Making a Difference: SOE Students Serve Children, Schools and Communities

“Making a difference” is more than a slogan in the School of Education. Our faculty, staff and students take seriously the challenges and opportunities to enrich the lives of others. In this issue of the newsletter, we profile four graduates who are making a difference in the world around them.

During July 2009, Rachel Bachman, MAT ’09, mathematics adolescence education (and current EdD student) and Jordan Titus, MAT ’08, mathematics adolescence education, co-taught a math class for Binghamton University’s Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) summer enrichment program. Rachel and Jordan’s math class met for nine hours every week and covered a range of material to help prepare the students for calculus, statistics and other math courses at BU. One of the biggest challenges they faced was modifying the behavior of the calculator-dependent students to comply with the University’s no-calculator policy.

Rachel, now a doctoral student working with Dr. Jean Schmittau, and Jordan, a second-year math teacher at Binghamton High School, incorporated team-building activities, experiments, manipulatives and a few card games into the fast-paced course, with the primary goal of giving their students visual and concrete ways to think about ideas like functions and equations.

Tom Miller, MAT ’10, mathematics adolescence education, an adventure specialist at the North Shore Day Camp on Long Island, has found a way to make a difference by working with children in a non-academic setting — using a zip line and high ropes course. Working with children ages 5 to 14, Tom taught team building, self-esteem and resilience as well as the technical skills of climbing and belaying. As Tom notes, “it was particularly rewarding to help some of the younger or inexperienced climbers set small, gradual goals for themselves and to watch them slowly work their way from simply putting on a harness to eventually making it to the tops of our highest peaks.”

Presented with the challenge of a student with learning disabilities who had experienced a traumatic event affecting her mental and physical health, Christi Derr, MSEd ’07, special education adolescence education, and her colleagues, Kelly Archer and Erica Dell'Sandro, visited the student at her home while she was unable to attend school. They modified her coursework and homework and then created a safe place in the school for her to go to when she felt anxious and overwhelmed. They implemented strategies to help this student feel safe, accepted, supported and valued. For these efforts, Christi and her colleagues were given the Outstanding Consumer Support Award by the Southern Tier Independence Center.

While on a trip to her parents’ homeland of Pakistan, Hina Ahmed, MAT ’09, social studies adolescence education, decided to engage in some first-hand research in order to understand life in that troubled country. Her travels took her to northern Pakistan, where she engaged in a conversation with a group of women villagers. Those conversations covered considerable ground — the role of the Taliban, the U.S. presence and the possibilities for a brighter future in Pakistan. Hina benefited enormously from the honest and forthright exchange, as did her hosts.
Pushing Forward

Throughout the continuing state and national financial downturn is stalling our effort to grow the School of Education, we are pushing forward.

The most obvious push has come in terms of student enrollment. Thanks to the extra efforts of the faculty and staff, we have grown by nearly 30 percent in the past two years. Even better is the fact that we continue to receive applications from terrific students, so the quality of our graduates remains high.

That said, we recognized that we need to take additional steps to help our students make a successful transition from their coursework to their fieldwork. We have instituted an orientation program for all teacher education students that, among other things, helps them better understand the inner workings of school contexts and their roles and responsibilities in those contexts. We are also developing a set of professional dispositions in order to track our students’ development as educators.

On the academic front, we recently initiated a review of our doctoral program. Originally conceptualized as a means by which school practitioners might improve their practices, the program has well served that need. Increasingly, however, we are attracting students interested in academic research and careers in higher education. So, as we move forward in our school, it made sense to take a close look at the admissions process, coursework, teaching and research opportunities, faculty resources and other facets of the current program. We launched that effort with a very successful faculty retreat in late October 2009. In the coming months we will be soliciting input from a range of perspectives, including current and former students and area teachers and administrators.

Finally, as the article on the front page of this newsletter attests, we are pushing forward in terms of the difference our students make. Although some observers question the ability of schools of education to produce quality teachers and administrators, we believe that we do just that. Our graduates are clearly the challenges ahead of them and they use the knowledge, skills and resources that they learn here to make a difference in the lives of others.

With a new administration in Washington and with fiscal challenges all around us, the field of education continues to garner considerable attention as challenges and reforms of all stripes are offered. At the School of Education, we believe that we do just that. Our graduates see the inner workings of school contexts and their roles and responsibilities in those contexts. We are also developing a set of professional dispositions in order to track our students’ development as educators.

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With a new administration in Washington and with fiscal challenges all around us, the field of education continues to garner considerable attention as challenges and reforms of all stripes are offered. At the heart of all ambitious schooling, however, are students and ideas and the educators who bring them together. We are proud of the efforts we have made toward that end and the efforts we expect to make in the future.

