Learning through Research

Research provides undergraduate and graduate teacher candidates with an opportunity to more deeply examine their interests in the field and to capitalize on their own knowledge and enthusiasm for teaching.

Student researchers develop problem-solving and presentation skills while gaining confidence and hands-on experience, as well as developing professional relationships in their fields of interest.

Buffalo State’s teacher education faculty members actively encourage all students—not just graduate students or undergraduates in leadership positions—to participate in action research and qualitative research projects. Projects are usually a student-faculty collaboration with faculty members supporting students through each step of the process, from articulating the topic to examining expert information to developing a meaningful approach and a thoughtful analysis of their findings. This can include completing the important International Review Board application, which ensures their activities maintain the safety and privacy of their research subjects.

Undergraduate researchers are supported through awards offered by the Undergraduate Research Small Grants Program or the Summer Research Fellowship Program. Students accepted for these programs receive a monetary stipend to support their research activities and are required to share their findings at the annual Student Research and Creativity Conference held each spring.

The majority of participants who travel through the International Professional Development Schools (IPDS) short-term teach-and-study-away programs engage in research before and during their time abroad. IPDS participants often carry out research projects that examine and compare methods of teaching and learning in the target country as well as the ways that community and family dynamics affect the children in our international classrooms. Participants also implement teaching activities and tools in our partner schools and share their experiences through action research.

Teacher candidates are also supported in their research through the Professional Development Schools Consortium (PDS). Each year students join faculty at the National Association for Professional Development Schools conference and present at the local PDS conference in September.

On campus, graduate students showcase their
School of Education faculty members work one-on-one with graduate students on research proposals and assist them in bringing their projects to local and national presentations. Jevon Hunter, Woods Beals Endowed Chair in Urban Education, is committed to developing research opportunities for students. “I want to pay it forward,” he said. “I want students from pre-kindergarten through high school, as well as Buffalo State students, to harness the necessary tools and sharpen them to become researchers and problem solvers of their own lived social realities. After all, shouldn’t that be one of the purposes of a meaningful education? Initiatives that support undergraduate and graduate research are paramount for developing the next generation of engaged scholars who work at the nexus of learning and teaching in urban communities and translating the outcomes into concrete classroom practices.”

Recent Research Presentations

- Border Crossing among Content Areas of Preservice Teachers at Buffalo State  
  — Lilly Inglut, English Education
- How Teachers Learn: Communities of Practice in English Teacher Professional Development  
  — Zachary Cook, English Education
- De Facto Segregation and Inequality in Buffalo Public Schools, 1910–2010  
  — Mitchell Ford, History and Social Studies Education
- Effectiveness of Teaching Strategies in Zambia  
  — Tianna Wilson, History and Social Studies Education
- Interactive Read-Alouds with Children’s Literature in Santiago, Chile  
  — Christine Garas, Exceptional Education; Oronike Clancy, Exceptional Education; Claire Bercovich, Exceptional Education; Jameela Bekele, Speech-Language Pathology
- Modifying Curriculum for Students with Severe Disabilities in General Education Classrooms  
  — Marilyn Wang, Exceptional Education
- The Role of the Physical Classroom in Student Learning  
  — Carlie Mogavero, Exceptional Education
- Maternity and Paternity Rights of Developed Countries  
  — Amber Amato, Elementary Education and Reading
- The Impact of Outdoor Play on Preschool Children  
  — Katie Froom, Elementary Education and Reading
- Student Teaching: Germany vs. New York  
  — Rachel Sparra, Elementary Education and Reading
- Using #Black&BrownLives to Enhance Learning and Teaching in Elementary Schools  
  — Roseanna Spencer, Elementary Education and Reading
- Special Education in the Dominican Republic: Hope for the Future  
  — Kasia Babus, Exceptional Education
- The Effects of Diverse Financial Backgrounds on Female Adolescents and Higher Education Opportunities  
  — Tess Ahua Gilmore, Elementary Education and Reading
- Learning Through Research continued

Student researchers develop problem-solving and presentation skills while gaining confidence and hands-on experience...
International Update

The School of Education’s International Professional Development Schools Consortium (IPDS) includes partnerships on five continents in eight countries. Each IPDS has unique objectives, but the overall purpose remains constant: give teacher candidates opportunities to globalize their understanding of education through international study and travel. These short-term teach and study abroad programs are organized to meet the needs of teacher candidates. Students travel between semesters after completing a preparation course. They work in PK-12 classrooms and collaborate with partner universities to learn about education in the target countries.

“While abroad, many Buffalo State students work with English language learners and often become second-language learners themselves. They broaden their abilities to be creative communicators and to empathize with others. Many also spend time volunteering in places immersed in poverty, which is an eye-opening experience for them as new teachers who must quickly learn to engage children in school with few resources or classrooms filled to capacity.

“After traveling to France, I realized that you will never know where our students come from, what they may or may not have, or even what they ate that day. It taught me that no matter what a student’s background, every child has an equal right to the best education.”

Participants relate their abroad experiences to their roles as new educators as well as what is happening in many Buffalo schools.

