ACTION IN EDUCATION

A publication for College of Education alumni

DePaul University
College of Education

Two campers make final adjustments on their solar-powered cars at a STEM camp funded by a Motorola Solutions Foundation Grant. Read more on pages 4-5.

Spring 2015

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Dean Paul Zionts

Notes from the dean

This fall quarter, the College of Education began the 2014–15 academic year at full force. One of the most exciting changes for the college was the inauguration of our bachelor's degree in special education program, which prepares students to teach children with exceptionalities in kindergarten through 12th grade. As a former special education teacher, I am thrilled that our undergraduate students have the opportunity to work in such a rewarding field of education with such remarkable students.

The start of our new special education program coincides with the 40th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Enacted by Congress in 1975, IDEA ensures that children with disabilities have equal access to public education that meets their unique needs. This act has helped bring educational support and services to special education students to provide greater opportunities than ever before. At the college, we are proud to help our students develop into educators and advocates for special education students.

Our bachelor's degree in special education students learn to apply different strategies for educating exceptional learners; to consult and co-teach in general education inclusion classrooms; to modify reading, math, and natural and social science content to meet the needs of students with disabilities; to teach small groups of students in resource classrooms; and to teach students with more significant disabilities in self-contained classrooms. The college's belief in the importance of individual dignity and personal responsibility is evident in our dedication to the field of special education and the many teachers, students and families within our reach.

Not only does the college prepare our students to teach those with special needs, it also serves both DePaul students and community members with disabilities. In addition to offering tutoring assistance to all education students, the Academic Success Center offers resources for individuals with disabilities. Learning assessments, study strategy consultations, and individual and group tutoring contribute to the success of our students. Further, our Education and Counseling Center (ECC) offers a variety of programming for individuals and families of students with special learning and emotional needs. By providing education and counseling services to those in need, the ECC helps DePaul students and community members achieve at their full potential.

With robust programs, innovative centers and initiatives, and an enthusiastic student body, the College of Education certainly is in the midst of an exciting time. I am eager to see what the rest of this academic year has in store for our community.

Alumna shapes California's English learner programs

By Melissa Smith

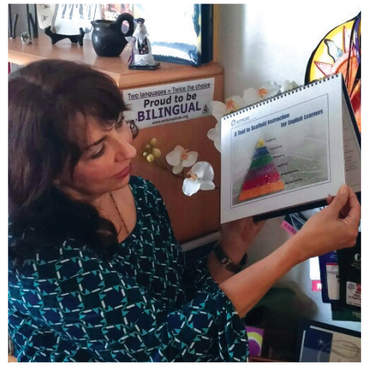
In 1981, then-professor Rafaela Weffer presented her class with excerpts from "The Six-Hour Retarded Child," a report commissioned by the President's Committee on Mental Retardation in 1969 that investigated children who appeared intellectually disabled during school hours, but who appeared to function normally the rest of the time. It focused on inner-city education— specifically on the experiences of minorities, because English language learners were often categorized as intellectually disabled—and the impact of such labels on behavior.

The report was dated when Magdalena Ruz Gonzalez (MED '82), project director for the multilingual academic support unit at the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), first studied it in Weffer's class, but she still uses it in her professional development sessions. "We talk about these students who appear to be dysfunctional, but who can handle life skills, and the parents who are unhappy with the system," Ruz Gonzalez explains. "Then, I ask, 'When do you think this took place?' The class thinks it's recent because it's still applicable today." Lest the participants become discouraged at the lack of progress, Ruz Gonzalez ends the activity on a high note. "I tell them that they are the ones who can change the system," she says. "'Each one of you can make a difference; are you ready?'"

Ruz Gonzalez provides professional development and certification classes, as well as oversees Title III federal requirements, for English learner programs. One of the goals is to create more dual immersion programs in schools across Los Angeles County's 80 districts and more than 300 charter schools. To do this, she brings those interested in starting dual immersion programs to visit schools with mature dual immersion programs. "The network helps promote the notion that dual immersion programs are a good thing," Ruz Gonzalez says. "It's good for the kids because when they get to high school, they are taking AP foreign language classes. We support this because it's part of the 21st-century skills that we want our students to have."

