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MU Continues to Combat the Teacher Shortage

The Future Educator Academy is supporting high school students by bolstering their career preparation and readiness for college.

By Mary Miller '22 November 15, 2023



Students participating in the Future Educators Academy experienced the Watershed Education Training Institute on campus.

Millersville University is committed to combating the current educator shortage in a variety of different ways, including **expanding its online course options** < <https://blogs.millersville.edu/news/2023/07/17/new-online-degree-programs/>> and **publicly sharing** < <https://bit.ly/46Lp1FA>> the possible **causes** < <https://www.millersville.edu/education/future-educator-academy.php>> of and solutions to the shortage. This summer, the University hosted the **Future Educator Academy** < <https://www.millersville.edu/education/future-educator-academy.php>> to recruit high school juniors who are interested in education and provide a residential college experience.

During July, 14 students from five school districts were able to experience what it's like to be a college student, all while learning more about what their future as an educator could look like.

“The ultimate goal is to recruit more students, especially students of color and first-generation students, into the field of education,” explains Dr. Miriam Witmer, associate professor of educational foundations and coordinator of the **Color of Teaching** < <https://www.millersville.edu/edfoundations/coloroft/>> program at the University. Witmer facilitated the academy alongside Dr. Jeffrey Wimer, professor of wellness and sports sciences.

“Scholars have the opportunity to see what college life is like,” Witmer

adds. "They also did a lot of self-reflection and learned about careers in education, so we hope they are motivated to pursue a college degree and to consider becoming an educator. Scholars from different schools were able to bond, so new friendships were made."

This was the first year that the academy was open to students outside of the School District of Lancaster. Other schools represented include York City, Penn Manor, Manheim Township and Ephrata.

Students began the week with a low-ropes course team-building activity. This first day focused on good communication and problem-solving between the scholars. After that, the students were able to attend various classes offered by MU faculty, so they could experience a typical college classroom. Supplementary sessions on financial aid, student success, and building friendships were included during the week. A closing ceremony was held on the last day with families.

Additionally, each student received a copy of "The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People," by Sean Covey. "Reading this book and having group discussions about its content promoted a deeper sense of purpose and sense of community for the scholars," says Witmer.

Millersville University continues to address the educator shortage in other ways as well. In a recent survey sent out to 16 Central Pennsylvanian school districts, it was discovered that while many students have high respect for their teachers, they are uninterested in the profession due to their perception of low wages in the education field.

“We need to educate high school students on the realities of the teaching profession through programs like the FEA and future teaching clubs in high schools,” says Dr. Lara Willox, dean of the College of Education and Human Services. “The starting salary may be less than in other careers, but there are many opportunities to increase salaries.”

As for other strategies, Willox explains, “We have started a fully **online early childhood program** < <https://www.millersville.edu/admissions/graduate/programs/certificatescertifications/online-instruction-endorsement-program.php>> to allow working adults to earn teaching certification. We also have an emergency certification program that will enable teachers teaching on emergency licenses to get certified in less than 18 months.”

Overall, the University is tackling educator shortage in many ways, but the academy in particular is an important tool for easing anxieties students may have about higher education and for recruiting more education students. “It will be imperative for high school students to be exposed to teaching as a career choice,” Willox says. “Through the FEA, high school students are getting excited about becoming teachers.”

“Future Educators Academy is one component of a comprehensive approach that Millersville University is undertaking to combat the pK-12 educator shortage in Pennsylvania,” explains Wimer.

“Historically, these types of early college programs in education are called ‘Grow-Your-Own’ or ‘pipeline programs,’ because they increase

student awareness and demystify the college experience. They also create enthusiasm for education as a career choice because of the possibility to return to the student's home community for employment following college."

"Although the teacher shortage is far from over, and fixing it is slowly taking shape, the Future Educator Academy is supporting high school students by bolstering their career preparation and readiness for college," says Wimer.

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