“The ability to compare and contrast our lives with the lives of others allows us to serve as advocates,” said Phyllicia Brown, Zambia 2014. “When people across the globe become your companions, their struggle affects you in a new way. Teachers must understand on a deeper level and view the world through more than one lens so we can build critical thinkers in our own classrooms.”

IPDS participants develop research, reflection, and observation skills and gain new teaching practices and relationships. Most depart the United States believing they will make a difference in the lives of others but soon realize that the greatest change is occurring within. They return with a stronger sense of themselves as part of a global movement, and display increased self-sufficiency, compassion, and adaptability as well as leadership and communication skills.

“I gained new perspectives and an appreciation for new cultures, and became better prepared for teaching diverse groups of students,” said Crystal Holmes-Smith, Chile 2015 and Rwanda 2016. “I faced fears, tried new things, and built the mind-set that there isn’t anything I put my mind to that I cannot accomplish.”

Often the students return to Buffalo State with a renewed interest in giving back and serve as ambassadors for study abroad and student engagement.

“I’ve woken up, learned that there is a whole other side of the earth where forgiveness, compassion, and love exist freely,” said Lily Inglut, Rwanda 2016. “I’ve learned to be flexible and to embrace the uncomfortable in order to change the world through teaching.”

In addition, students find that IPDS is a wonderful addition to a professional résumé.

“At the campus job fair all the school representatives wanted to talk about was my experience overseas,” said Shannon McCoy, three-time participant of Dominican Republic 2015 and 2017 and Germany 2017. “That I sought a chance to get out of my comfort zone and into the homes and schools of strangers showed employers that I am willing to take risks and think creatively,” she said.

Learn more at http://schoolofeducation.buffalostate.edu/ipds.

Zambia (top), Germany (bottom)
Juliana Mowatt wants to be part of the solution: paving a path to success for students from marginalized communities who lack opportunities or support.

Mowatt, a senior seeking a bachelor’s degree in childhood education with a concentration in English, was selected as a 2017 Summer Teaching Fellow for Uncommon Schools, a nonprofit network of urban-area public charter schools working to close the achievement gap and prepare low-income students to graduate from college. As a Teaching Fellow in Rochester, Mowatt collaborates with high-performing mentor teachers in Uncommon schools.

“It has always been my passion to help interrupt the achievement gap in urban- and low-income areas,” said Mowatt. “For many children, learning and discipline starts in the classroom. Teachers are able guide students to their desired destinations by being effective and passionate and implementing excellent classroom strategies.”

Summer Teaching fellows receive teacher training and professional development by observing and teaching in classrooms while receiving continual feedback and coaching from mentor teachers and the academy director. Fellows may also develop a lesson plan and build curriculum for a summer class as they develop and enhance their instructional skills.

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“I want to be a part of the solution. My heart is toward low-income students who commonly lack motivation for education due to their environment and fewer opportunities. I want to make a difference in the lives of children in urban areas. I want them to know that they are important, that they can obtain that degree; whether to become an architect, doctor, teacher... it is possible. I want them to know they can make a difference in the world starting with their community. And I want them to view education as a priority. This is why I want to become a teacher.”

For more information, visit http://www.uncommonschools.org/careers/stf/program.

“Unique teaching opportunities: Western New York

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“We are Buffalo State Teachers.”

Each development, each improvement, each new way to serve local and global communities through our teaching practice is grounded in our predecessors. We take that responsibility soberly: It is a promise to the parents of current students. It is a commitment to promote social justice and sow the seeds of peace through education in a world increasingly terrorized by ignorance. It is a dedication to develop educational programming that is fully present in the real world of kids, families, and schools. It is a vow to build on our heritage of excellence.

We are Buffalo State Teachers.
Crystal Holmes-Smith, ’15, ’16

The summer after she completed her literacy specialist master’s degree, Crystal Holmes-Smith, ’15, ’16, accepted an offer to teach fourth and fifth grades at Moriah School in La Esperanza, Honduras. As she taught English, science, and mathematics, she also studied the Spanish language and developed her classroom methods.

Holmes-Smith believes teaching abroad was the perfect way to spend her first year as an educator. “There were some challenges, of course,” she said. “English is a second language for my students, so I had to work hard to help them understand the content. But I enjoyed the challenge. I had the freedom to be creative and do whatever I think is best. I had fun.”

Teaching provides Holmes-Smith with the satisfaction of helping students reach their goals, and her focus on literacy enables her to help them develop strong reading and writing skills—skills she considers essential. “I’ve watched students struggle because they lacked literacy skills,” she said. “I chose this field because I think that literacy is the basis for all education. I am motivated in my desire to make a difference in the world. It is important to me that I make an impact and have a positive influence on others.”

Holmes-Smith said that Buffalo State contributed greatly to her personal development by helping her build confidence and leadership skills. As an undergraduate, Holmes-Smith collaborated with student government, took on an organizing role with Step Expression (a student group that volunteers at events to increase school spirit using the art of stepping as a form of communication), and worked closely with Buffalo State’s Professional Development Schools Consortium. She also engaged heavily in undergraduate research—earning a summer research fellowship and presenting on campus and at national conferences.