Her career spans classroom and administrator roles, which gives Ruz Gonzalez insight into how best to structure these programs. While teaching first and second grades in the 1980s, she was successful using sentence frames and question prompts. Her idea evolved into "A Tool to Scaffold Instruction for English Learners." The booklet, which is available through LACOE, has sold more than 13,000 copies in less than a year and is being translated into both Spanish and Mandarin for use in dual immersion programs. "This tool is being used in classrooms throughout the state of California—even universities are using it in their teacher education programs," she enthuses.

Ruz Gonzalez honed her education skills while at DePaul. The college's hands-on approach to learning, stringent clinical requirements, and intensive instruction in report writing continue to help Ruz Gonzalez as she develops clear and concise training materials. As state requirements move toward a more additive bilingual approach to education, Ruz Gonzalez smiles, knowing she has been delivering this message for more than 30 years. "We were thinking that we were working with an empty slate," she explains. "We were ignoring the fact that students come in with their home language. Now, the field is looking to build on the first language. We're moving in the right direction."



Magdalena Ruz Gonzalez's tips for new educators:

Never stop learning.
Take all the opportunities offered in your district to grow in your knowledge. Sign up for workshops. Make connections with new people across schools and share your resources.

Take the leap for leadership.
You may think you are not ready, but leadership begins among your peers. Take on small leadership roles at first to learn how to negotiate the waters.

Always nurture relationships.
This profession is about building relationships with students, parents, teachers and administrators. If this is too difficult because you are too shy or you feel intimidated, work to build your self-confidence.

Get involved.
Professional organizations are good ways to stay connected with your peers. Attend as many conferences as you can, and volunteer your way in if you have to.

Summer camp sparks interest in STEM for sixth-grade girls

By Jamie Sokolik

Building and racing solar-powered cars, putting together a working clock, assembling and studying the physics of a roller coaster—it was all in a day's work for the sixth-grade girls who attended the DePaul Inspiring STEM in Girls camp last summer.

Inspired by the growing awareness and concern about the underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM)-related careers, three College of Education professors invited middle-school girls in the Chicago area to a two-week camp featuring fun projects and experiments. During the session, Associate Professor of Elementary Mathematics Education and Associate Chair of Teacher Education Nell Cobb (CSH MA '87), Assistant Professor of Science Education Eunmi Lee and Assistant Professor of Secondary Education Stephanie Whitney showed campers not only how much fun STEM subjects can be, but also how capable students are in all aspects of STEM application.

"According to the research, middle school is the last chance we have to engage girls in STEM topics and to hold their interest long term," Lee says. "When they lose that interest, it greatly affects their choice of a future career." The camp was made possible by a $25,000 Motorola Solutions Foundation Grant, and the professors quickly found that there was a huge amount of interest. Sixty-seven girls, many from high-needs areas, signed up to attend. Among them were students from Irma Ruiz Elementary School, and Principal Dana Butler chartered a bus and employed teacher aides to ensure his students could attend.

"The girls absolutely loved it," Butler says. "We were excited to offer this opportunity to encourage those girls who have a passion for STEM subjects. As the students get older, you see the science fairs become more and more male-dominated, but girls are just around the corner on this thing. This program is an important part of the process to give them a little push." The campers were just as engaged and excited as the administrators had hoped.

"The camp was really interesting," says Esmeralda Ortiz, a sixth grader and former camper from Irma Ruiz. "They had so many things to learn about, like how solar power works, which was really fun. The projects we did at camp helped us when we got back to school, too." Ortiz's classmate Christina Enciso agrees. "You're learning, but you're also having fun at the same time," she says. "It makes the lessons easier to understand. Also, the teachers were really nice, so that motivated me to ask more questions and participate more."

Cobb, Lee and Whitney used a three-tiered teaching system, which included employing high school students and DePaul students to serve as counselors. The professors designed the lesson plans and taught them to the college students, who, in turn, instructed the high school students. High school students would relate the lessons to the campers with help from their college-level peers. In using this system, the camp had an impact on students in multiple age groups and of varying levels of ability.

