

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

ASPIRE



READY, SET, TEACH!

The stories of two first-year teachers reveal the essential preparation provided by MTSU's College of Education

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

03

Teaching Moments

Editor's letter

04



Ready, Set, Teach!

The stories of two first-year teachers reveal the essential preparation provided by MTSU's College of Education

09



A College without Walls

Dean's letter

10



Children First

MTSU's early childhood programs prepare future teachers and play key roles in the lives of Tennessee schoolchildren and their families

15

Clear Signals

Development letter

16

The Difference Makers

MTSU's Professional Counseling major produces leaders for schools and students

20



The Business of Education

Wil Clouse infuses innovation and entrepreneurship into the study of education

22



The 360-Degree Student

Teacher candidate and Buchanan fellow Erin Paul effortlessly mixes coursework and volunteerism

24

News from the College

26

Helping Hand

The ASPIRE to Teach Grant ensures Tennessee's best future teachers make it to the classroom

27

Class Notes

Teaching Moments

by DREW RUBLE

MTSU produced significantly more licensed teachers—540—than any other university in Tennessee in 2011, the most recent year of available data from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Highlighted in this second edition of *ASPIRE* are many examples of the ways our College of Education is leading statewide efforts to prepare future teachers to be effective classroom instructors who will help children find success in life.

Often overlooked in analysis like this, I believe, is the extensive work the College of Education does with veteran teachers. This includes offering ongoing professional development aimed at keeping Tennessee teachers current in their knowledge and equipped with cutting-edge tools in their classrooms. It's continuing education that positions MTSU as a sort of statewide teacher think tank.

A massive renovation project now underway in the McWherter Learning Resources Center, or LRC, will result in the creation of a new College of Education professional development center. The center will soon be able to host 150 teachers at a time and provide a comfortable, professional setting for K–12 students and educators in our region to focus on the newest methodologies and standards in teaching.

This work with veteran teachers also includes making available and easily accessible advanced degree options. While recently revised state guidelines have reduced the number of incremental pay increase steps in teacher salaries, the fact is that teachers in Tennessee make more money when they possess master's degrees, and they are better qualified for advancement into leadership positions or administration.

Those aren't the only reasons to get an advanced degree, though. Dean Lana Seivers points out that a master's or doctoral degree in education can help a teacher be more effective by putting the theory and practical research knowledge learned in the university classroom into practice in K–12 schools.

"We are not trendy or fad-driven; our programs help teachers deal with whatever comes their way," says Seivers, who served as Tennessee commissioner of education under Gov. Phil Bredesen. "We have always kept our focus on what helps teachers teach and students learn."

For example, MTSU's master's programs address many critical needs—reading, inclusion, counseling, and English as a second language—and can help teachers immediately. MTSU's doctoral programs are unique in the nation. The Ph.D. in Literacy Studies helps teachers understand the process of children's learning, and the Ed.D. in Assessment, Learning, and School Improvement is designed to equip teachers and administrators to make rapid improvements in their schools. In addition, MTSU has interdisciplinary programs with the College of Basic and Applied Sciences—such as the Ph.D. in Mathematics and Science Education—for teachers in those fields.

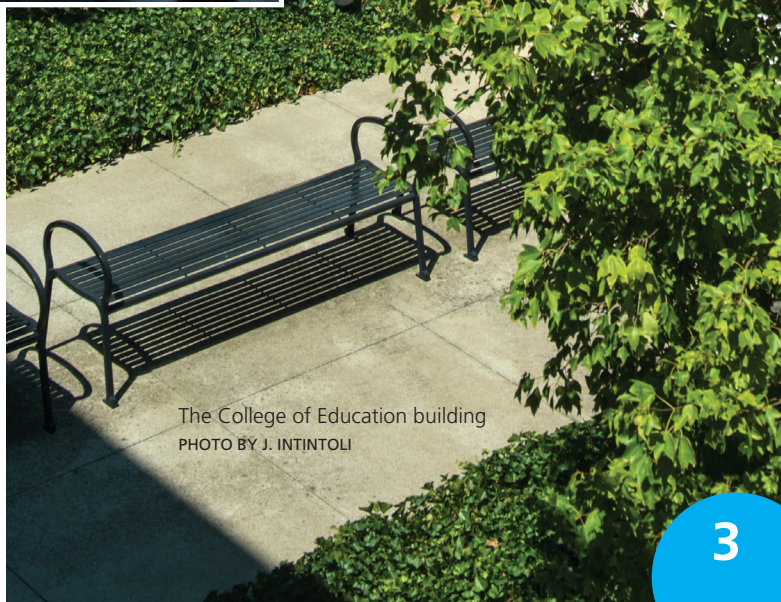
From its foundation as a teacher-training institution in 1911, MTSU's commitment to taking a leadership role in improving Tennessee's teacher workforce remains central to the University's identity. That role has perhaps never been more important than now, when K–12 education reforms are sweeping the state and nation. [A](#)

—MTSU News and Media Relations director Jimmy Hart contributed much to this note.

editor's letter



Drew Ruble, University Editor



The College of Education building
PHOTO BY J. INTINTOLI

READY, SET, TEACH!

The stories of two first-year teachers reveal the essential preparation provided by MTSU's College of Education

by ALLISON GORMAN





Ashley Fuqua and Gerald Jones
PHOTO BY J. INTINTOLI

"I can't do this."

"You can do it!"

It's a familiar refrain in Ashley Fuqua's third-grade classroom at Westside Elementary in Robertson County. Westside's a Title I school, which means that at least 40 percent of its students come from low-income households. Almost a third of Fuqua's students also come from non-English-speaking families. Combine those economic and cultural factors with the stepped-up pressures of the third-grade curriculum (more independent work and complex reading and math skills), and you have a classroom full of students for whom every day is a fresh obstacle course.

So every day, Fuqua nudges, coaxes, and praises: "You've got this. You know this. You can do it."

Not long ago, Fuqua was navigating an obstacle course of her own. In spring 2014, she was a senior in the College of Education, preparing to graduate under the first full year of the Ready2Teach (R2T) curriculum. Designed with significant input from MTSU and PreK–12 faculty and mandated by all Tennessee Board of Regents institutions, R2T addresses the main challenges faced by teacher-training programs, whose graduates cannot afford to fail in the classroom. The cost to communities and, on a larger scale, the economy, is far too high.

Ready2Teach aims to produce good teachers by focusing less on education theory and more on practical experience. Among its challenging requirements are a second semester of classroom teaching—a five-day-a-week Residency II semester following the part-time (Residency I) semester of student teaching—and the completion of the edTPA, an exhaustive, nationally-assessed written and video portfolio developed at Stanford University.

The requirements make for a grueling senior year. When R2T was unveiled, Fuqua wasn't happy because it pushed back her graduation by a semester. And when edTPA time came, she says, "Most [students] were downright negative. It was kind of like Job—oh, woe is me."

Her salvation was Dr. Cheryl Hitchcock, who guided Fuqua and her fellow seniors through the daunting edTPA submission process. "She was incredible," Fuqua says. "She had such

LEADING THE QUEST

MTSU's *Quest for Student Success* is a series of reforms launched in 2014 aimed at increasing retention and graduation. At its core, the *Quest* is a promise that every student who comes to MTSU with the drive to achieve will be met with the best instruction from excellent professors who care about their success and offer personal attention if students struggle inside or outside the classroom.

From new student data-tracking software to the hiring of 47 new academic advisors, the *Quest* has had a tremendous impact. MTSU achieved increases in retention in fall 2014 and spring 2015 with regard to both new freshmen and all students, undergraduate and graduate. For all colleges, persistence rates are at their highest level in five years.

