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By Emma Crawford Kent

Daily Journal

COLUMBUS – Mississippi University for Women hopes to decrease the number of low-income children starting kindergarten behind their peers through the creation of a Jumpstart chapter on MUW’s campus.

Currently, Mississippi’s only Jumpstart program is at the University of Mississippi and is in its fourth year.

The program, coordinated through the university’s Center for Excellence in Literary Instruction (CELI), includes UM and CELI staff and about 25 Jumpstart volunteers.

The goal of MUW’s Jumpstart chapter is to start with about 12 volunteers for its local area.

Children in low-income neighborhoods typically start kindergarten 60 percent behind their peers in more affluent communities, according to statistics provided by Jumpstart, a national organization that helps children develop language and literacy skills.

Rose Ford, site manager for MUW’s Jumpstart program, explained that these children tend to fall behind due to a lack of experience and not a lack of ability.

“We really anticipate we can help close the gap in this area,” Ford said.

While the program is open to all students, MUW plans to target education majors as volunteers.

Education students, who are also members of MUW’s College Corps, must commit to at least 300 hours of service.

If participants are able to complete the requirements, they are also eligible to earn a \$1,200 education award.

Monica Riley, chair of MUW’s education department, said she hopes Jumpstart will foster greater connections between MUW students and the community.

“This is a great opportunity for our students,” Riley said. “We hope we can turn them on to service opportunities to change children’s lives while being involved in the local community.”

Volunteers will undergo 30 hours of intensive training before entering the classroom.

The students will work as a team at the chosen sites and meet with Ford on a weekly basis.

Nationally, more than 11,000 children were served by more than 4,300 Corps members in 2014 through the Jumpstart program.

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