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Intercultural Immersion through Creative Partnerships: Whitworth's Jan Term Program

The intercultural education component of the Whitworth University teacher certification program, at both the graduate and undergraduate levels, began about 20 years ago. One purpose of the class was to offer our mainly middle-class Caucasian teacher-candidates an immersion experience in a diverse educational setting.

Since that time, the program has continued to grow, and at the present we place approximately 100 candidates each January in educational settings all over the world. The *Introduction to Intercultural Education* course and the Jan Term immersion that precede these placements satisfy the required multicultural component in teacher education for certification. Our program was commended by NCATE, and we have received many requests for information about how we do it, particularly with the budget of a small, private, liberal arts university.

Undergraduate students first take a one-credit course, *Introduction to Intercultural Education*, and Master in Teaching (MIT) candidates take a three-semester graduate course in intercultural education. These experience-based courses emphasize theory and the connection of that theory to their upcoming three-week intercultural immersion experience. Self-understanding and the understanding of one's own culture is critical for entering, participating and communicating effectively within other cultures.

For the Jan Term study, the candidates are asked to choose a site that is very different from their own background and experiences. Sites vary greatly and include orphanage schools in Korea and Brazil; public and private schools in several settings in Mexico and Thailand; inner-city schools in San Francisco, Seattle, Los Angeles, New Orleans and Jamaica; and Native American tribal schools in and around the Spokane area. Some students work in tribal schools or other schools located on or near Native American reservations. For students staying in the immediate Spokane area (which is 95 percent Caucasian), we have developed a number of local sites that provide students with an experience that immerses them in tribal schools, ESL programs for children and adults, Head Start programs, local refugee resettlement programs, and public schools that serve low-income areas and special populations, such as street children and homeless children. Many of the local site schools serve the families of the 15,000 Russian immigrants granted refugee status in our area.

Additionally, candidates are provided the option to design their own Jan Term programs. These candidates must submit their proposals to the professor who teaches the intercultural course in order to be sure that it meets program criteria. All undergraduate students complete a portfolio including a structured reflection-connection journal, qualitative anthropological data collection, and a reflection paper. These portfolios are of high quality, prized by the students who develop them, and are a significant part of their gateway into the profession. MIT candidates collect similar qualitative anthropological data and submit a graduate-level paper at the end of their intercultural experience.

This year, 10 candidates will be traveling with Professor Ann Teberg to Arusha, Tanzania, to work at an elementary school and orphanage. In addition, we have candidates traveling in faculty-led groups to San Francisco, Seattle, and Albuquerque. Whitworth continually seeks out schools that are interested in establishing this professional partnership. It is our sincere desire to invite outstanding international schools to join the list of opportunities that provide high-quality and meaningful intercultural experiences for our Whitworth education students.

For some of the candidates, the intercultural experience precedes their student-teaching experience; for the MIT candidates, the experience occurs in the middle of the year-long student-teaching experience, and other candidates complete their experience immediately following student teaching. Some candidates have noted that their experience provided learning as significant as their student teaching.

All of our candidates participate in a debriefing following their Jan Term immersion. They share what they did, what they learned, and what they still have to learn about communicating effectively across cultures. Additionally, they discuss how this immersion will affect their future teaching. The power of their insights is exceptional.

In summary, Whitworth University has developed a number of creative partnerships in a variety of ways; their partnerships have been valuable to both the university and the partner groups. The relationships developed have truly enhanced the multicultural education efforts of the School of Education, and have also provided benefits to the partner schools and groups.

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