The stories of Ashley Fuqua and Gerald Jones show that the College of Education is serious about its mission. Graduates must be ready to go immediately into the profession and effectively teach children. The college's quest is to make sure its graduates are successful so that they can, in turn, help K-12 students succeed.

Here are some of the ways the College of Education ensures that students are well prepared:

Faculty in the college focus on staying current in their knowledge of what teacher candidates will need to be fully equipped in schools now.

MTSU teacher training candidates, although attending one of the largest undergraduate schools in Tennessee, get personal attention from teachers and essentially get a small-college experience in terms of the guidance they receive.

From the time they are admitted to the college to the time they graduate, teacher candidates are provided extensive advising every step of the way. There are layers of advising and checkpoints to ensure that students stay on track and learn what needs to be learned to join the profession and be prepared. [A](#)

READY, SET, TEACH! (continued from page 5)

grace in the midst of everyone going crazy."

That's the tenor of teacher training at MTSU, where faculty, staff, and administrators collectively shepherd students through the process, particularly during that last challenging year.

As Fuqua puts it, "They're there to hold your hand when you need it, and they're there to kick you in the butt when you need it as well." (In her case, the boot was on the foot of the generally beloved Dr. Willis Means, who gently but firmly pushed Fuqua to take an Honors class to fulfill a course requirement. "He told me, 'Ashley, quit whining and do the work,'" Fuqua says. "'I've had you in my class—you can do it.'")

Helping Future Teachers Cross the Finish Line

The goal in the College of Education is to coach students through the rigors of teacher training so that they're prepared for the variety of challenges they'll face in the classroom.

For example, Bobbi Lussier, executive director of the college's Office of Professional Laboratory Experience, works with faculty, University supervisors, master clinicians, and PreK-12 schools to help students who are struggling in Residency II. She offers advising, intervention, remediation, schedule adjustments, changes in school assignments, seminars, edTPA training, and even "boot camps." As a result of new seminars led by Hitchcock and Dr. Andra Helton, the college saw a "significant increase" in edTPA scores this spring, Lussier says.

For Fuqua's fellow graduate Gerald Jones, now a fifth-grade teacher at Lascassas Elementary School in Rutherford County, his major struggle was financial. The long hours required by Residency II—five days a week in the classroom—cut into his job at Publix.

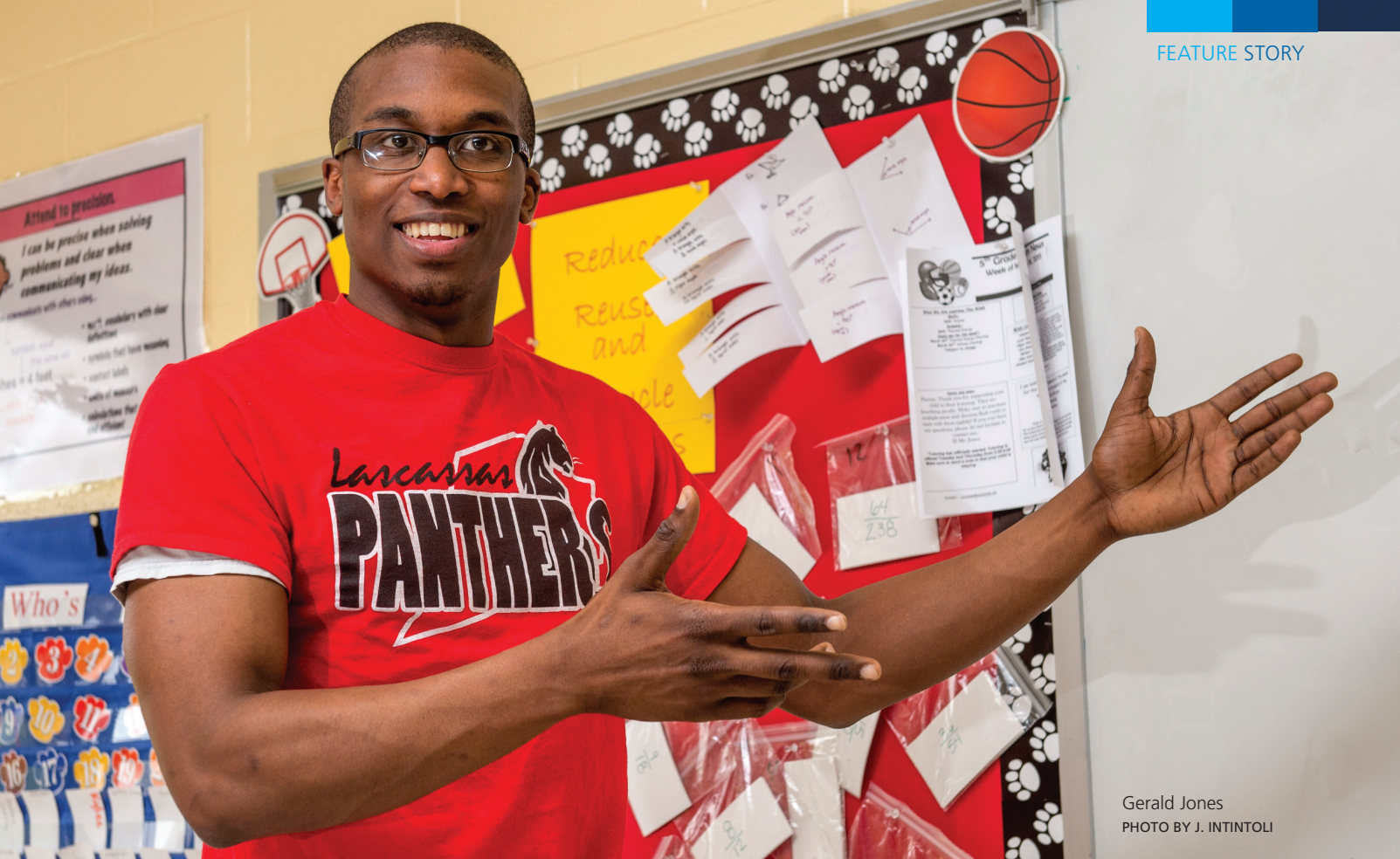
"I felt like I was drowning," Jones says. "My mind was focused on teaching—this is basically like a job—and then I'd go to my second job after leaving student teaching and I'd think, 'There's no way I can do this.' So I worked only on Saturdays, and even then I couldn't devote my full mind to my other job because I was so focused on teaching and the tasks I needed to get done."

Dean Lana Seivers put Jones in touch with Lussier, who helped him secure an ASPIRE to Teach grant to lighten his financial burden (see related article on page 26). Funded through the MTSU Foundation, the program was launched in late 2013 to help College of Education students, especially those in their residency semesters, pay for basics like food and rent and academic expenses like the required \$200 to \$600 in certification exams while they work toward becoming professional educators. "It's catastrophic when a candidate completes the teacher education program but cannot apply for licensure because they cannot afford to pay for the Praxis exams," Lussier says.

Other help Jones received was less tangible but longer lasting. He credits Dr. Terri Tharp with being extraordinarily accessible as an advisor and even going beyond that official capacity to help him polish his classroom skills.

Advising is a critical component of what the college offers, especially since R2T has added even more moving parts to an already complex curriculum (part classwork, part fieldwork). Despite tough budgetary times, the college

The goal in the College of Education is to coach students through the rigors of teacher training so that they're prepared for the variety of challenges they'll face in the classroom.



Gerald Jones
PHOTO BY J. INTINTOLI

has added more advisors even since Fuqua and Jones graduated last year. (See the “Ensuring Student Success” sidebar on page 8.)

“Advisors need to always have the best interests of their students at heart,” Tharp says. “Our goal is for them to be independent learners, but it is vital that we support and encourage them along the way.”

