

Students gain teaching experience through SIUE Foreign Languages program, collaboration with Edwardsville YMCA and elementary schools

Theresa San Luis | Sep 22, 2013 | [0 comments](#)



Tyler Yurish, an SIUE student who taught foreign languages classes last year, anticipated the end of year school presentation.

While some children spend their time playing, others remain in the classroom learning new languages – and SIUE students were the instructors.

Foreign languages professor Debbie Mann coordinates the program in cooperation with Natasha Howard, arts and humanities coordinator at the Edwardsville YMCA, along with the Parent Teacher Organization of the local school District 7.

Through the program, children in kindergarten through second grade can be enrolled in the extracurricular before- and after-school foreign language classes. The children must reside in Leclaire, Goshen and Glen Carbon.

Howard said the three-way collaboration is great, and 250 students enrolled last year.

“That’s quite a few students covering three schools,” Howard said. “The foreign languages department is great at advertising it.”

Bailey Weems, a junior Spanish education major, said she really enjoyed the way the program was set up.

“It was very organized and they gave me what I needed to succeed, and they were really flexible,” Weems said. “They gave me the freedom to creatively apply what I wanted to do in the classroom”

According to Howard, the children get attached to the teachers and the parents really like the opportunity.

“It’s really fascinating to me to see kids come back the next year and how much they retain,” Howard said. “The teachers make learning language fun through projects, songs and games.”

Mann said the opportunity for SIUE students to teach is tremendous experience for them.

“It’s wonderful for our students and for their resume,” Mann said. “It’s so much a win-win situation.”

Weems said the experience is giving her the practice she needs for her intended career-becoming a high school Spanish teacher.

“This has been affirming for what I want to do,” Weems said.

Pam Ortiz, a recent graduate who majored in Spanish, taught in the program at Goshen Elementary for three years and said she enjoyed it.

“Going to medical school to be a pediatrician, this was a great experience to work with children,” Ortiz said. “Every day was different and exciting.”

This year approximately 10 students will be hired to teach the young children. Students with at least an intermediate level of speaking French or Spanish have the opportunity to apply.

Howard, who recently held interviews for the paid positions, said there were a lot of great candidates to choose from.

According to Howard, the teachers have been enthusiastic.

“The teachers have been great interacting with the kids,” Howard said. “This is another aspect we’re able to bring in and give parents.”

Mann said the department of foreign languages is glad to have the partnership under the responsibility of the YMCA and is grateful to the District 7 schools that are involved in the program. The program has been in operation for more than 25 years.

“It’s the kids’ parents who voluntarily sign them up,” Mann said. “I think parents in this school district are realizing that it’s important to start foreign languages as soon as possible.”

Mann said there is no profit margin in the self-supporting program.

Mann’s daughter was in the Spanish program. Mann said she appreciated the cultural awareness her daughter gained because “at their age they’re curious.”

“When kids can learn to count in French or Spanish, it’s cool,” Mann said. “Kids are like sponges. They learn the language much faster and easier and don’t fear making a mistake.”

Matt Ehrhardt, a pharmacy and Spanish major said the experience has been great as children are quick learners.

“Children can retain so much knowledge and pick up a new language much easier in these formative years. However, the most important job is to plant the seed for a long term commitment to learning,” Ehrhardt said. “We do so by playing games, having competitions, getting up out of our seats, and getting engaged.”

Weems said at the end of last year they prepared a program with the children to present to parents what they learned.

“The kids were so upset that it was at the end, and they were like, ‘That’s the end? Are you going to be here next year?’ It was so encouraging that they loved having me there,” Weems said.