2013

Letter from the Dean: Wildly Exciting Opportunities

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Wildly Exciting Opportunities

This is an exceptionally interesting time for the College of Education (COE). We are continuing to construct seamless connections with our partner school districts. Our deeply rooted commitment to our communities remains at the forefront of everything we do. As an illustration of this commitment, below you will find several examples of our growing networks of educational outreach partnerships that provide “wildly exciting opportunities” for our students.

One of the best examples of the integration of college coursework and fieldwork is the recent move of our Special Education Program’s undergraduate assessment and oral language courses to Godfrey-Lee Public Schools. These courses join the five graduate learning disability courses offered off campus in Grandville and Wyoming Public schools. By placing these classes in schools, the Special Education Program has created supervised clinical experiences that allow our students to learn theory and implement best practices.

Another exciting opportunity is our partnership with the local arts community led by the Grand Rapids Symphony, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Grand Rapids Community College, Kendall College, and the COE. Together we are developing a plan to start an International Baccalaureate (IB) school focused on the arts in Grand Rapids Public Schools. The school will begin as a preschool early childhood program and include kindergarten to 3rd grade students. The hope over time is to extend the school to a fully endorsed IB K-12 school with an integrated art experience. The Grand Rapids School of the Arts (GRSA) will be unique in the IB system and a truly collaborative initiative with the COE and arts community having direct involvement in K-12 curriculum and programming.

As part of this effort, the COE will implement within GRSA a lab school which integrates practicum experiences and classes. The concept of this lab school increases the experiential component of current classes and expands the opportunities for students’ service hours in education. Ultimately, we envision teacher education being fully integrated into the school, providing our students with a valuable foundation for their careers in education. It will also provide COE students with IB school experience and an understanding of a global, rigorous K-12 curriculum.

One final example is funded by a federal grant from the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration called FORCES that partners the COE’s Groundswell initiative with Grand Rapids Public’s City Middle School and Rockford Public’s East Rockford Middle School to integrate into curriculum Great Lakes Literacy Principles and service learning opportunities. This grant promotes an understanding of math, science, and social science as well as stewardship of the Great Lakes. The implementation of this project strengthens our work with the 15 schools in Kent County through Groundswell and will provide a model for future evaluation of the program.

These wildly exciting opportunities are only a few of the many projects that are changing the COE and that serve as examples of our commitment to a foundation in evidence based theory and practice reflected in experiential learning.

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