Seivers says that attitude reflects the perspective of College of Education faculty and staff—who are, after all, teachers teaching teachers.

“They are educators first and foremost,” she says. “They know their students and work hard to help them through whatever challenges they face. Whether financially, in the MTSU classroom, or in their school placements, we all try to model what is expected of effective, caring educators. I think our teacher candidates have a firsthand example of what good teachers do, and hopefully they will pay it forward with their own students.”

Jones says he quickly established good working relationships with faculty members like Dr. Alyson Bass, who helped him with his reading instruction, which he considered his weakest area.

Bass, a specialist in literacy education, says she’s adamant about “scaffolding” students in the skills they need to have before they leave her class. “The process can be different for each student since they all come with varying prior knowledge,” she says. “It’s an arduous yet thoroughly gratifying task when I observe a student move from not knowing to knowing.”

Jones says Bass showed him techniques he later used to great effect with his fifth-graders at Lascassas, and he regularly uses

many of the materials he received from her as a student—although he didn’t realize just how handy they would be until he became a teacher himself.

The same thing happened with certain teaching applications he learned about at MTSU. “I didn’t actually see them in action until I got to Lascassas,” he says. “Then it made sense why my teachers had recommended them.”

But Dr. Becky Alexander’s classroom management course was the one Jones drew on most as a new teacher—or, more accurately, as a new hire. He began poring over his old notes as soon as he received his teaching assignment and realized he had to be prepared to manage his first classroom. As he’d been taught to do, he tackled any problems proactively—arranging his classroom to minimize distractions for students, and then developing a plan to deal with disruptions calmly and effectively. “It’s worked pretty well,” he says.

And although the edTPA process was daunting, Jones says building the portfolio turned out to be vital preparation for the classroom. “I can’t just make up a lesson plan and teach it,” he says. “I have to do research. I have to make sure it makes sense for the students and really look at my lesson plan overall. So the edTPA was a lot of work, but it got me ready for teaching.”

Work in Progress

Still, that first year involves plenty of on-the-job training. “There’s a lot I didn’t learn until I got into my first classroom and figured things out on my own, by doing,” Jones says. His professional learning curve included progressively higher scores awarded to him

ENSURING STUDENT SUCCESS

College of Education graduates like Ashley Fuqua and Gerald Jones are quick to credit the staff and faculty at MTSU for the personal care and attention they received to prepare them for their first years as professional teachers. Since Fuqua and Jones left MTSU a year ago, there are even more levels of advising in place to help students become successful.

The Student Success and Advising Services (SSAS) unit in the college is designed to provide academic, personal, professional, and financial support to students majoring in education at MTSU. Established in spring 2014, SSAS works with staff and faculty to provide a streamlined path through precandidacy, admission to teacher education, student teaching residencies, and teacher licensure.

SSAS members contact freshmen and incoming transfers before they arrive at MTSU and help them through the admissions process. Advisors lead all freshmen and transfer CUSTOMS orientation advising sessions and help students register for their first-semester classes.

Staff members closely monitor the academic progress of education students and provide counseling and tutorial referrals for those who are struggling.

Advisors help students complete the requirements for admission to teacher education and submit their applications for candidacy.

SSAS works to provide a smooth transition from initial candidacy to teacher licensure and offers career development, PRAXIS tutoring, interviewing skills development, and other student success programming.

SSAS processes microgrants to provide one-time financial assistance of \$250 to some support education students in need.

Says Jim Rost, SSAC director, "The College of Education is committed to providing a holistic student support approach for all of our students from orientation to graduation." [A](#)

READY, SET, TEACH! (continued from page 7)



by administrators observing his work over the course of the school year. He got his first perfect score in the spring.

Those classroom observations are stressful for all teachers, especially new ones, and Fuqua says the many assessments MTSU requires of teacher candidates made the experience easier when she got to Westside Elementary.

"Our professors prepped us back and forth about knowing that rubric, especially in student teaching," she says. "At first I thought, 'Gosh, this is overkill.' But it helped. I mean, everyone's nervous before evaluations, but I feel like I can truly hit the target."

One of the most important lessons Fuqua learned in her first year of teaching is that some days will be better than others—particularly with so many at-risk students. She now knows it's okay if she's not perfect as long as she still feels passionate about her mission. The day she doesn't, she says, is the day she'll leave the profession.

"I don't want to be an ineffective teacher," she says. "I don't want to be the reason a kid starts hating school or thinking 'School's too hard for someone like me.' Because those kids want to succeed. As long as they feel loved and respected and safe, they'll do anything for you."

And so she tells them what her teachers told her—"You can do it!"—the message amplified by a display on her classroom wall: bold letters that say "The Tassel Is Worth the Hassle," and her cap and gown from MTSU. [A](#)

dean's letter

A College without Walls

by LANA SEIVERS

Ask anyone to name the five people who have made the biggest impact on his or her life, and chances are most of them will name at least one teacher. Imagine, then, the impact of MTSU's College of Education over the course of its 104-year history.

Since its beginning as Middle Tennessee State Normal School in 1911, preparing teachers has been central to the mission of this institution. We are proud of MTSU's rich history in teacher education and the many contributions our graduates have made.

Today, preparing future teachers, counselors, and school leaders is still central to our mission. The exceptional College of Education faculty and staff are dedicated to providing quality programs in a supportive, rigorous, and student-centered campus environment.

Our state-of-the-art College of Education Building that opened in 2011 is where we prepare students to embark upon a professional career that will impact the lives of your children and grandchildren. However, it's not the only place where teacher candidates learn how to teach, what to teach, and why teaching matters. Our strong collaboration with PreK–12 school districts, particularly Murfreesboro City Schools and Rutherford County Schools, serves as a pivotal and important part of our teacher preparation mission.

This issue of *ASPIRE* features other places where helping teachers teach and children learn is central to the mission, including the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services. The early childhood education programs—the Ann Campbell Early Learning Center (formerly Project HELP), the Child Development Center, and the Home and Community-Based Early Intervention program—are also part of the College of Education. They all play a vital role at the University and in the communities they serve. In these programs, our teacher candidates gain experiences that enhance the research, best practices, and content knowledge taught by College of Education faculty.

These early childhood programs are so much more, though. They are places where families and young children are served by this University in ways that only those who have worked with young children or those who have young children of their own can appreciate. They are places where caring, well-trained teachers make sure the youngest of our children receive developmentally appropriate instruction that focuses on the critical first years of a child's life. They are places where the aspirations of these children and their families take root. These are also places where young children learn early on what it means to be a part of the MTSU "True Blue" family.

Whether learning in the classrooms in the College of Education Building, in PreK–12 schools, or in early childhood education programs, MTSU students are gaining the real-world experience needed to continue our University's proud tradition of making a difference through the power of education. I believe this latest edition of *ASPIRE* magazine offers more powerful evidence of that fact. [A](#)



Lana C. Seivers ('72)
Dean of the College of Education



CHILDREN



Children at the Ann Campbell Early Learning Center
PHOTO BY JACOB SMITH, ANN CAMPBELL EARLY LEARNING
CENTER (ACE)/PROJECT HELP

MTSU's early childhood programs prepare future teachers and also play key roles in the lives of Tennessee schoolchildren and their families

by PATSY B. WEILER

In her office at Ann Campbell Early Learning Center (ACE), Dr. Robyn Ridgley smiles at the happy racket outside her open door. Watching preschoolers walk from their classroom, Ridgley, MTSU associate professor and the center's interim director says, "That is one of my favorite sounds.

"All you have to do is spend a minute in the classroom, and you know it is important work. They are somebody's babies, but they are our future," she says.