Donald A. Cole

Donald A. Cole received the Binghamton University Council/Foundation Award recognizing his extraordinary 19 years of dedicated service as the coordinator of the Liberty Partnership Program in the Binghamton City School District. Liberty Partnership is one of several outreach programs sponsored by the School of Education.

Ever active, Don worked with high school students and their families, along with the schools and youth serving community agencies, to foster higher achievement by at-risk students. Throughout the years, Don helped hundreds of students turn their lives around and become academically, socially and emotionally empowered. His initiatives have included a multicultural awareness program to improve relations among a diverse student body and program partnerships fostering leadership and character development among his Liberty students in cooperation with community agencies such as the Broome County Youth Bureau, Lourdes Youth Services, Binghamton Housing Authority, the Gang Prevention Task Force and the Broome County Urban League. He also implemented the “Liberty Scholars” program, which allowed students to take advanced placement courses from Broome Community College. Finally, Don was instrumental in developing the Liberty Partnership’s highly recognized RESOLVE program to help youth master the skills of communication, conflict resolution and anger management.

In parting, Don’s Liberty students at Binghamton High School raised almost $3000 to establish the Donald A. Cole Scholarship to advance his vision into the future. (If you wish to contribute, please contact the BCSD Dollars for Scholars Program.) We wish him all the best in his new endeavor and we are confident he will continue to be influential in the lives of young people who need strong guidance and encouragement.

New Program in Early Childhood Special Education

The graduate program in special education now offers three different concentrations: Early Childhood Special Education (Birth to Grade 2), Childhood Special Education (Grades 1-6) and Adolescence Special Education (grades 7-12). The three different age groups match New York state’s certification areas. Special education teachers used to be able to teach any age group, but all that changed when new certification requirements went into effect in 2004. With those changes, many new special education teachers were qualified to teach in elementary schools — except in kindergarten.

As part of her work on a grant from the Roger L. Kresge Foundation, Dr. Liz Anderson was able to document growing needs for special education teachers in kindergartens, pre-K and early intervention settings. With that evidence, the faculty received approval to design a program in Early Childhood Special Education, which recently won state approval.

Applicants to the Early Childhood Special Education program must have a bachelor’s degree and NYS certification in Early Childhood Education (Birth to Grade 2) or Early Childhood Education (Birth to Grade 6). The 36-credit program, which includes two summer courses, could be completed in one year of full-time study or more slowly by part-time students. Graduates earn the MSED degree. Details about the program are posted on our website.

Liz Anderson
Partner Power

Again this year, the School of Education continues its partnership with Johnson City Elementary/Intermediate School to support literacy teaching and learning. In an after-school program called Partner Power, nearly 50 children are paired with SOE graduate students who provide weekly tutoring in reading and writing.

Partner Power gives SOE graduate students an opportunity to administer a variety of assessment tools to children as a way to learn about the children’s established and emerging literacy behaviors. Based on this assessment information, tutors plan and implement targeted instruction to build children’s reading comprehension, vocabulary and writing skills. With their tutors, the children read chapter books and create ABC books on topics of their choice, which they share with their classroom teachers and classmates.

Now in its eighth year, Partner Power was created for all those involved as it benefits the teaching and university partnership that makes a big difference for all those involved as it benefits the teaching and university partnership that makes a big difference. This year Jan Hussar (SOE alumna and who is now principal at Owego-Apalachin Elementary School) and Laurie McKevoy (SOE alumna and JC teacher, who is now principal at Owego-Apalachin Elementary School). This year Jan Hussar (SOE alumna and JC teacher, who is now principal at Owego-Apalachin Elementary School) is co-teaching the graduate course with Distinguished Teaching Professor Karen Bromley and Jennifer Anderson.

We look forward to continuing this successful school-university partnership that makes a big difference for all those involved as it benefits the teaching and learning of children, graduate students, Johnson City and SOE faculty and the community.

The children in Partner Power offer these comments:

*I learned about animals. I liked doing my ABC book.*
*I would make Partner Power longer.*
*I learned bigger words and I learned how to make a book.*
*I learned when you read slower that you understand.*
Their parents offer additional insights:
*He seems to be reading much better and excited about it.*
*She has enjoyed the program and we are really glad she could take part.*
*She reads and writes every night now.*

Every year the Educational Talent Search (ETS) program helps at least 625 low-income students, who are the first in their families to attend college, navigate the often daunting college admission and financial aid processes. Counselors Wixie Skellert, Diana Johnson and Nadia Salaraz lead many tutors to meet with high school students in 14 school districts in Broome, Chenango and Tioga counties. They also use our downtown office to meet with older students whose plans for higher education have been delayed or interrupted.

