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From Professionals to Professional Educators

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From Professionals to Professional Educators

By Dr. Barbara LaBeau, GVSU Staff

It is early on a bright sunny fall morning and Anne Heyt is getting ready for the day, not as a Civil Engineer where she has been working for the last 20 years, but in a math classroom at Creston High School in Grand Rapids Public Schools.

Anne is one of the 12 Woodrow Wilson Fellows participating in the W.K. Kellogg Foundation's Woodrow Michigan Teaching Fellowship Program at Grand Valley State University. Anne took a bold step and left her career as a water and wastewater systems engineer to take part in a new approach to prepare teachers.

Funded through a matching grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation managed by the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation the program focuses on teacher preparation in the underrepresented areas of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) in the public schools. The STEM disciplines have been focused on nationally in an effort to improve educational outcomes for K-12 students. This grant program seeks to enhance education in the STEM fields by bringing scientists and engineers into the teaching profession and in the process develop new ways to prepare teachers in STEM subjects. The program endeavors to promote changes in university-based teacher preparation by including extensive clinical experiences in high need public school classrooms.

Seeking new graduates and career changers, like Anne, the Grand Valley program places Fellows in high-need urban and rural communities. Anne and her colleagues are committed to teaching for at least three years in Michigan's high need secondary schools. The program at GVSU is strongly clinical, the Fellows spend all or part of five days a week in the classroom, and two afternoons in courses at

GVSU. The course work is integrated with activities and observations in their school placements.

After spending the summer in preparatory courses and tutoring Upward Bound students, Fellows have begun to see the challenges and the rewards of teaching after now being in the classroom for the past semester. Asking Anne to reflect on the program so far she shared her thoughts:

The Woodrow Wilson fellowship program has been both incredibly rewarding and challenging. Last summer I left my career as an engineer to become a Fellow, and have never looked back. The program is set up in a way that allows cohort Fellows to form a unique bond with each other and university staff, which has given me a sense of community that I never had in my previous work or college experiences. It's been great so far, and I hope that with the continued support of the program, I will become the type of teacher that can make a difference in the lives of students.

Fellows will be mentored for three years as they step into their first permanent teaching position in the classroom. One of the reasons for the mentoring is to continue the support of the Fellows in the teaching profession, and to decrease the dropout rate that is common as new teachers enter the profession

Fellow Robert Slider, with past experience researching the impacts of climate change on plants as part of an international study, left his studies as an arctic ecologist for his Fellowship that has taken him to Ottawa Hills High School in the Grand Rapids Public Schools. He sees the continued support of his colleagues, mentor teacher Bobbi-Jo Kenyon, and the faculty at Grand Valley

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as a positive aspect of the Fellowship. “Being placed in a cohort of professional, well-rounded, and highly motivated individuals has kept me excited about this opportunity. Each person brings in something different and it seems like I pick up a new skill or piece of information with each class we hold together”.

The ten additional Fellows from GVSU are placed at: Central High School and C. A. Frost Middle School in Grand Rapids, Muskegon High School and Bunker Middle School in Muskegon, and Lee Middle and High School in Wyoming.

The twelve Wilson Fellows at GVSU are part of 92 recipients across the state, from diverse backgrounds that

competed in the highly competitive application for the W.K. Kellogg Foundation’s Woodrow Wilson Michigan Teaching Fellowship. The Fellowship recruited both recent college graduates and those seeking a different career; the fellowships are awarded to promising educators with strong backgrounds in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Fellows receive \$30,000 to pay tuition and living expenses while they pursue a customized master’s degree program that prepares them to teach.

Application for the 2012 cohort of Fellows is available until January 12, 2012 online at <http://www.gvsu.edu/teachingfellowship/>. Application for the 2013 Fellowship will be available in the summer of 2012.