Quadruplets Elliott, Emerson, Thompson, and Kathryn Smith
PHOTO BY DARBY CAMPBELL

EN FIRST

While sometimes overlooked, the successful sights and sounds of early childhood education take place regularly at MTSU. These activities can be found at the ACE on North Baird Lane, the Child Development Center in the lower level of the Fairview Building (which also houses the ACE classroom for 4-year-olds), and the office of the Home and Community-Based Early Intervention program on the third floor of the College of Education Building. (The MTSU Child Care Lab, directed by Nancy James, is a fourth childcare center on campus, but is not part of the College of Education.)

“Some may not realize these early childhood education programs are part of the College of Education,” says Dean Lana Seivers. “These high-quality programs for young children and their families demonstrate MTSU’s commitment to the community, and they also enjoy strong support and partnerships from individuals and

organizations within the community. The collaboration between their staff and MTSU faculty provides MTSU students with expanded learning opportunities that enhance both their academic experiences and service learning.”

A Healthy Mix

At ACE, approximately 70 children, ages 15 months through four years, some with developmental delays or disabilities, are enrolled part- or full-time and taught in one of four colorful classrooms. More than 1,500 hours of hands-on training are provided at the center for preservice teachers each year.

First known as Project HELP (Help Educate Little People), ACE was started in 1983 by the late Dr. Ann Campbell and was renamed in her honor in spring 2014. Its founder



Early interventionist Angie Sexton and April Smith sing “Itsy-Bitsy Spider” to hone the Smith childrens’ language skills. PHOTO BY DARBY CAMP-

was a fierce advocate for children, recognizing the need for a preschool where very young children with special needs and their peers, who are typically developing, could learn together and grow to respect, befriend, and help each other.

“Families who have young children with developmental delays can feel assured their children with unique needs will be supported and encouraged by their teachers and peers here,” Ridgley says.

For Amy Ayer, who works in MTSU’s School of Nursing, the center is a perfect fit for her two sons, Harrison, five, a typical learner, and James, three, who has developmental delays and receives some of his nourishment through a feeding tube.

Her oldest son started at the center because his mother liked how close it was to her job, the low adult-to-child ratio, the center’s master teachers, and the opportunity Harrison would have to interact with other students in his classroom.

“The center has provided us with a sense of home and security,” Ayer says. “We know our children are in good hands and in a safe place.”

When James was old enough, it made sense to put the brothers in preschool together.

“My youngest son, James, has a condition known as hemifacial microsomia,” Ayer says. “Essentially, half of the bones in his face did not develop, including his ear. He suffers from unilateral deafness and speech delays. He is comfortable and not scared because his older brother, Harrison, is there, and James also benefits from the inclusive program. Getting to spend the day with typically developing children encourages him to strive harder and work harder at the skills in which he needs to improve.

“The center has provided us with a sense of home and security,” Ayer continues. “We know our children are in good hands and in a safe place.”

Ayer is confident both of her children are being well prepared for elementary school.

“The center is a great place for my children because they learn not all children are the same and not everyone learns in the same way,” she says. “They will be used to a rigorous learning environment and have the best available tools to be successful in elementary school. This is a vital program for our community, and it is a great learning experience for future educators. I think the MTSU students learn as much from the children as my boys learn from them.”

Learning the Ropes

Across campus from ACE, the Child Development Center (CDC) is one of only 100 laboratory preschools in the nation that give future early childhood teachers and other students the chance to work with and observe children from ages one to five in an enriched learning environment. It's been part of MTSU for nearly 50 years.

About 50 children participate in morning or afternoon programs Monday through Thursday. While engaged in structured play, they also learn important life skills. Director Beverly "Marzee" Woodward says that when newly enrolled students who don't speak English receive patient and thoughtful instruction while playing with peers, they quickly learn to understand and communicate.

"Each year, we have approximately 1,000 students who are involved at the center as graduate assistants, preservice teachers, or other majors observing our classes," says Woodward. (An observation area with two-way glass is located between the classrooms.) Woodward also sponsors Raiders for Young Children, a group for education majors and those studying in related fields. "Our mission is to empower future teachers to be able to understand and encourage the development of the whole child," she says.

One such student is Jebediah Peavler of Rogersville, who spent four to six hours a week at the CDC conducting an infant/toddler practicum lab in spring 2015. As a tall, African American male, Peavler doesn't match the description of most Early Childhood Education majors, but he doesn't give that much thought. Instead, he focuses on graduating in December 2016 and becoming a Rutherford County kindergarten teacher.

"I really don't recognize myself as anything special in the sense that I'm breaking gender and racial norms by pursuing my degree because there really should not be any," Peavler says. "I'm pursuing early childhood education to be a positive role model and because I have a love and appreciation for children."

However, the former music major, who loves to sing, write music, and skateboard to class, experienced some trepidation when he began classroom work with very young children.

"Before I entered my practicum class, I was very apprehensive of children below the age of three," he says. "I'm a large individual and, to me, infants and toddlers were extremely delicate and fragile beings. I've learned [this age] is definitely ready to learn, and there's nothing to be apprehensive about."

Woodward remembers Peavler's initial challenges but also how he quickly asked for help and moved forward to overcome them.



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

"Because Jeb was different to many of the children, they were initially afraid of him. He actively sought out advice on how to foster relationships with children and families and followed that advice," says Woodward. "[Now] he gets on the [eye] level of the children, uses a soft voice, and is comfortable speaking with parents and children alike. Jeb is going to make a great early childhood teacher and be a strong role model in his field."

Shoring up a Community's Foundation

Tucked away on the third floor of the Education Building is the office of Home and Community-Based Early Intervention (HCBEI), a resource agency of Tennessee's Early Intervention System (TEIS) in the Tennessee Department of Education. Director Amanda Dunlap and her team, also known as early interventionists, have served as many as 15 southern midstate counties assisting qualified children from birth to age three who have been diagnosed with a disability or developmental delay in skills such as crawling, communication, and social interaction.

Those helped are from all socioeconomic backgrounds, and the service is free when criteria are met.



A child at the Ann Campbell Early Learning Center
PHOTO BY JACOB SMITH, ANN CAMPBELL EARLY LEARNING CENTER (ACE)/PROJECT HELP

"We are strictly home- and community-based," Dunlap says. "We go out to the home, babysitter, daycare, park—wherever the children are located. Kids come to us with goals written in an individualized family service plan made by a service coordinator. We encourage and coach the family or caregiver with strategies on how to help them reach those goals during their everyday routines and activities."

Often, early interventionists find themselves working with more than one child, such as the energetic quadruplets of April and Shawn Thomas Smith. Along with 5-year-old brother Mason, sisters Emerson, Thompson, Kathryn, and the one boy in the group, Elliott, moved to Tennessee in July 2014. They came from Virginia when their father accepted a job at First Presbyterian Church in Smyrna.

Because the quads were born prematurely, they qualified for services and started the HCBEI program when they were 15 months old.

"I feel so fortunate. All it took was one phone call to get the ball rolling to make sure my children got the services



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER

available to them in Tennessee," April says. Three of the four get developmental therapy to help with their communication and social interaction skills.

At their last six-month review, the children had accomplished two-thirds of their goals and are now on target to complete them during the next six months.

April is a former elementary teacher and Memphis native. She attended Girls State at MTSU in 1995 and says she was happy when she learned the HCBEI program was offered through the University. "My service coordinator, Kimberly Johnson, and MTSU developmental therapist Angie Sexton have become part of my village. They are my people, and I love them," April says.

She adds, "The therapy helps me be successful in homing in on each child's individual learning style and do my most important job, which is to be an advocate for my children."

Sexton calls the Smiths an ideal family to work with.