Although all the students we help and encourage on their paths to college are wonderful and their stories are compelling, some of them, such as Christina Muscatello and Shameka Durham, stand out.

Christina Muscatello earned a bachelor’s degree in history at Binghamton University in 2008 and was a recipient of a Chancellor’s Award. She participated in three Theatre Department productions, did an internship in the office of the mayor in Binghamton and served on the board of the campus chapter of Habitat for Humanity. She is currently an AmeriCorps member in the Rural Health Service Corps based in Whitney Point. She credits ETS for giving her the confidence to pursue all her goals and dreams.

Shameka Durham was a high school senior when she first met with an ETS counselor and learned about the availability of financial aid and the possibility that her family could afford to send her to college. Upon graduation, she attended Broome Community College and completed an associate degree in liberal arts. Later she completed a degree in human development and entered in the social work program at Binghamton University. Throughout her studies, Shameka maintained contact with her ETS counselor, whom she credits with encouraging her to pursue goals she would never have attempted on her own. Today Shameka is a School of Education staff member working at Binghamton High School on a joint appointment with ETS and the Liberty Partnership Program while she completes the requirements for her MSW degree.
Fall 2009 Recognition Ceremony

Since 2006, SOE has added a school-based recognition ceremony to the events surrounding winter and spring graduations. On December 4, we hosted the fall 2009 recognition ceremony at Endwell Greens. We have the largest number of graduates each fall; this past fall semester, 72 of our students graduated. Brenda Myers, EdD ’04, superintendent in the Groton School District, was our keynote speaker, and MAT physics student Nick Natshak was our student speaker.

After the class, one student commented that Dr. Blake’s teaching is masterful, which is why he makes it look easy. His style is informal, his language clear and without technical terms or jargon, and this leads to ready class participation.

In addition to stimulating courses and discussions, daylong bus trips to museums and ethnic dinners, Lyceum's lifelong learning program attracts a large number of students. During the four classes, there were dozens, and I didn’t want to do poets on four American poets, I had the chance to offer more than one presentation. His style is informal, his language clear and without technical terms or jargon, which is to say he makes it look easy. Discussion was lively, and Prof. Karen Wixson, MSEd ’75, commented, ‘The difference between an expert and a non-expert is that the former can explain the concept of American poetry is significant. The students who experienced firsthand events and discoveries, and without technical terms or jargon, and this leads to ready class participation.

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GEAR UP: Powerful Learning Experiences for BHS and SOE Students

The GEAR UP program (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) provides early intervention strategies to all students in 10th and 11th grades at Binghamton High School in order to improve their academic performance and to increase their opportunities to attend college.

During the fall semester, School of Education MAT students make up the majority of the college students involved with the GEAR UP program. Currently, there are 43 MAT students working with the BHS students for 35 hours throughout the semester. Most of these hours are devoted to tutoring students either individually or in small groups. The MAT students also spend five hours observing in classrooms in their discipline (math, English, science or history). During these observations, the MAT students observe classroom management skills, the execution of detailed lesson plans and the key elements necessary for a positive teacher/student relationship. MAT student Collin Cook said, “Through observing teachers, I gained useful ideas for lessons that I will use in the future.”

Being a part of the GEAR UP program is a rewarding experience for both the BHS students and the MAT students because strong relationships are formed and the BHS students receive tutoring assistance from college students who are very knowledgeable about their subject matter. Working with the MAT students on a regular basis is what gets some BHS students excited about coming to school each day. One BHS student said, “I can’t wait to do my math homework with Jason tomorrow at lunch!”

The GEAR UP experience provides hands-on experiences for the MAT students, particularly for those who have had few opportunities to work directly with high school students. MAT student Elane Van Kuren said, “The individual time I spent with the students gave me some additional confidence in my ability to relate with them on a social level as well as to try and implement the teaching strategies that I have been learning in the classroom setting.”

By bringing prospective college students together with prospective teachers, GEAR UP creates opportunities for both groups to grow and to learn from one another.

The Teacher/Leader Quality Partnerships Program

Binghamton University’s School of Education continues its tradition of excellence in professional development and successful participation in the Teacher/Leader Quality Partnerships (TLQP) program with a new grant award — Improving Mathematics Learning and Teaching — that incorporates lessons learned from its 2003 TLQP award and propels the School of Education in new directions to serve new populations. Dr. Paul-William Burch and Dr. Beth Burch have won a three-year Title II federal grant administered through the New York State Education Department with a $467,948 award for Year 1.

