

CONVOCATION SCHEDULED FOR EDUCATION GRADS

For the first time ever, the School of Education at Grand Valley State University will host convocation ceremonies for graduates going into education fields.

A formal convocation is scheduled for Friday evening, April 23, at VanSingel Performing Arts Center in Byron Center.

Special student recognition will be given to Rebecca Seyfried, Tim Woznick and Jill Niemeyer. A reception in the lobby is scheduled immediately following the convocation.

FALL GRAD CLASSES MOVED

To alleviate space problems due to construction at the Eberhard Center in downtown Grand Rapids, graduate level education courses for the fall semester of 1999 have been relocated to Union High School, 1800 Tremont Blvd NW. Union High School is located just north of the Lake Michigan Drive and Covell intersection.

STUDENTS RECEIVE HONORS

The School of Education acknowledged the achievement of six outstanding graduates at the University Awards Banquet on April 15. Chosen for this year's Outstanding Student Awards at the undergraduate level were Terri L. Westra, Elementary Education; Victoria L. Clayton, Secondary Education; and Amy F. Rhoades Special Education. Graduate honors went to Daniel A. Burns, M.Ed., General Education; Tracey E. Taylor, M.Ed., Special Education; and Rita McLary, M.Ed., Reading/Language Arts.

STUDENT CHAPTER WIN AWARDS FOR SERVICE

Grand Valley State University student Patricia McCrea has been named the 1999 recipient of the Dr. Charles Van Riper Outstanding College Student Award. The award is presented annually to an outstanding college undergraduate student for strong leadership and commendable service to students with disabilities.

McCrea is president of the Michigan Federation of the Council for Exceptional Children Chapter 908, which was selected as the Outstanding Student Chapter in Michigan for 1999. It is the first time the GV chapter has received this prestigious award.

ON THE COVER: Student teacher Matthew Mollica, upper left, has a key role in the partnership between GVSU and Aberdeen Math/Tech as a mentor, instructor and role model. Sherrill Pryor, upper right, becomes versed on children's literacy issues in China during her recent trip to the Orient. Meanwhile, a partnership between the School of Education and Muskegon Heights High School is aimed at staff development through field studies, which occur by land, lower right, and by sea, lower left.

ROBERT HAGERTY DEAN'S CORNER



FACING A LOOMING TEACHER SHORTAGE

A looming shortage of qualified teachers is a serious threat to K-12 education objectives as we prepare for the new millennium. Some districts are already feeling the effects.

In 1998 — for the first time in 15 years — Michigan's universities failed to produce enough teachers to fill the number of vacancies in the state.

Most of the large districts in Michigan, such as Grand Rapids, Muskegon, Detroit and Flint, received federal dollars to reduce large class sizes at the early elementary levels for the 1998-99 school year, transforming what may have been perceived as a slight teacher surplus into a shortage.

Two other factors have exacerbated the teacher shortage. One is early retirement. More and more, Michigan teachers are retiring at age 55. The baby boomlet (children of the 1950s and '60s baby boomers) prompted virtually every Grand Rapids area school district to build additional classrooms over the past several years. Schools are scrambling to find enough fully certified teachers to fill classroom vacancies.

Last fall, public school officials across the country found themselves furiously searching to fill last-minute teaching vacancies. Many were in math and science classes, which teachers have been leaving for the private sector to command higher salaries in booming high-tech industries. Many schools were unable to fill special education positions as well.

The shortage of certified teachers will become more serious and widespread. In the next decade, rising student enrollments and a new wave of baby-boomer retirements will require 2 million new teachers, according to the U.S. Dept. of Education. Meanwhile, schools of education in many parts of the country are turning out fewer graduates — a phenomenon attributed to both the low birth rates of the mid-1970s and that generation's reluctance to enter such a demanding but lower-paying field.

Attrition also plays a role in the shortage of certified teachers. Almost 30 percent of teachers leave the profession within five years.

Searching For Solutions

In 1996, California enacted perhaps the most ambitious education initiative of the decade, a \$1 billion program to reduce the size of elementary classes by hiring 20,000 additional teachers. President Clinton joined in, proposing a national plan to help place 100,000 new teachers over the next several years. However, California's effort instantly posed a question that is likely to be echoed across the country as many schools embark on a historic hiring binge. Where will these new teachers come from?

California found sufficient teachers, but only by draining its substitute pools, raiding private schools, recruiting from other states and Mexico, and hiring thousands of teachers with "emergency licenses." In fact, about 10 percent of California's teachers are NOT certified and are working with "emergency temporary credentials."

The effort to increase the pool of certified teachers should not dilute quality. While more teachers are needed, the needs of today's students and the needs of the future work force require that standards not be weakened. Grand Valley State University requires an overall grade-point-average of 2.8 to be admitted to teacher education. This is the highest G.P.A. required for admission to a school of education in Michigan.

Strengthening Preparation With Support

Several research studies demonstrate that the best predictor of future success as a classroom teacher is the student's effectiveness in pre-student teaching and in student teaching. GVSU excels in both of these field experiences. At least one of these field experiences must be in a multicultural classroom.

Smaller classes — though increasing the demand for teachers — might help solve shortages by making teaching more appealing. To counteract the problem of attrition, public school districts need to improve their mentoring programs for new teachers and involve new teachers in collaborative learning groups.

New teachers need to be placed in a classroom environment where they can succeed. Young teachers have lofty ideals for making a difference in the lives of young people. When new teachers are placed in classroom environments where those ideals are confronted with the reality of a classroom that doesn't support teaching and learning, these new teachers are apt to look elsewhere.

One of the most important missions of the GVSU faculty is to inspire in students a desire to make a career of teaching in urban/multicultural schools. Identifying such schools which also have a strong culture that supports teaching and learning is more difficult today than seven or eight years ago. If schools wish to attract the best new teachers, it is essential that the district's commitment to a culture of teaching and learning be without compromise.

(Robert Hagerty, Ed.D, is Dean of the School of Education. After serving an initial three-year term as Dean, Hagerty was permanently appointed to the position this spring. Hagerty is a former superintendent of Ionia Public Schools and served as an associate professor of Education at GVSU before being named Dean in 1996. Questions, comments, suggestions? Hagerty may be accessed via e-mail: hagertyr@gvsu.edu)