instruct pupils

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Long Island students who need reading and writing help, but whose families can't afford tutoring, now have a new, no-cost opportunity.

SUNY Old Westbury's School of Education is piloting a free Literacy Learning Clinic starting Jan. 31 for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

Graduate students in the public college's two-year Master of Science in Literacy Education program, which was launched in fall 2017, will provide strategy instruction sessions once a week for 45 minutes on Old Westbury's campus through May 16.

"It serves the community, as well as gives our graduate candidates a setting where they can practice their skills under the supervision of college faculty as they complete their degree," said Amy Hsu, the program's coordinator, who is an associate professor and chairs the college's childhood education and literacy program.

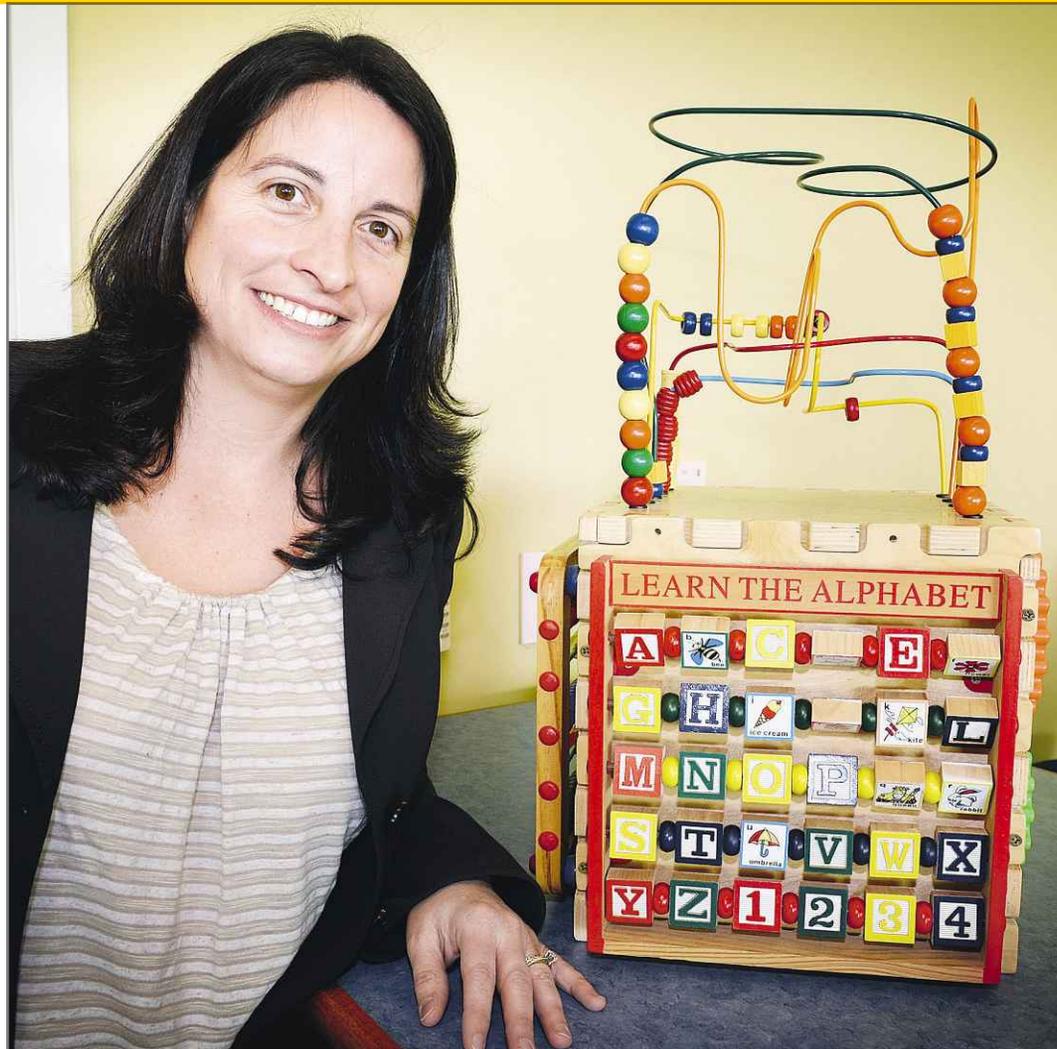
"Many children lack confidence in their literacy abilities," Hsu said. "We're looking to serve those who need support for developing literacy proficiency, and of course those that don't have the access to it."