Two study-abroad opportunities also influenced Holmes-Smith. In 2015, she traveled with the International Professional Development Schools to Chile, where she observed, taught, and studied Spanish. In 2016, she traveled with the Anne Frank Project to Rwanda to take part in a drama-based education program. Both trips allowed her to build friendships, stretch herself as a teacher, and examine the joys and struggles experienced across the globe. Holmes-Smith believes that campus-led travel-abroad is something all students, especially teacher-education candidates, should make part of their academic plan.

“I had the freedom to be creative and do whatever I think is best. I had fun.”

Brianna Ware, ’16

When Brianna Ware, a 2016 graduate majoring in early childhood education, headed to Houston to complete her student teaching last October, she bought a one-way ticket.

“In Houston, they actually have billboards that say, ‘Do you want to teach? When can you start?’” Ware said. "They lacked literacy skills," she said. "I chose this field because I think that literacy is the basis for all education. I am motivated in my desire to make a difference in the world. It is important to me that I make an impact and have a positive influence on others.”

Ware learned about the Houston program from School of Education Dean Wendy Paterson, who worked with HISD to establish the opportunity for Buffalo State students interested in pursuing teaching careers outside the local area. “Many of our students want to stay local,” Paterson said, “but we encourage them to take advantage of the opportunities Buffalo State offers to travel and learn.”

“Buff State is really good for giving you classroom experience so you can make the right decision about a major,” said Ware, who chose early childhood education. “When I worked with kindergartners, I really enjoyed it. They are little people with big personalities who have a lot to say. And I believe that if children have a good start, they can make better choices.”

Ware hopes to teach in a school with a higher poverty level. “I want to have the opportunity to make a difference,” she said. “I want my students to come to school and learn because it will be the best part of their day.”

The Houston Independent School District (HISD) had 400 vacancies, and that’s just one of several school districts serving the city and its population of more than 2 million people. To meet the demand, HISD and other districts, including the Aldine Independent School District, are encouraging education majors from around the country to visit Houston and its schools. Those visits are personal. Student interns are invited to participate in a one-week placement in an urban school setting and are hosted by district administrators during a brief visit that introduces the student to the possibility of becoming a teacher in Houston. During the placement, each intern gets hands-on training from a master teacher and, by the end of one week, shifts to being the lead teacher in the classroom. Students who successfully complete their student teaching in Houston are hired.

Ware’s first visit took place in May 2016. “I went in to teach in a second-grade class on Monday,” Ware said. “And my mentor was amazing at giving suggestions. It wasn’t all simple lesson plans; the class had arts and activities, and the teacher used a lot of technology.”

“Education is always changing, and there will always be new strategies and techniques,” she said. “There are many challenges in education, and if you don’t truly love your job, those challenges will frustrate you. It is up to you, as a professional, to remain engaged in research and professional development so that you are always equipped with the best tools for student success.”
STUDENT RECOGNITION

UPStander Awards

At the April “Take Back the Night” event, Buffalo State’s Counseling Center honored Claire Borczuch and Kassia Balus, undergraduates in the Exceptional Education Department, with the 2017 UPStander Awards. “UPStander,” a play on the word “bystander,” is a term the center uses to describe those who are involved in and contribute meaningfully to the community. UPStander Awards are given annually to members of the Buffalo State community who have gone beyond their assigned roles or duties on campus and have made a difference in someone’s life by an act of kindness, unselfish action, proactive behavior, or caring attitude. Borczuch was recognized for her quick thinking and compassion when a Best Buddies participant with intellectual disabilities suffered a medical emergency on campus. She physically supported the person and stayed with him long after help arrived, then visited him at home after the incident. Balus is a deeply involved student who works to raise awareness on the importance of listening to and advocating on behalf of others who are in need or who cannot adequately express themselves. Recently when an individual with intellectual disabilities on campus was looking for assistance but was being ignored by passersby, Balus got involved and made sure he got to a safe place. This event later compelled her to share her message, imploring readers of the student paper, the Record, to look past themselves and out to those in need. Borczuch and Balus, inspiring role models for their peers, are valued members of the Exceptional Education’s “Civil and Caring Academic Community.”

Adult Education Award for Diversity and Social Justice

Jason Mazeski, graduate student in adult education, received the 2017 Adult Education Award for Diversity and Social Justice. Mazeski earned his bachelor of science degree in forensic psychology from John Jay College of Criminal Justice. He is a police officer for the New York City Police Department, assigned to the counterterrorism training section, and is a full-time instructor and a member of the curriculum design and development team. Mazeski has written three training programs for the department and revised more than 14 existing courses. He works to expel bias and culturally motivated profiling techniques from the counterterrorism training curriculum. Reaching more than 7,500 officers each year, the redesigned curriculum seeks to replace methods and practices that perpetuate social injustice with those that promote community interaction and fair application of the law to all citizens of New York City. Mazeski hopes to work with other training units within the department to foster a gradual movement toward social justice, responding to the diverse population of New York City.