"This three-tiered approach is unique," Cobb says. "We all got together and talked about the activity, but then the college and high school students really got into it and made it their own. Working with college students in this way also helped the high school students become more excited about their college prospects. We were able to involve so many different levels of education in this way."

As the professors prepare for the 2015 summer camp, they hope for more campers. "The college students were already passionate about STEM subjects, and having them interact with the high school students, who might not yet fully understand the difference a college education can make, was invaluable," Lee says. "The high school students carried that into their teaching of the middle-school students. As the camp gets bigger, so will this positive ripple effect."

In addition to encouraging confidence in middle school girls' STEM abilities, the professors believe that camps like this are also effective because they show real-world application of common science concepts. "As the campers realize they can use what they learned in their lives and daily experience, we've found they tend to become increasingly motivated to learn more," Lee says. "It's a very important aspect to the camp that we will continue this summer."

Butler says that he sees this theory in practice when watching his own students. "This is about exposure," he says. "It's about opportunity, and it's about seeing the world bigger than our own neighborhoods. When these STEM concepts become practical, it's very real to a student. They're a part of living and touching it, and a career as a scientist, engineer or mathematician becomes an actual possibility. They realize they can be the one to create something that will make the world a better place to live in."

For next summer, the professors plan to offer similar activities, but also to expand the camp with additional engineering-focused projects to incorporate more math. The girls from Irma Ruiz Elementary say they would love to participate again in 2015. "We were all there because we love science," says sixth grader Amor MacWilliams. "It was nice to connect with students from so many different schools who all had that in common. It was interesting to see the different perspectives, too. I really loved it!"

Grants provide opportunities for professors to engage with community-based research

By Melissa Smith

Over the course of their careers, College of Education professors share their expertise with legions of students in the classroom, but most are contributing in the field as well. Many research opportunities are made possible through funding from both external and internal grants. Because of this financial support, professors can better meet the needs of the current educational landscape.

Civic engagement

Hilary Conklin, program leader and associate professor of secondary social studies, and Molly Andolina, associate professor of political science, will be observing Chicago Public Schools (CPS) classrooms across the city as part of a research project examining a high school civic education curriculum. Their project, "Fostering Student Voice: A Case Study of the Impact of Participatory Civic Education on Secondary Students' Literacy and Civic Skills," will run through summer 2016 with funding from a Spencer Foundation Grant. Andolina and Conklin are interested in the impact of Mikva Challenge's Project Soapbox curriculum, which is a civic education program targeted at underserved high school students.

"The public speaking curriculum seems to hold real potential for helping kids, particularly marginalized young people in CPS," Conklin says. "We're looking to see what students are learning from participating in this curriculum in relation to those Common Core speaking and literacy skills. There's a civic education achievement gap, so these are ongoing, pressing needs that clearly need attention." She also notes that "the project will allow us to determine the potential for closing what previous studies have identified as a civic education achievement gap between students in the best funded schools and those in classrooms with fewer resources." In addition to classroom observations, Andolina and Conklin will administer pre- and post-surveys to measure the impact of the curriculum on both civic and literacy skills. "One of the exciting facets of this study is the potential for our findings to inform not just researchers, but teachers in the classroom," Andolina says.

Enhanced counseling services

Ann Friesema (EDU MA '05), director of the Education and Counseling Center (ECC), and Philip Gnilka, assistant professor of counseling, received an Illinois Counseling Association Foundation Grant to develop new offerings at the ECC. The grant funded "Preparing Counselors to Strengthen Resiliency Skills of At-Risk Children and Their Families," a program that supports counseling services, transportation for clients, assessments and educational resources. "Our students have the opportunity to work with teens and adolescents while receiving close supervision and onsite support from the program and the center," says Friesema.

The one-year grant helped build training opportunities for DePaul students and strengths-based counseling services for the community. "In the first quarter of services, after just three sessions, clients showed positive improvement and high working alliance scores," Friesema explains. "These assessments provide evidence for the students that they are creating connections and working positively with the clients. It's been meaningful for everyone so far and an intensive training program for the DePaul counseling students."

