



Insider Training

BY JENNIFER LANGHAM

Pacific's Urban Teacher Residency Program takes teacher training to the classroom to prepare confident, competent educators for success in inner city schools.

Amanda Haynam '13 (*above*) is pursuing her dream of teaching in an urban school, a dream she had nurtured since volunteering in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. She's part of a new Teacher Residency Program in the Gladys L. Benerd School of Education. But when she first heard about the program as an undergraduate, she could hardly believe it was possible.

"I could get paid a stipend to earn my master's degree and my teaching certification? I could get a year of classroom experience in an urban school and job placement after I completed the program? It sounded like a dream come true," says Haynam.

"Pacific is taking experiential learning to its highest art form," says Benerd School of Education Dean Lynn Beck. "The School of Ed has a tradition of innovation, including programs like Teacher Corps and EdPro2, and this program builds on that tradition."

Now in its second year, the Urban Teacher Residency Program (UTRP) prepares highly effective teachers to work in urban schools with low-income, diverse learners. It is a partnership between University of the Pacific and Aspire Public Schools, one of the nation's largest and top-performing public charter school systems. One of only a few such programs in the country, the

UTRP is based on the medical residency model, combining standard coursework with a year-long classroom residency toward earning a master's degree in education and a preliminary California teaching credential.

The residents are placed in an Aspire school under the close supervision of skilled mentor teachers. They take courses taught by Pacific faculty on campus, online and on site at a local Aspire school. Upon successful completion of the program, residents are guaranteed priority hiring for teaching positions within the Aspire system, after which they can earn tuition reimbursements for each year they remain a full-time teacher with Aspire.

"We all have a stake in making sure our schools are the best that they can be," says Michael Elium, assistant dean in the School of Education and one of the designers of the UTRP. "This program helps train teachers who are skilled and committed to working in the urban communities where they can make a real difference."

With Pacific's focus on improving high school graduation rates and improving college readiness in K-12 education, Aspire is a natural partner. Its motto is "College for Certain," and 97 percent of Aspire school graduates have applied to and been accepted at

four-year colleges. This is especially impressive considering that less than 10 percent of the residents in the communities Aspire serves have any postsecondary education. Teacher Residents in these schools learn not just teaching methods and classroom management, but how the Aspire model helps prepare students for college.

The 19 students currently in the UTRP started classes on the Stockton campus last summer, after which they were paired with their Aspire mentor teachers. During the school year, the residents are in the mentor's classroom four days a week, where they gradually assume more responsibility for the classroom. They spend the other days in a resident seminar and completing coursework.

"It really does take a lot of time," says Jake Weiler '13, a resident in the current cohort. But he likes that he can put the coursework into practice right away. "It's linking theory and a body of knowledge to skills in the classroom. It feels holistic."

Weiler is unusual in the program because he taught in an urban Midwestern charter school before coming to the UTRP. He says he had no teacher training at all.

"It was sink or swim, and I dog-paddled," he says. "It showed me how desperate we are as a society for good teachers. I wanted to be better, to be more than mediocre for my students."

Recent statistics bear out the need for better support for new teachers. Based on a



Jake Weiler '13 appreciates being able to get immediate feedback and guidance from his mentor teacher, Gary Rowher.

study by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, 10 percent of teachers who began teaching in 2007 or 2008 left teaching after the first year. Urban school environments can be even more challenging. On average, about 50 percent of urban school teachers leave within the first three years. By contrast, the retention rate for teachers who are graduates of urban teacher residency programs beyond the first three years is 85 percent.

"Having seen a teacher succeed in an urban, low-income environment has made me see that it's possible," says Olivia O'Bryon Mackey '11. A part of the previous year's cohort, Mackey is now teaching in an Aspire classroom of her own. "The experience definitely prepared me to be better in my behavior management and ready to build relationships with families and students."

Jeff Starr, teacher residency coordinator for Aspire, says early anecdotal feedback from schools who hired first-year teachers like Mackey from the UTRP is that these teachers are performing more like second-year teachers or beyond.

"They have skills — like the ability to stand up in front of a classroom and deliver clear, concise instructions — that come with experience," Starr says.

"This is the cutting edge of how teachers will be trained, and must be trained," Weiler says. "I'm proud that Pacific's on the forefront of this movement." Both Haynam and Weiler see the UTRP as part of a real shift in teacher education.

"It was a risk for Pacific and Aspire to take, and I admire that Pacific is willing to look beyond the status quo of teacher education," says Mackey. "I really don't think there's a better way to become a teacher."

For more information on urban teacher residency, visit www.UTRUnited.org.

"I really don't think there's a better way to become a teacher."

— Olivia O'Bryon Mackey '11

