

## Arizona Cultural Teaching Experience

Fifteen University of Wisconsin – La Crosse teacher education students traveled to Phoenix, Arizona January 10-17, to participate in the Arizona Cultural Teaching Experience. The experience was a collaborative partnership coordinated by Career Services and the School of Education, and led by Brenda Leahy, Career Advisor, and Cindy Duley, Assistant Director of Field Experience.

The group was greeted at the airport by Fowler Elementary School District administration with a yellow school bus, which was the primary transportation for the week. The district has four elementary schools and two middle schools, and teacher education students were placed with two different cooperating teachers during the week to provide a variety of opportunities to interact and learn. Area teachers also graciously hosted students in their homes for three nights, which offered students another unique perspective on the life of a teacher.

The district provided a warm welcome with many special events throughout the week, including an authentic Mexican dinner on the first night, complete with flamenco dancing by local student groups, and Arizona and Wisconsin trivia games. During the district inservice, administration created an opportunity for teachers from the Midwest to share some of their Arizona teaching experiences with the teacher education students. The group from Wisconsin was also honored at the Fowler District School Board meeting, and each individual was recognized with a certificate of appreciation for service to the district.

The partnership between Fowler Elementary School District and the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse began several years ago with Fowler visiting the UW-La Crosse campus annually to interview and recruit teachers, resulting in the hiring of many UW-La Crosse graduates. These visits were the beginning of many discussions between Career Services, the School of Education, and Fowler, regarding the possibility of providing more urban experiences for teacher education students prior to graduation. Conversations continued, and with the leadership and support of Dr. Finders and many others, the partnership has now evolved into a one-week immersion experience.

Fowler Elementary School District is a rapidly growing and changing district of 4,800 students, with an ethnically, culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse population. Many students come from highly impoverished backgrounds and speak languages other than English at home, with Spanish being most common. This experience challenged teacher education students to develop strategies for working with diverse learners, and to think deeply about meeting the needs of each individual learner. Many were impressed by the incredible classroom management skills of teachers and they have an increased awareness of issues surrounding English language learners, state mandates, and the influence on curriculum, as well as many other aspects of teaching. Overall, it was an extremely powerful learning experience for all participants, which challenged preconceived ideas and opened the door for future teaching and employment possibilities.

Participants from left to right:

(Back Row) Chase Steiner, Amy Piekarski, Shauna Goodman, Katie McGarry, Allison Dickman, Jordan Rear; (Middle Row) Brenda Leahy (Career Services), Holly Lasche, Emily Butorac, Nicole Terrones, Katie Konsella, Melissa Wiehr, Mary Teclaw; (Front Row) Cindy Duley (Office of Field Experience), Chelsey Matthes, Kristen Zwirgzdas, Sarah Rawls;