Notable women figures

Roxanne Owens (EDU '84), department chair of teacher education and associate professor of elementary reading, hopes to move beyond traditional social studies by exploring "Rabble Rousers, Risk Takers and Revolutionary Women in History" in her children's literature course. With assistance from the Illinois Reading Council Literacy Support Grant, Owens purchased books concerning little-known female historical figures and brought a guest speaker to teach elementary students about historical research (read more on page 9). "Social studies can seem irrelevant to students when it is presented as names and dates from events that happened many years ago," Owens says. "By introducing kids to actual, real people who did significant things, it becomes much more alive to them."

This two-quarter course allows DePaul students to become familiar with key females in history before engaging in a classroom-based research project with elementary students during field experiences. Owens hopes to expand her students' use of literature and primary source documents in the classroom. "Literature is about integrating books into the kids' learning experience beyond the idea that this would be a fun book to read," Owens says. "This project helps DePaul students see how they can use literature as a learning tool in their classrooms."

Social justice

Amira Proweller, associate professor and department chair of educational policy studies and research, joined Beth Catlett, associate professor and department chair of women's and gender studies and director of the Beck Research Initiative for Women, Gender and Community, and Sonya Crabtree-Nelson, assistant professor of social work, in confronting inequality, sexism, racism and classism head-on. They are working with a group of female students from the Chicagoland area, the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago and Ma'yan (a New York City-based Jewish, feminist, educational organization) on their new research project, "Exploring Jewish Teen Youth Perspectives on Social Justice." "Social justice and social change is everyone's responsibility," stresses Proweller. In this program, which is based on the principles of youth participatory action research, the student participants interrogate issues of social justice, power, privilege and oppression in their lives.

Over the course of 14 months, the professors meet with the students, ages 14–17, twice a month for two hours at DePaul's Lincoln Park Campus to discuss a structured curriculum in social justice, culminating in a final research project that will lead to some plan of action toward social change. "Young women really want the opportunity to come together to talk about issues around difference, diversity, equity, injustice and change in a supportive, yet challenging, space," explains Proweller. "We want them to develop a skill set and knowledge base to address these issues in a meaningful and sustained way in the interest of shaping a different world."

Special education math

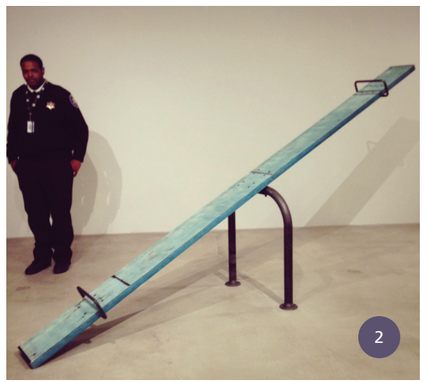
As part of the new undergraduate degree in special education, Stephanie Whitney, assistant professor of secondary education, developed a new math course to be offered in fall 2015. The stipend will help her explore "Best Practices for Exceptional Learners: Integration of Teaching and Learning of Mathematics & Special Needs Students," and allow her to create both in-class and lab-based curricula on best practices in special education for grades K–12. "It's not about teaching the individual content, it's about creating a habit of mind in future educators so that they approach mathematics from the viewpoint of the students," Whitney says. "What are the competencies that students bring to the table and how can special educators engage them through their strengths in order to help build up their deficit areas?"

Whitney and the special education cohort will partner with the ECC to offer services to clients with special needs. She understands the pace of the 10-week course may be challenging. "That makes the work more intense because [students] get to apply their classroom learning while interacting in the field with clients," Whitney explains.

Around the College

1

1 Congressional Black Caucus Foundation
Nell Cobb (CSH MA '87), associate professor of elementary mathematics education and associate chair of teacher education, addressed the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation during its annual legislative conference on Sept. 26, 2014. The conference panel focused on education and employment for African-Americans in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, and panelists discussed socioeconomic issues that contribute to lower representation of African-Americans in these fields and possible solutions. Cobb was the panelist with a background in teacher education. [Photo credit: Soulfully Speaking Photography]

