

The Titans-Hornets connection: GB Preble home to 25 UWO teacher-ed alumni

by Alyssa Kadansky - Thursday, November 14, 2013

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When students graduate from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's College of Education and Human Services, they enjoy a host of career opportunities. With 27 schools in the Oshkosh Area School District, 11 districts in Winnebago County and more than 400 statewide, UWO education grads have plenty of places to apply.

With all of these options, it is a bit surprising that 25 UWO alumni currently are working at Preble High School in Green Bay.

These alumni have positions at Preble ranging from teachers to counselors to library media specialists and more. It is the University's reputation for producing great teachers that MaryBeth Petesch, UWO field experience director, believes inspired the hiring of so many UWO graduates.

"A district will hire candidates from a certain institution, and if they like what they see they will pursue other candidates from that institution," Petesch said.

Petesch's role at UWO is to procure student-teaching positions for education students at schools that fit their needs and abilities.

"Our primary responsibility is to match them with mentor teachers," Petesch said. "We have 40-45 school districts within our service region that we call upon. My job is to make those matches."

After four years of rigorous coursework, late nights of studying and the stress and excitement of student-teaching, 25 UWO alumni found that Preble High School was their perfect match.

Preble High School offers graduates of various backgrounds and areas of study opportunities to use their skills to help prepare students for life after high school. Using their college experiences and their passion for education, UWO alumni are leaving their legacy at Preble High School.

Claire Staats '12, used her study-abroad experiences and her English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to enhance learning for English Language Learners (ELLs) at Preble High School. While attending UWO, Staats traveled abroad to Chile and participated in English Opens Doors, a program dedicated to improving the teaching of English as a Foreign Language and making classes more accessible to the Chilean people.

She now helps students from different backgrounds in her social studies for English language learners and bilingual social studies classes.

“The ELLs are a wonderfully unique group of students who come to school from various backgrounds, experiences and abilities,” Staats said. “I really think that my ESL classes helped prepare me the best for tapping into what they really can do. I am so proud of my students, and I would highly recommend any ESL course for everyone going into education.”

Petesch said providing future teachers with the training to work with different pedagogy during student-teaching is crucial to the success of education graduates. In doing so, teachers like Staats can apply academic and pedagogical information from their coursework to the classroom and be able to experiment with what works and what doesn't for students with different abilities.

“They must be open to diversity, special needs and different ethnic backgrounds,” Petesch said.

French teacher Jessica Culver '03, also has taken her passion for foreign language to Preble High School. She helps to provide students with the opportunity of a lifetime—traveling to Europe to experience French culture.

Having studied abroad in Quebec while attending UWO, Culver used the lessons she learned in her own French studies to help her students gain an appreciation for the language and the culture.

In 2012, Culver led a student group to France, and she is now teaming up with the Spanish program at Preble High School to organize a trip to Spain and France in June 2014.

“Preparing for trips includes fundraising and informational meetings for parents to prepare for behaviors and items that will be necessary in Europe,” Culver said.

For the students who choose to stay a little closer to home, Culver runs a French Club that allows students to be immersed in French culture from the comfort of the classroom. A host of opportunities await Preble High School French students as they pursue their own interest in French culture.

“It is amazing to share another language and culture beyond the classroom through travel excursions,” Culver said. “To experience French food, music, film and more from the Chicago Art Institute to the Louvre in Paris.”

Not only have students at Preble High School benefitted from the high quality education and skills that UWO alumni have brought with them to the classroom, but the alumni also have the opportunity to learn from their students.

Special Education teacher Amy Kakwitsch '01, said that the most rewarding part of her job is having students return to tell her how they are doing. With a strong background in special education, Kakwitsch provides students with different learning abilities the opportunity to pursue a high-quality education.

For Staats, working with students who come from all over the world and bring new experiences, challenges and viewpoints to the classroom is the most rewarding part of her job at Preble High School.

“My students come from all over the world and bring all of their experiences into the lessons, activities and discussions we do on a daily basis,” Staats said.

Educators play a crucial role in influencing students to pursue their dreams and become active members of society. For teachers like Culver, seeing students thrive and reach their goals is rewarding.

“When my students succeed, both in my class and in the high school setting, it is so fulfilling to know that I may have influenced them to pursue their future in higher education and future careers,” Culver said.