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School of Education dedicated to bringing God into the classroom

December 01, 2009 ¦ Kristen Riordan

Graduates of Liberty's School of Education (SOE) may look like ordinary teachers, but engraved upon each is the fingerprint of God. Liberty's SOE is dedicated to creating experts in the field of education, with help from the Almighty Teacher.

"We have a commitment to excellence, but the difference here is that our motivation does not come from ourselves, but our Lord," said Dr. Karen Parker, dean of the SOE.

While having a Christian influence could be viewed as a limitation in some careers, Liberty sees it an advantage. Liberty produces teachers and administrators who are eligible to work in both Christian and public schools through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accreditations; it also prepares professionals for sports settings through the Sport Management Department.

CHRIST-CENTERED CURRICULUM

Teacher candidates have three tracks to choose from: Elementary/Middle, Secondary or Special Education. Additional options are offered in the graduate program. Within each are specializations designed to fit the student's specific gifts.

When a candidate has chosen the elementary track, for example, they are required to select two of the four concentrations — math, science, social studies and language arts. Students who choose Secondary education must complete all requirements for a separate major, plus the teacher licensure.

All education tracks require an additional 300 in-classroom hours of practicum and student teaching in both Christian and public schools. "I think the greatest thing that the Liberty SOE gave me was real-world experience said Jenny Presson, a 2009 graduate. "Those hours I spent in classrooms really helped prepare me to work with students who don't fit textbook molds, in settings that are sometimes less than ideal. "The SOE also equips its teacher candidates with general Christian education classes, including Christian worldview, evangelism, creation studies and theology.

CONTINUED GROWTH

2 Corinthians 3:17 reads, "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." It is evident that the Lord is at work at Liberty as seen in its financial stability and growth. The School of Education had 1,700 students five years ago; now there are more than 5,500 — a 300 percent increase (including online graduate enrollment).

"The SOE growth curve has not reached total potential based on record enrollment in introductory courses, and 37 doctorates finished last year, and there are over 100 dissertation committees currently," Parker said.

While other universities are being forced to cut back employment, Liberty has four new faculty. The School of Education has also been among the sites chosen for improvements in facilities, furniture and technology. Students now have access to wireless Internet throughout the SOE building.

Liberty's School of Education is creating well-rounded professionals who will be responsible for educating the next generation of Champions for Christ.

ABOVE AND BEYOND

In some departments, it is uncommon for students to be involved outside the classroom, but in the SOE it is the norm. Students have the choice of joining the international honor society, Kappa Delta Pi (KDP), or the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), an international service organization that works to improve the educational success of individuals with special needs and/or exceptional abilities.

Moreover, Liberty's SOE sees extracurricular activities as part of its overall program. "It is more than just an 'honor' to be part of the honor societies. Students are required to be active members and participate in service activities," Parker said.

Liberty's KDP chapter has won the Achieving Chapter Excellence award for three years as a result of its outstanding dedication to service at LU.

In addition to the KDP and CEC, students have the opportunity to join the Christian Educators Association International (CEAI), which provides discounted liability insurance. The CEAI's mission is to encourage, equip and empower educators according to Biblical principles.

COMMITTED FACULTY

Behind every great teacher is another great teacher. Liberty strives to provide students with the best experts in their field of study. Not only does the faculty have education degrees and K-12 experience, they also have hearts dedicated to Christ. They aim to instill God's love as a foundation in students' personal lives so they can enhance education in their future classrooms.

"I love the professors. They are always willing to meet with me outside of class, and they have been working with me to find a job when I graduate," said Meghan Mullaney, a senior education major. They also have an appreciation for LU's unique atmosphere.

Prior to coming to Liberty, Dr. Jill Jones worked at another well-known Division I university. When she was applying for tenure there, she was faced with colleagues asking her to stop discussing God and prayer in her classroom. However, for her that was, "like asking me to stop breathing."

After that struggle, Jones prayed that God would let her leave her "Babylon" and move on to "Jerusalem." She soon found herself at Liberty University.

Jones loves the spiritual aspect of Liberty's SOE. "I prayed for my students at other schools, but the fact that I can pray with my students allows God to enter the classroom in a way I've never experienced anywhere else," she said.

For more info on Liberty's School of Education, go to www.liberty.edu/education.