"Both parents are involved and take the time to educate themselves on evidence-based practices. My role has been one of a mentor and support system," she says.

Sexton's job looks different with every family.

"Sometimes I am an encourager, and sometimes I am a coach," she says. "Every family has different dynamics and individual needs. It is my responsibility to identify what those are and utilize my experience to serve them best."

From serving infants and toddlers to educating future teachers and being a trusted community resource, MTSU's early childhood education programs are amazing examples of the far-reaching effect education can have at all levels. [A](#)

"The center is a great place for my children because they learn not all children are the same and not everyone learns in the same way."

development

Clear Signals

by LUCIE BURCHFIELD

As development director for the College of Education, I get the chance to meet many, many people throughout the course of the year. Luckily for me, I like people. I like their stories, and I always feel like I learn something new with every encounter.

My primary job when meeting with people is to listen. It's not a job to me, really. I like to ask questions, listen, and learn. Of course, from a job perspective, I'm most interested in people who want to engage with MTSU and enjoy a relationship with their alma mater that adds value to their lives and also to the University—most importantly, to our students. On a perfect day, I meet someone who cherishes the time they spent here as a student, who is generous, passionate about education, possesses a volunteer spirit, has maintained their connection to MTSU, or is already an active alum. There are many people who fit this description, thank goodness! But I believe there are many more with a desire to fit that profile.

My official job description will tell you I am a “major gifts” officer, which I am, and I work faithfully to secure such gifts. But the term “major gift” is complicated, both to me and to many potential donors I meet. While a large, seven-figure gift is certainly a “major” deal and typically what one thinks about when they hear about gifts to universities, that's not always the case, or the norm. Let me explain.

About three years ago, I traveled to Atlanta to meet with various alumni. All were first-time visits for me. In a diner outside of Atlanta, I got to meet Patsy and Joe O'Neal. Patsy had received her degree in education at MTSU and was a lifelong educator. I listened to the couple tell me the story of how they fell in love (they were pen pals while he was in Vietnam) and about their many travels together around the world (they have been to every continent), as well as how they have supported both of their alma maters for years. In fact, the O'Neals have supported MTSU with a philanthropic gift of some size for 21 years.

Think about that for a moment. For 21 years, when the O'Neals thought about making a gift to MTSU or were asked to make a gift to MTSU, they said “yes.” As you might imagine, I love that about them! But I also love the fact that they don't just support MTSU through their giving, they also continue to engage in the life of the MTSU community. For instance: they always attend Homecoming and try to attend a second football game each year; they attend Alumni Summer College; and, personally speaking, they have always done what they could to help me achieve my fundraising goals, whether that meant helping get other area alums to attend an event in Atlanta, read program drafts and give me feedback, or even just sincerely and genuinely support me in my professional and personal life.

At MTSU, we have a special society called the Signal Society that recognizes donors who have made gifts to the University for 20 years or more. One Signal Society member has actually given for an amazing 50-plus years! That is MAJOR! But in this edition of *ASPIRE* magazine, I recognize a couple that is pretty “MAJOR” in my book—Patsy and Joe O'Neal. Thank you for continuing to support MTSU with your gifts, your participation, and your service. We are proud to call you our own! [A](#)



Patsy and Joe O'Neal

Lucie Burchfield
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THE DIFFERENCE MAKERS



MTSU's Professional
Counseling major
produces leaders for
schools and students

by DIANE HUGHES

In the high-stakes realm of K–12 education, teachers and principals are the primary professionals responsible for positive outcomes. Often, school counselors are overlooked for the important roles they play in the success of a school and its students.

That's especially true today, when school counselors are dealing with issues that extend beyond college and career preparation. Counselors must deal with everything from cyberbullying to school shootings. The American School Counselor Association website says, "Gone are the days of school counselors sitting in their offices simply handing out college applications, making schedule changes for students who want to drop a class, or meeting with the troublemakers in the school. Today's school counselors are vital members of the education team. They help all students in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social development, and career development, ensuring today's students become the productive, well-adjusted adults of tomorrow."

Almost since its founding in 1911, MTSU has produced the lion's share of new teachers for Tennessee schools. The College of Education also plays a critical role in the preparation of school counselors.

Dr. Virginia Dansby, counseling professor and coordinator of the Professional Counseling major, emphasizes just how crucial school counselors are to the overall educational process.

"The tremendous contributions that school counselors make to student success and to the operations of essential processes in the school are all too often minimized or overlooked," Dansby says.

Graduate students like Megan Harper want to fill that vital role and make a difference in the lives of students.

"School counseling provides a way to help kids be heard and understood and also helps them understand important character traits that will affect their choices for the rest of their lives," says Harper, who expects to graduate from the MTSU master's program in counseling in December 2015.

Gears in Motion

Key features of MTSU's School Counseling concentration include service learning, a practicum, internships, and work at the MTSU Center for Counseling and Psychological Services.

In the Multicultural Counseling course, a core class in the program, students complete a service-learning

project that requires them to volunteer in a setting "that serves a population in which [the student] has the most preconceived ideas and the least experience," says assistant professor Dr. Michelle Stevens. The course is designed to strengthen awareness and understanding of ethnically and culturally diverse populations.

According to Stevens, past service-learning projects have been performed at organizations such as Green House Ministries, Project Help, Thistle Farms, and the Nashville Rescue Mission.

Every student also gains experience at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The training is rigorous and well supervised, to say the least. The program does not send its graduates into the professional field underprepared for what they will face. The stakes—working closely in the personal lives of schoolchildren—are quite high.

"Students complete a minimum of 100 practicum hours in a middle school, 300 internship hours in an elementary school, and 300 internship hours in a high school—all under the supervision of an experienced school counselor and the MTSU instructor," Dansby says.

According to Harper, the practicum helped her choose the grade level she'd like to work with and has been a confidence booster.

"We deal with real clients in the same environment we'll actually be working in," she says. "Having that time to learn and practice in school with supervision is so important. Having teachers to support me and supervise helps me feel more willing to put myself out there and be assertive."

Each student also gets hands-on training at the Center for Counseling and Psychological Services in Maple Leaf Village on West College Street in Murfreesboro. Professor Chris Quarto calls it a "high-tech facility."

"There are cameras in each counseling office that allow professors to observe students' counseling sessions in a different room," says Quarto, who added that confidentiality is strictly maintained.

The center also has cutting-edge technology that professors use to guide students through sessions.

"Bug-in-the-eye technology allows the professor to type helpful hints that appear on a computer screen

"The tremendous contributions that school counselors make to student success and to the operations of essential processes in the school are all too often minimized or overlooked."

in the counseling office that can only be read by the counseling student as they are counseling clients,” Quarto says. “It also allows the professor to whisper helpful hints into the earpiece of the student.”

Counseling students have the opportunity to observe the live sessions of their classmates—a useful teaching tool. Dansby emphasized that all faculty members in the program have some experience in public schools, including two faculty members who worked full-time counseling in schools before coming to MTSU. There is also a focus on class size and connecting with students.

“We pay considerable attention to relationships in the program,” Dansby says. “We have small class sizes with team projects for collaborative work, and we provide frequent advising sessions. We also have a professional counseling program student organization that provides student-to-student mentoring and help.”

Harper’s undergraduate degree is in Psychology, but Dansby says the program welcomes students from all areas of study, not just Education or Psychology majors.

“We are striving to attract a diverse group of students who have an allegiance to social justice and to

advocacy for equal opportunity for all members of society. The most common majors of our students are Education, Psychology, or Social Work, but the program can build on the skills that undergraduates have obtained in their general courses and in any major,” Dansby says.