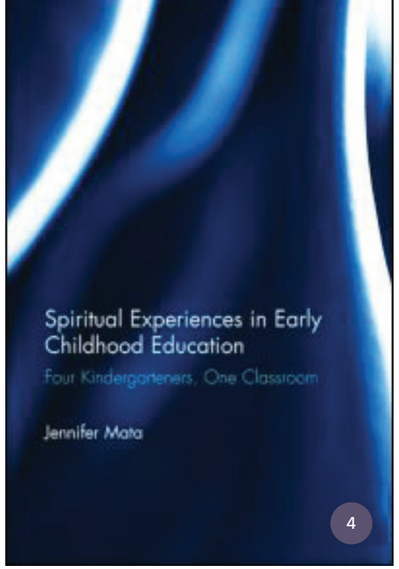


2

2 Professor featured at School of the Art Institute
The School of the Art Institute featured a major work by Jim Duignan, associate professor and chair of visual arts education, in "A Proximity of Consciousness: Art and Social Action," an exhibition at the Sullivan Galleries that ran from Sept. 20, 2014, through Dec. 20, 2014. His work, "A Plea for Playgrounds," embodied by a 12-foot seesaw, was inspired by the 1905 manifesto of the same name that explained the connections between access to playgrounds and poverty, health and democracy. The reissue of the 1905 pamphlet was a collaboration with Columbia University professor and architectural historian Jennifer Gray, with whom Duignan recently spoke about their work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and is planning a new project, Reimagining Abandoned Schools. Visit ***stockyardinstitute.org*** for more information on this and other projects.

3

3 White House Convening
On Nov. 17–18, 2014, professors Erin Mason, Alexandra Novakovic and Melissa Ockerman participated in the White House Convening: Strengthening School Counseling and College Advising. This convening, held at San Diego State University, focused on improving school counseling preparation, programs and practices with the ultimate goal of increasing college access for all students. It was held in partnership with the White House's College Opportunity Agenda and Michelle Obama's Reach Higher Initiative. DePaul was the only university invited from Illinois, and Mason served as one of two state team leaders. Mason, Novakovic and Ockerman have continued this important work through Student Postsecondary Advocacy Network, through which they meet with state leaders and organizations to help prepare, partner and create policies to increase college-going rates of Illinois students.



4

4 Spiritual Experiences in Early Childhood Education: Four Kindergarteners, One Classroom
In "Spiritual Experiences in Early Childhood Education: Four Kindergarteners, One Classroom," Assistant Professor Jennifer Mata argues that educators should be responsible for fostering children's spirituality in the classroom and for reintroducing these topics into early childhood education. She surveys existing literature on spirituality to offer a working definition of spirituality as an essential characteristic of humanness that helps connect individuals to themselves, to others, and to the transcendent. Following a phenomenological qualitative methods approach, Mata offers in-depth descriptions of what spiritual experiences and expressions look like for four kindergarten children, and reviews and proposes pedagogical strategies to nurture spirituality in both classrooms and teacher preparation programs.

5

5 Illinois Reading Council Event
On Dec. 10, 2014, the College of Education welcomed award-winning author Sally Walker to campus to speak to nearly 350 Chicago public and Catholic elementary school students. Walker discussed best practices for historical research, encouraging students to utilize library resources and explaining how to determine the validity of Internet sources. She also shared her own experiences in research, engrossing audience members with the histories that led to her books on Winnie the Pooh and the Halifax Explosion. The event was made possible in part by the Illinois Reading Council Literacy Support Grant that Associate Professor Roxanne Owens (EDU '84) received (see pages 6-7) and the Illinois Council for Affective Reading Education.

6

6 Institute for Daisaku Ikeda Studies in Education
On Jan. 14, Jason Goulah, associate professor and director of bilingual-bicultural education and world languages education programs, officially launched the Institute for Daisaku Ikeda Studies in Education. Goulah, who is director of the institute, welcomed internationally renowned scholars Jim Garrison, professor at Virginia Tech, and Larry Hickman, professor at Southern Illinois University, to speak about the 21st-century relevance of American philosopher John Dewey and Japanese educators Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Daisaku Ikeda. The Institute for Daisaku Ikeda Studies in Education is the first such university-affiliated institute in the United States, North America and the Anglophone academy worldwide.

