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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Selected News Releases

Graduate Students Learn From, Give Back to Area Schools

ORONO, Maine -- Students in the University of Maine's Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program have spent much of the past year working with classroom teachers in three area communities. They brought new ideas and varied experiences to schools in Old Town, Brewer and Orono. They also offered a rare commodity in busy public schools -- the time and resources to do research and evaluations and to develop new programs and materials.

When the 30 students complete the 13-month newly redesigned MAT program this month, they will take with them valuable lessons learned in cooperating schools, and they will leave more than memories behind.

As part of their work in the graduate-level course, Social Context of Education, the students initiate a project custom designed to benefit the school providing their internship experience. Projects completed this spring range from an inventory of school technology assets and needs to conducting an after-school activity interest survey.

The traditional definition of teaching based solely on classroom performance is much too limiting, according to course instructor John Maddaus, associate professor of education. "We want people entering the teaching profession to be well aware of and engaged in the school and the community it serves," he says. That means understanding the "big picture" of the many factors that influence what happens in the classroom -- such as policy, parental involvement, community expectations and business partnerships.

In developing their projects, the interns are expected to interact with people in the school and community to ensure that their work is relevant and useful. Other examples of team and individual projects MAT students completed this spring are:

- Organization of two Envirothon Teams at Old Town High School, providing the opportunity for students to explore new careers, develop teamwork and competition skills, and learn about environmental knowledge and ethics. The Envirothon is a natural resource problem-competition, sponsored by the Maine Association of Conservation Districts.
- An evaluation of the America Reads grant program which, through Penquis CAP, places foster grandmothers in Brewer's Pendleton Street School to work with first graders having difficulty with beginning reading. Their report will be used to meet the program evaluation requirement and help support continuation of the grant for the coming year.

"We worked as a team looking at schools and how their skills could meet our needs," said Pendleton Street School Principal Cathy Lewis. The interns' ideas, research, data collection and

analysis resulted in an impressive documentation of the validity of the America Reads grant, according to Lewis. "It was a tremendous learning experience for the students and a great benefit to the school," she says.

- Production of a videotape on the service learning program at Orono High School. The informational video will be used to introduce service learning to incoming students.
- A survey of courses at Old Town High School that meet performance indicators in the career preparation section of the Maine Learning Results, and development of informational materials for students and their parents regarding certain career fields. These materials will be used as part of the career preparation program being developed for ninth graders.

Educators credit the MAT students with bringing a mature outlook, diverse experiences and a high level of energy to the classroom. The students are graduates from universities and colleges from Georgia to Canada, with majors in subjects from art history to veterinary science. They come from a variety of work experiences from ship's captain to social worker and lighthouse keeper to public health consultant. And, they pursue avocations as varied as bee keeping, printmaking and triathlons.

Some of the MAT students specializing in elementary education have another project to anticipate as co-authors of informational essays designed to help parents assist their children in learning to read and write. The essays, written with cooperating teachers in the schools and Brenda Power, UMaine associate professor of literacy education, will be published by Heinemann next spring. Titled "Connections: The Parent Communication Kit," the set includes the essays, available in hard copy and electronic formats, and a booklet of ideas for fostering links between home and school.

The 1998-99 MAT students arrive on campus June 14 for a summer of coursework and professional activities in preparation for their collaborative school-based teaching and learning experiences in the fall and spring.

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