Dansby says students who don’t have teaching degrees study basic classroom management and instructional skills. They also spend a minimum of 40 hours in an elementary school practicing those skills.

Backing It Up

The master’s program at MTSU is the perfect training ground for aspiring school counselors like Harper, who did a lot of research before choosing a graduate field. She was attracted by MTSU’s accreditation from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

“It was important to me to find a program that was accredited,” Harper says.

According to Dansby, that accreditation is highly coveted and sets high standards.

“We pay considerable attention to relationships in the program,” Dansby says. “We have small class sizes with team projects for collaborative work, and we provide frequent advising sessions.”

"We are the only public college or university in middle Tennessee that is accredited by CACREP," Dansby says.

Earning the CACREP accreditation took more than just offering the right curriculum. Administrators are required to measure and demonstrate that the program is achieving desired results.

"We have to show evidence that we not only taught the material but that we also evaluated the efficacy of the program," Dansby says.

The program is evaluated every eight years, requiring a self-study to maintain accreditation.

"If we pass the self-study, a site team comes in for a very detailed audit," Dansby says. "We went through our review in the fall of 2014 and received the full eight-year accreditation for both of our counseling programs—School Counseling and Clinical Mental Health Counseling."

Maintaining the accreditation takes a lot of work, but it's worth the effort. The CACREP credential is very appealing to students and their prospective employers.

"Coming from a CACREP program can provide advantages to a graduate and even, at times, advantages in the job market," Dansby says.

The Result

Harper expects to begin her search for a postgraduate counseling position in the fall, and she's leaning toward working with elementary students.

"No matter where I end up, I am excited to enter a school and set up a program that best fits the needs of the students in that school," Harper says. "School counselors are meant to be resources and advocates for students, and that is what I hope to pursue in the long run." [A](#)

BEYOND the SCHOOLYARD

In addition to the School Counseling concentration at the master's level, the College of Education also offers a concentration in Clinical Mental Health Counseling.

According to counseling professor Dr. Chris Quarto, the clinical concentration seeks to prepare students to work as licensed counselors in hospitals, community agencies, and private practice.

These two tracks of study fall under the auspices of the Womack Educational Leadership Department. In 2009, the department was renamed to acknowledge the work and financial contributions of the late Professor Bob Womack and his family. Womack graduated from MTSU in 1948 and taught at the college from 1953 until just before his death in 2010. Generations of the Womack family have graduated from MTSU, going back to Bob's brother, Price Womack, who graduated in 1928. Thanks to the family's endowment, says Dr. Virginia Dansby, the department is able to stay on the cutting-edge of training for professional counselors.

"By supporting faculty travel to professional conferences, the Womack endowment helps our faculty stay abreast of current information and trends, which we can then bring back to our classrooms," Dansby says.

That investment seems to be paying off. In 2011, the college's Professional Counseling program earned the Outstanding Master's Counselor Education Award from the Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. Winners of the award must demonstrate outstanding training in areas of professional identity, ethics, assessment, group work, counseling supervision, practicum, and internship. [A](#)

Editor's note: If you would like to help further this work and increase the endowment, visit www.mtsu.edu/development/foundation.php or contact the Foundation office at (615) 898-2502 or (877) 444-MTSU.



Wilburn “Wil” Clouse has been recognized for decades of work promoting entrepreneurship with the John E. Hughes Award for Entrepreneurial Advocacy from the U.S. Association of Small Business and Entrepreneurship (USASBE).

“This is the highest award that I’ve ever received for my lifetime of work in creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship,” Clouse says.

Clouse, a 1968 MTSU graduate, wants to sow the spirit of entrepreneurship within disciplines throughout MTSU in his position as a research professor in the Womack Educational Leadership Department.

“We are very pleased to have Wil Clouse at MTSU, and his expertise and enthusiasm have helped to infuse innovation, problem-based learning and entrepreneurship education across our campus,” says College of Education Dean Lana Seivers.

Associate Professor Terry Goodin nominated Clouse for the Hughes Award, citing his career of more than 40 years at Vanderbilt University, where he developed the Center for Entrepreneurship Education, and his time at Western Kentucky University, where he developed two centers of excellence in entrepreneurship.

“He has an entrepreneurship spirit that permeates his life as a teacher, researcher, consultant, and independent entrepreneur,” Goodin wrote in his nomination letter. “In his work at four different universities over the past 54 years, Wil has had the opportunity to spread the entrepreneurship spirit to some 10,000 students.”

The Hughes Award is one of three given by the USASBE to those “who have demonstrated clearly a significant leadership role in promoting entrepreneurship through their work and contributions to the field.”

The awards were presented Jan. 23 at USASBE’s annual meeting in Tampa, Florida.

Clouse held the Mattie Newman Ford Endowed Chair in Entrepreneurship at Western Kentucky and is an emeritus professor at Vanderbilt. He founded and served as president of Clouse and Associates (1975), Matrix Systems (1981), and Clouse–Elrod Foundation (2011).

“I’ve always been an outside-of-the-box thinker,” Clouse says. “I’ve always been into creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship but never really recognized it in the early days of my life.”

Clouse grew up in Nashville and attended public schools. He showed a penchant for business at an early age. He bought his first stock market shares as a teenager for \$100—a hefty chunk of cash in the 1950s for someone his age.

Clouse’s first job after college was as a research assistant in the Department of Biochemistry in the School of Medicine at Vanderbilt. Later, he moved to a chemical engineering position with DuPont and was a patent coordinator for a time.

With a bachelor’s degree in chemistry and some business acumen, Clouse began taking night and weekend classes in economics at MTSU.

Dr. Furman Cunningham, then dean of the College of Business, asked Clouse if he’d like to teach some economics courses. At first hesitant, Clouse gave it a shot.

He eventually developed the computer science technology program at Columbia State Community College and returned to Vanderbilt as a faculty member.

Clouse had many creative assignments at Vanderbilt. He worked for 20 years in innovation and entrepreneurship education there, and he developed a working relationship with John Hughes, for whom the Hughes Award is named. Hughes funded Clouse’s entrepreneurship work at Vanderbilt through Coleman Foundation grants.