Dr. Paul-William Burch directs the project. Dr. Jean Schmittau, the project’s lead mathematics educator, creates and oversees the mathematics education dimension within this statewide project. BU, the lead institution, is joined by Sage College and the College of Saint Rose as well as 10 school districts in three regions of the state. Partner school districts include Binghamton, Elmira, Hammondsport, Hunter-Tannersville, Margaretville, Middletown, Prattsburgh, Sharon Springs, Utica, and Watervliet. Binghamton University leaders will model for the other colleges all aspects of the project, from scheduling to workshops in course structures to curriculum building to action research.

The original Binghamton TLQP project focused on middle school mathematics and on improving the mathematical understanding and research-based practices of middle school mathematics teachers. In this proposal, the faculty expand their focus to include elementary school teachers. Because many elementary school teachers have only one mathematics course before they enter the classroom, they may have imperfect understandings of mathematics. This project involves gently teaching mathematics to teachers at the same time that it teaches teachers how to teach mathematics.

This new project provides for the content and instructional needs for teachers in grades 3-8 as well as special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers and staff. The ESL strand is a new feature of the project, designed to address a perceived need. For example, Margaretville has a population of 22 percent Hispanic children and Binghamton City Schools have students with 26 percent native languages.

An ongoing goal for the Binghamton TLQP project is to provide significantly more than 40 contact hours of professional development distributed throughout the year so that all teachers may easily meet district requirements for continuing professional engagement. Our project will also attempt to reduce the number of teachers in partner districts who are not certified or who are teaching out of certification by 20 percent. Our ultimate goal, perhaps not achievable in one year, is to improve the mathematics scores on NYSED mathematics exams for grades 3 through 8 by 10 percent.
Keep Us Informed

We would like to know more about our alumni! In future publications, we would like to have a section addressing what our former students are up to now. Please cut this page out, place it in an envelope with postage, and send it back to us; we are eager to hear from you.

Name
Year graduated
Program
Your job: Tell us about your job (where you work, what grade level, position, etc.), what your students are like, the culture of your school.
Your pursuits: Tell us about any awards that you have been given, promotions, publications, new opportunities, etc.

Thank you for your participation!

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Funding Opportunities

SOE faculty, staff and students deeply appreciate your generous support of the school. Please consider our two newest funds for student and faculty excellence:

The Fund for Student Excellence (FSE) provides an opportunity for donors to contribute to the recognition of and support for outstanding student potential and achievement. Among other things, FSE monies will help students attend and present papers at professional conferences and seek funding for independent research projects.

The Fund for Faculty Excellence (FFE) offers a similar opportunity to support the outstanding work done by SOE faculty. Dispersed at the discretion of the Dean’s Office, FFE funding will enable faculty to travel to collect data, to present their findings in national and international settings, and to explore possibilities for external funding.

SOE Alumni in the News

Natalie Berlin, MSEd ’08, childhood education, teaches 2nd grade at the Brooklyn Excelior Charter School (K-8). She also directs an after-school program, Reader’s Theater, and is the spokesperson for curriculum development at the school.

Dana Lancaster Damp, MAT ’92, biology, teaches AP biology and living environment at Lake Placid Middle/High School.

Carol (Nassan) Dean, EdD ’03, is an assistant professor in secondary education (foreign language) at SUNY Oneonta. She received a scholarship to the 2009 Summer Institute sponsored by the NYS Association for Language Teachers. Her review of the book, The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life, was published in Excelior in 2008.

Thomas DePaola, MST ’90, biology, was hired as vice principal of Long Beach High School in Lido Beach, N.Y., this past fall. He earned a master of science in education degree from the College of Saint Rose in May 2009.

Robert Dinaberg, MST ’71, social sciences, taught for 30 years in the Union-Endicott CSD and has relocated to Dover, N.H., where he is working with the Active Retirement Association, a program for retirees operated under the auspices of the University of New Hampshire.

Kristen Fusaro, MAT ’06, English adolescence education, teaches grades 10 and 12 at Staten Island Technical High School, a specialized New York City high school. She received Donors’ Choose grants in 2007, 2008 and 2009.

Brenda Myers, EdD ’05, is the superintendent at Groton Central Schools. During summer 2009, she presented at leadership conferences throughout the state, where she facilitated instructional rounds for school leaders to improve their practices.

Stacy (Hopkins) Smith, MSEd ’00, social studies education, teaches social studies in grades 9-12 at the Broome-Tioga BOCES Columbus Learning Center in the 8:1:1 Transitions program. She has an 18-month-old son and is completing her CAS in educational leadership through SUNY Cortland. She also participated in the summer 2009 CTAH workshop and summer 2009 PACE Educators Academy through the NYS Department of Labor.

Cuifeng Wei, EdD ’04, is working at the Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia as an international student advisor.
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