

U of M professor teaching more than just English

By Bryan Newcomb
Staff Reporter

A free language and literacy pilot program started in June by University of Memphis linguistics professor Anita Pandey will continue pursuing its goal of bridging cultural and demographic differences in the Memphis community this fall.

The pilot program is a unique English as a second language (ESL) program designed to teach English to minority non-native English speaking mothers living in Memphis.

According to U of M student Demarious Danovi, who will graduate this summer with a master's in English with an ESL concentration and become one of the program's teachers in the fall, the program is much needed.

"There is a tremendous need for the (ESL) program, particularly for the mothers," she said. "Often times the children go to school and the husbands get jobs, leaving the women at home. The chil-

dren can learn English at school and the men can learn it at work, but the women are often isolated."

Although classes held at the Memphis Hispanic Institute (MHI) focused on teaching English to minority mothers, the program also encouraged mothers to pass their native language on to their children.

"We don't want people to begin to turn against their first language, but to embrace bilingualism," Pandey said Wednesday. "The concept of everyone learning as a group helps to create a community of learners, resulting in an exchange of both linguistics and culture."

For the ESL learners, most of whom are Hispanic, the community atmosphere provides an appealing learning process, Pandey said.

"While parents are learning English, the kids are learning their first language. Families are learning together and getting closer," she said.

When Pandey joined The U of M in the fall of 1997, the

Hispanic population in Memphis was at 30,000. Current statistics cite the Hispanic population at more than 200,000.

According to Pandey, the program is not restricted to teaching mothers and children, but it has also offered native English speakers a chance to learn valuable information about other languages and cultures by inviting them to sit in the classroom.

Pandey said the program is the first of its kind in the nation.

"Programs in the Long Beach, California, area are raving about family literacy programs with homework assistance being provided at libraries — but that is a short-term fix," she said. "We provide a long-term fix by involving the parents, which will enable them to attend school PTA meetings and help with homework."

Not being able to help their children with their homework because of linguistic and cultural barriers is one of the biggest concerns to many non-native English speaking families, Pandey said.

This fall, the city will provide free transportation by bus to and from a new ESL facility across the street from the public library on Poplar. Classes, however, have not yet been scheduled for the fall.

Pandey said she hopes the program will continue to grow and include a greater variety of minority groups, such as Koreans, Vietnamese and Africans. The program, which is largely funded by the city, will be taught by Pandey's former students, who are qualified ESL teachers.

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more year of work but didn't have to be told why she was being let go.

Although she had not told her bosses of her condition, her appearance was visibly softening and the fact that a faculty member saw her in women's clothes off-campus led her to believe they "had figured me out."

She immediately told administrators she had gender identity disorder and was undergoing transition but wanted no special treatment.

They responded unequivocally: She could work only as a man. "The University expects that, during your employment with the university, you will dress in the male gender role," an official wrote twice that spring.


Barger says her dean wanted her out immediately because he felt she threatened the young engineering program and its 122 students. "He told me that if I was seen coming out of the women's restroom, every mother would pull their child out of school and the department would collapse." Other faculty confirm that the dean and other department members voiced concerns about negative student reaction.

A school spokesman says Henson was uncomfortable speaking with the news media.

Barger asked to move to the computer science department. Faculty there say she was qualified for a post they'd tried to fill for years, but her application was vetoed by higher-ups.

Administrators then wrote that Barger must agree to use men's bathrooms. As classes began in August, the ultimatums grew more explicit.

"You may not wear any item obviously associated with the female gender (earrings, wigs, nail polish, cosmetics,




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