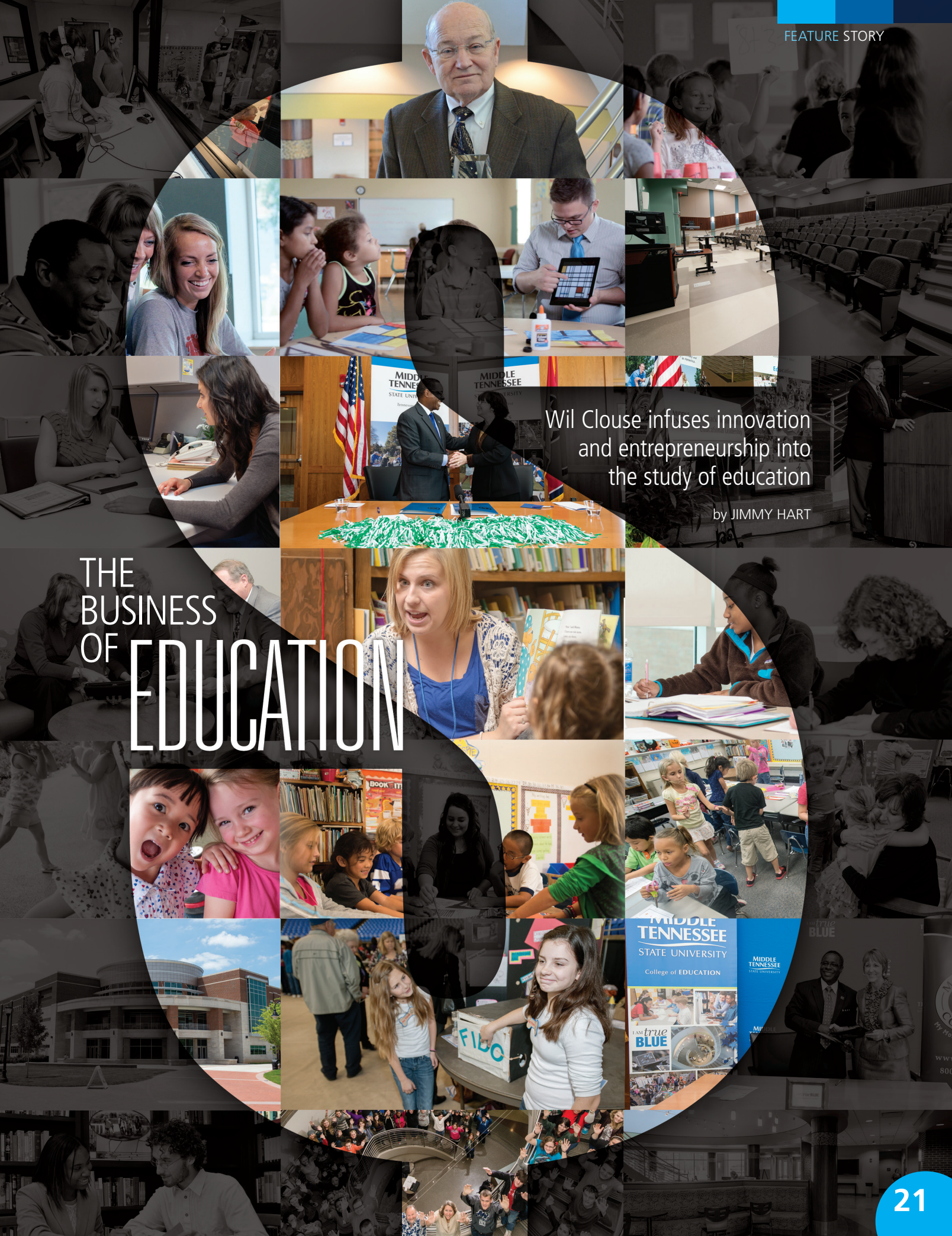
Clouse later created the Clouse-Elrod Foundation Inc., which has funded projects at MTSU in agribusiness and education.

Clouse is working on a research paper about the challenges facing all educators in teaching the millennial generation and properly preparing students to be productive in the marketplace. Clouse believes traditional methods of teaching must evolve to engage millennials more deeply and to center on authentic problem-based learning.

“Dr. Clouse brings years of valuable experience in higher education to our department and is helping us become a leader throughout the state in ‘problem-based learning,’” says Dr. Jim Huffman, chair of the Womack Educational Leadership Department.

Clouse’s focus is on cross-disciplinary entrepreneurship and innovation. He is working with faculty members to help develop a culture of innovation and commercialization across all disciplines at the University.

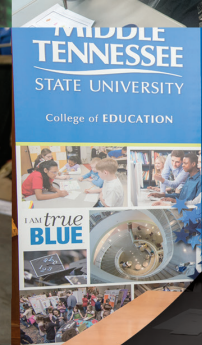
“I’d like to be able to infuse innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship across the entire MTSU campus,” he says. He’s working to develop problem-based modules that encourage creative, innovative thinking, “so that when a student learns the academics of that class, he or she will see the opportunities to take that idea from that class into the marketplace.” [A](#)



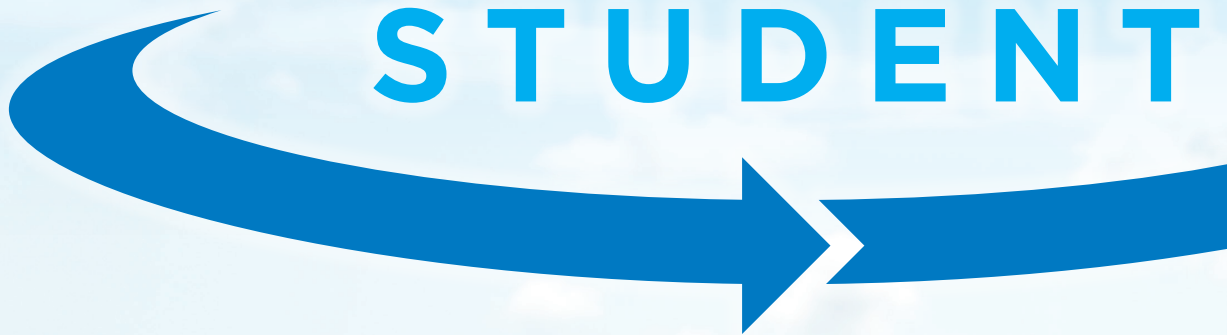
Wil Clouse infuses innovation and entrepreneurship into the study of education

by JIMMY HART

THE BUSINESS OF EDUCATION



THE 360-DEGREE STUDENT



REE

Teacher candidate and Buchanan fellow Erin Paul effortlessly mixes coursework and volunteerism

by DARBY CAMPBELL

Teacher candidate Erin Paul, a 21-year-old junior majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies, is the first College of Education enrollee to also be a Buchanan Fellow. Named for the late Nobel Prize-winning economist and alumnus Dr. James M. Buchanan, the Buchanan Fellowship, awarded through the Honors College, is limited to 20 students per year and is the highest award given to an entering freshman at MTSU.

An accomplished student, Paul has also demonstrated a fierce ambition for mission work and helping others. She is a volunteer and residential intern with Community Servants at Wherry Housing, a low-income housing program that offers a helping hand to many refugees and immigrants in Murfreesboro. There, Paul helps children from non-English-speaking homes complete their homework assignments and helps teach non-English-speaking adults basic conversational English and how to do things like filling out and understanding forms and applications.

Paul's English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching experience extends far beyond Rutherford County. With two overseas trips already under her belt, she was, at press time, preparing for a third trip to Thailand to teach English. She was also in the process of applying for a Fulbright Scholarship to teach abroad for a year after graduation. Her intended undergraduate thesis is "Effective Teaching Strategies of ESL." Paul says she hopes to continue serving those around her while building a career teaching English abroad.

Paul's teachers and advisors are understandably impressed with her ability to meet the challenges of a Buchanan Fellow's course load, which involves special seminars and Honors classes as well as the intense schedule of a College of Education teacher candidate.

"Erin is a dedicated student who is unselfish and community-centered," says Dr. Laura Clippard, Paul's Honors advisor. "Her work with the Wherry Housing Community and overseas teaching experience is something that comes naturally for her because her personality is warm and caring."

Paul's College of Education advisor, Dr. Willis Means, described her as "one of those unusual students who exemplifies her major: Interdisciplinary Studies. She has sampled widely from the academic offerings afforded her at MTSU—philosophy to foreign literature in translation to astronomy to pedagogy—and has enhanced not only her learning but that of her colleagues."

With her kind of energy and passion, there's no telling where Paul's teaching degree may take her. What is not in doubt is that with a heart and mind like hers, the sky is the limit. [A](#)

Erin Paul, pictured here on the balcony of the College of Education building with the Paul W. Martin Sr. Honors building behind her

PHOTO BY DARBY CAMPBELL

news & notes

So many stories . . . so few pages! There are simply too many positive developments happening in the College of Education to tell you about them all in a single edition of *ASPIRE* magazine. The following news and notes section, then, is intended to highlight just a few items from the past year.



Pictured from left to right are Nissan employees Tim Mrozinski, JaMichael Smith, Jennifer Hill, and Magen Clayton; Robyn Ridgley, interim director of the ACE Learning Center; and Nissan employees Chris Hobby and Michael White.