Other colleges and universities on Long Island — including Adelphi University, Hofstra University, Long Island University and St. Joseph's College — offer similar tutoring services through their graduate education programs.

Most partner with specific school districts. Hofstra, for example, works with students from Hempstead, Uniondale and Roosevelt schools, while St. Joseph's works with Patchogue-Medford. Services through LIU and St. Joseph's are free, while Hofstra and Adelphi charge a fee.

These programs are in high demand.

"It's been a bit of a battle to get extra help at school," said Hazel Chrobot of West Hempstead, who works at Adelphi.



Amy Hsu, who chairs the SUNY Old Westbury program, said it can benefit those who can't afford help.

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— Amy Hsu,  
program coordinator

Last year, her first-grade daughter was having difficulty reading. Chrobot found help for her at The Literacy Center at Adelphi, where master's degree candidates work with students in first through 12th grade. The cost for individual placement is \$300, and \$150 for a group set-

ting of four students or fewer.

After 10 weeks, she saw “tremendous improvement,” Chrobot said. “She had little rhymes and little flashcards and things that were more meaningful to her than memorization.”

Chrobot is hoping to get her daughter, who now is in the second grade, into the program again this semester, but she said there's always a waiting list.

All teaching programs offer some literacy training, but Old Westbury's literacy master's degree allows the teachers to dive deeper into reading and writing strategies, to identify age-appropriate literature, and trains them in how to assess students' reading skills, Hsu said. It also teaches them how to build on students' strengths as readers and writers.

“We live in such an informa-

tion-based world that they need strong literacy skills in order to make sense of the world,” she said.

The master's program culminates with the six-credit clinic during the last semester of the second year. The clinic allows them to work with students individually and in small groups, outside the confines of a classroom and set curriculum, Hsu said. The teachers, who are all state-certified, also will create progress reports for parents and provide advice on how they can further support literacy growth.

This semester, they hope to serve about 60 students through the clinic, Hsu said.

Next year, it's expected to grow even larger, as the number of teachers in the program rises, she said. Eight master's candidates who are set to grad-

### About the clinic

SUNY Old Westbury is offering a free weekly Literacy Learning Clinic for students in kindergarten through 12th grade.

- The clinic begins Jan. 31 and runs through May 16.
- Sessions are 45 minutes, and are offered at either 4:45 p.m. or 5:45 p.m.
- There's no cost to families, but a parent, guardian or caregiver must remain on-site during the session.
- For more information and to sign up, visit [oldwestbury.edu](http://oldwestbury.edu).

SOURCE: SUNY OLD WESTBURY

uate in May will be certified in literacy at either the childhood or adolescence levels, or both. An additional 21 teachers joined the graduate program's second cohort this past fall and will be eligible to teach at the clinic in the spring 2020 semester.

Ashley Coleman, 26, of Mineola, is on track to be one of the first graduates from the Old Westbury program this spring. She said she already has used her literacy training at the Our Lady of Fatima School in Jackson Heights, where she works as a third-grade teacher focusing on English language arts and social studies.

The program's strength-based approach helps build students' confidence, she said. For example, if students say the wrong word and correct themselves, Coleman points out how they were able to solve the problem on their own, she said.

One student Coleman worked with during the fall semester made significant progress, and the more confident the student became, the more that student shared thoughts and took risks, she said. “The more they take risks, that's how they're going to grow as a learner.”

The clinic provides practice assessment skills and produces reading reports for parents.

“I feel like bringing this type of program into the community is going to help more students develop the skills that they need to be successful in reading, or making sense of a text, or anything else they read,” Coleman said.