7

7 Winter Education Issues Forum
In honor of the 40th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the college hosted its Winter Education Issues Forum. The forum, held Feb. 17, examined the past and present of special education law and explored the future of the field.

8

8 Facing History and Ourselves Evening Seminar
On Feb. 18, the DePaul University and Facing History and Ourselves Collaboration presented its evening seminar, "Counselors, Teachers and School Leaders: Working Together to Create Optimal Schools." The seminar offered counseling and educational leadership students the tools they need to tackle difficult conversations about school culture and discussed how shared leadership affects schoolwide success. Attendees received two CPDUs.

New state requirements prompt revitalized master's programs

By Melissa Smith

In compliance with new Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) requirements, the College of Education launched two new teacher leader programs and revamped its principal preparation program. Geared toward in-service teachers seeking leadership roles, these master's degrees prepare professionals for the rigorous expectations facing them in the field today.

Curriculum studies or educational leadership master's degree with teacher leader endorsement

Previously, the college offered teacher leader endorsements on existing master's degrees; however, to better meet the needs of its students, the college expanded its offerings to include the endorsement within master's programs as well. Interested students can make a choice between curriculum studies and educational leadership based on an individual's intended career path. Those seeking positions within the classroom pursue the curriculum studies track, while professionals hoping to move into administrative roles in K–12 schools complete the educational leadership sequence.

"Teaching and learning is central to school success, and school leadership needs to focus on helping teachers improve their basic pedagogy, classroom instruction, assessment and curriculum," explains Joseph Gardner, associate professor and director of the curriculum studies graduate programs. The curriculum studies teacher leader program does just that by stressing strong leadership skills, with an emphasis on instructional improvement. "All of us—from the novice teacher through the senior school leader—need to be focused on the basic business of how we improve teaching and learning in the classroom." The teacher leader endorsement equips current teachers with leadership skills that prepare them to become leaders within schools and districts in roles outside of principalship.

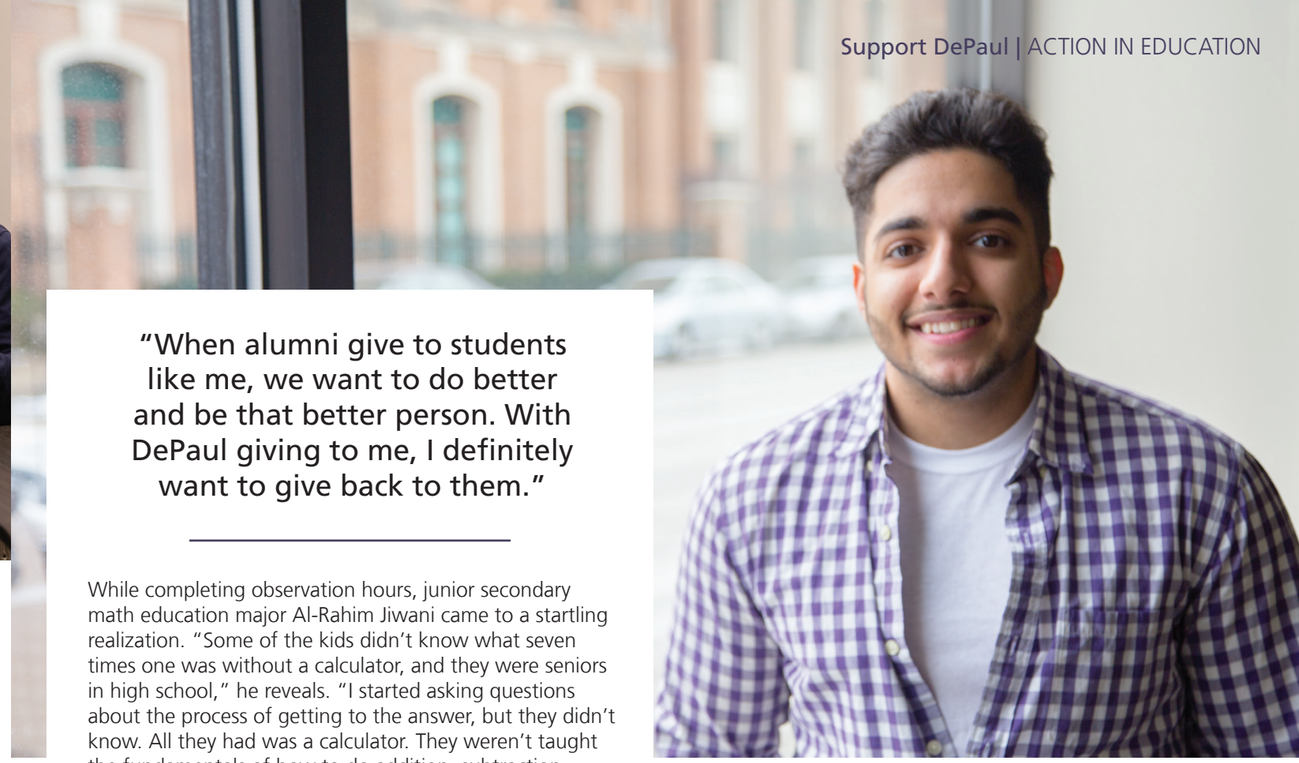
The educational leadership teacher leader program trains students for decision making on a broader level by prioritizing administrative and programmatic leadership. "Leadership is so important to making schools effective," stresses Barbara Rieckhoff (EDU MA '84), associate professor and director of the educational leadership master's program. "What leaders are doing is really important to student learning, and the best, most effective, schools operate using a shared leadership structure." The program provides training in both curriculum development and effective administration, and is geared toward individuals seeking to become department chairs and team leaders.