Driving Success

A group of employees from Nissan's Smyrna plant donated three skids of needed supplies—including napkins, paper towels, wet wipes, paper cups, cleaning supplies and other similar items—to

the Ann Campbell Early Learning Center (ACE) in summer 2015. As they had last year, Nissan held a supply drive at its plant. The donations will enhance the ACE staff's care of the children being taught there.

Global Perspective

For two of the past three years, Dr. Jane Seok Jeng Lim has led a group of future teachers on a study-abroad trip to her native Singapore. She has done so, she says, in an effort to ensure these future educators gain global experience in education before graduating and getting jobs teaching in schools.

“As the world is becoming more global and the classrooms in our schools are becoming more diverse, students need to be able to respond to these changes,” says Lim, an assistant professor in the Department of Elementary and Special Education. “Study abroad is a way to provide a global perspective on education. I want students to move beyond local knowledge to be global citizens and eventually education diplomats, promoting social responsibility, global and cultural awareness, and civic engagement in education.”

Lim knows of what she teaches. She earned her undergraduate degree in Perth, Australia, her master’s in Sydney, Australia, and her Ph.D. in New York. She has also presented at 30 national, state, and international conferences. She is a former executive director of the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore), was on the executive board of the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), and is the current president of Tennessee ACEI. Lim’s area of research interest is on bullying among refugee children.

Lim organized trips to Singapore in the spring semesters of both 2013 and 2014. She is planning another trip in 2016.



Students accompanying professor Jane Seok Jeng Lim to Singapore in 2014 were Lauren Mott, Naomi Ekundayo, Lindsey Miller, and Sheila Watkins.



Cheryl Hitchcock, Elementary and Special Education faculty, left, and Brad Bartel, provost at the 2014 Faculty Promotion and Tenure ceremony. PHOTO BY ANDY HEIDT

Good Assessment

Early Childhood Education faculty member Dr. Cheryl Hitchcock spearheaded implementation of the edTPA performance assessment for MTSU candidates completing their teacher preparation program. A component of the Ready2Teach initiative adopted by the Tennessee Board of Regents, edTPA is a performance-based, subject-specific assessment and support system used by more than 600 teacher preparation programs in 40 states to ensure new teachers are ready to teach upon graduation.

Hitchcock is a national certified scorer of edTPA portfolios. She developed and directed the edTPA implementation and training plan for the College of Education. Hitchcock conducts multiple training sessions for candidates, faculty, supervisors, and staff members each semester. She has guided and supported hundreds of MTSU candidates to successfully complete the edTPA to meet program requirements and improve their teaching.

“Teaching is a tough profession,” Hitchcock says. “Candidates should enter their first year of teaching with the ability to teach all students.”

Hitchcock earned her bachelor’s, master’s and Ed.D. in exceptional Learning with a concentration in young children and families from Tennessee Tech University. She came to MTSU in 2007 after many years teaching everything from Pre-K special education to high school Japanese. She also served as the gifted education coordinator for 10 years in the Warren County school district.



“Support from this ASPIRE grant put me one step closer to achieving my dream of becoming a teacher. It encourages my dedication to college and eventually my teaching career. Not only did it make a difference in my life, but it will make a difference in the lives of the children I will teach.”

—Cassie Judkins

visit www.mtsu.edu/ASPIRE

Helping Hand

Amid rising educational expenses and the demanding rigor of the teacher preparation program, help is needed to ensure Tennessee’s best future teachers actually make it to the classroom

The College of Education recently established the ASPIRE to Teach Grant, an initiative that has already proven to determine whether or not some of our most talented teacher candidates make it through their college preparation to wind up where they belong—teaching in a classroom.

A response to the growing number of students whose short-term financial challenges threaten to derail their education, the ASPIRE to Teach Grant is funded by donors and alumni.

With the demanding rigor of the teacher preparation program, many students must reduce outside work hours or quit their jobs entirely to give their studies and Residency (student teaching) the time and attention now required.

Too often, students who have nearly achieved their degrees either “stop out” with hopes of returning to school, or drop out because of an unanticipated financial hardship that seems insurmountable.

The ASPIRE to Teach Grant is changing that. Established at the beginning of 2014, the initiative has already awarded more than \$5,000 to 21 students, most of whom have graduated and are teaching.

That is why this grant is so important. In the words of College of Education Dean Lana Seivers, the grant is an opportunity for friends and alumni of the college “to do our part to get the very best teachers into our schools.” [Editor’s note: As proof of how strongly Seivers believes in the positive impact of the ASPIRE to Teach program, she provided the money that launched the grant and continues to make contributions to the fund.]

Without question, this new grant can ensure that a small financial hardship does not prevent an outstanding student from becoming a successful teacher. Help is needed, though, to continue that mission.

The College of Education relies on donations to support the grants currently given to students. It is also striving to build a permanent endowment of \$25,000 so that this important fund will be stable far into the future.

“As new educators begin their careers as teachers and school leaders, the generosity of our friends and alumni will be paid forward when they help a teacher candidate in need,” Seivers says. “Thanks to them, the aspirations of our students—and the dreams of the students they will teach—begin here.”

To make a gift to the ASPIRE to Teach Grant, contact College of Education development officer Lucie Burchfield at Lucie.burchfield@mtsu.edu.

class notes

A sampling of College of Education graduates making a difference in the lives of schoolchildren



Thais That Bind

Looking for a way to give back to the world, and eager for a satisfying adventure, Natalie Stewart ('14) is serving two years in Thailand as a member of the Peace Corps—the program started by President Kennedy more than a half century ago that sends American citizens all over the world to work on development projects and promote mutual understanding. She is photographed here with some of her students.



Linda Gilbert



Matthew Little

Grade A Grads

The MTSU Alumni Association's annual Distinguished Alumni Awards in 2014–15 included two College of Education graduates. The Achievement in Education award went to Murfreesboro City Schools director Linda Gilbert ('72, '79 and '91). Matthew Little ('08), was awarded in the Service to the Community category.

More Where That Came From

Rutherford County Schools recently honored a total of 46 educators as teachers of the year. This year's grade-level winners were all MTSU graduates. Marlene McGregor, works as a K–5 math interventionist at Blackman Elementary. Laura Schlesinger, teaches at Smyrna West Alternative School. Kyle Prince, teaches at Central Magnet.

Governor Haslam appointed 18 statewide educators—including four MTSU College of Education graduates—to the "Governor's Teacher Cabinet." They are: Rebecca Few ('01), Murfreesboro City Schools, Mitchell Nelson Schools and Bradley Academy; Anita Underwood Gray ('07), Lebanon Special School District, Byars Dowdy Elementary; Annette C. Johnson ('94, '11), Franklin County Schools, Broadview Elementary; and Angie Tisdale ('07, '09), Franklin Special School District, Freedom Intermediate School.



Ann Nored



Amanda Nored

Like Mother, Like Daughter

Two College of Education graduates who work as librarians in Nashville-area schools were recently named teachers of the year by their respective employers. What's the twist? Turns out they are mother and daughter: Ann Nored ('04) of Wilson Central High School and daughter Amanda Nored Counts ('07, '10) of Hobgood Elementary School.



Like Daughter, Like Mother!

Speaking of mother-daughter combinations, Anna Watkins ('07), a kindergarten teacher at Shayne Elementary in Davidson County was also named that school's teacher of the year in 2014. Her mother, Sheila, recently received a B.A. in Human Sciences, Early Childhood Education and Teaching in 2015 and is preparing to become a teacher herself. "I am, and we are True Blue!" Sheila Watkins said. Speaking of her daughter, she added, "She has definitely created impressive footsteps to follow!"

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