Master's degree in principal preparation

Shared leadership is central to the new principal preparation program as well. "It's about creating a school culture," Rieckhoff says. "It's not just walking in and throwing your agenda around. It's about trying to understand an existing culture and how you can move it forward, building on the talents and the strengths of people within the school and its community." Students are trained in discipline-, theory-, problem- and experience-based knowledge, and new to the program are strict guidelines that require both elementary and secondary internships.

"We've added new elements to courses in the areas of literacy, numeracy and special education," says Rieckhoff. "Our principal candidates are well prepared to deal with the challenges they will encounter in their schools." The program prepares graduates to serve in both private and public schools and is aligned with Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium and ISBE standards.

Rieckhoff is confident that the new teacher leader and principal preparation programs will provide increased opportunities for future school leaders. "Schools are challenging places, and we need everybody to contribute to solving the problems in schools," she says. "Nobody is absolved of this. It is important to get everyone on board, and these new programs provide students with the necessary leadership and problem-solving tools to foster both a positive school culture and student growth."



"When alumni give to students like me, we want to do better and be that better person. With DePaul giving to me, I definitely want to give back to them."

While completing observation hours, junior secondary math education major Al-Rahim Jiwani came to a startling realization. "Some of the kids didn't know what seven times one was without a calculator, and they were seniors in high school," he reveals. "I started asking questions about the process of getting to the answer, but they didn't know. All they had was a calculator. They weren't taught the fundamentals of how to do addition, subtraction, division and multiplication." It was then that Jiwani changed his focus from high school to middle school. "I feel like I can really reach them at that age," he says.

Jiwani understands firsthand the impact a teacher can have on student success. During high school, he would have rather been in the gym conditioning for whatever sport was in season than in the classroom preparing for the next exam. Yet, his math teacher Ankur Joshi kept him on track. "[Joshi] told me to really focus on what I had to do to go to college, get a good education and a better job," Jiwani recalls. Joshi was more than Jiwani's teacher—he was a mentor, coach and friend. "I didn't know a teacher could have such a big impact on anyone's life," he asserts. "One day, I hope to do that for a student of mine."

A self-professed "math geek," Jiwani was drawn to DePaul because of its top-notch education program and extensive university resources. "The university doesn't want you to fail or graduate late," he says. "They don't just want your money—they want you to succeed." Jiwani credits receiving scholarship support as providing an extra incentive to do well. On track to graduate summa cum laude, he aspires to improve his grades each quarter and to continue making the dean's list. "Scholarships help students stay in school and stay focused on their work," Jiwani says. "When alumni give to students like me, we want to do better and be that better person. With DePaul giving to me, I definitely want to give back to them."

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