

THE PARTNERSHIP



A NEWSLETTER OF THE WYOMING SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Smoothing the way for Wyoming students

Justine Swenson wants to be one of the few.

The 19-year-old Lusk High School graduate is in her first year of classes at Casper College. She works part time, lives off campus, takes a full load of courses and hopes to earn a competitive seat in the school's nursing program.

In many ways, though, Justine is fighting an uphill battle. According to information presented to the Wyoming Legislature in 2007, out of 100 high school freshmen in Wyoming, only about 19 will go on to complete a postsecondary degree immediately out of high school.

About a quarter of a freshman class gets lost before they ever finish high school. Only half of those who do graduate go on to college or university, and of those, just half finish within 1 ½-times the expected completion time for their chosen certificate or degree.

The situation isn't unique to Wyoming. According to the NCHEMS Information Center for State Higher Education Policymaking and Analysis, about 29 percent of full-time associate degree students earn their degree in three years. About 56 percent of bachelor's degree students earn their degrees in six years. (Wyoming students do somewhat better at 59 percent and 56 percent, respectively.)

Still, educators know things could be better. They see it in their data, and they hear it from their students.

That's why several groups, including the Wyoming School-University Partnership, are focusing their energy on high school to higher education transitions. The Partnership has sponsored summit meetings across the state, bringing together educators from all levels to discuss transitions around specific subject areas. Groups have met to discuss life sciences, math and writing.

Each time, educators gained better insight into the different experiences students garner at different levels, as well as the different expectations at each level. Increased conversation is leading to renewed efforts to align curriculum and expectations, to prepare students for their next steps and to be aware of the needs of students in the 21st Century.

Learn more about students' experiences and the efforts of Wyoming educators in this special issue of the Wyoming School-University Partnership newsletter.

Inside

Students see gaps in transition from high school to college

Page 2

Educators engage in subject-area work on transitions

Pages 3-5

Joy Mockelmann shares the advantages of the Partnership

Page 6

Wyoming group heads to NNER Summer Symposium

Page 7

Students struggle with transitions

By Jenni Lockett

As a consultant for the Wyoming School-University Partnership, I've spent a lot of time hearing Wyoming educators talk about the need to improve high school to higher education transitions. Data tells us that transitions are rough; that many students don't even make it to the second year of college, let alone the graduation stage.

I've heard – and written – about the Hathaway Scholarships, the success curriculum, the Wyoming P-16 Education Council. But I've rarely encountered first-hand accounts from students themselves.

That's why, this spring, I cheated. I abandoned journalistic codes of ethics and went to the closest source I had: my sister and her friends.

At nearly 25, my sister, Meghann Dillon, is a nontraditional student. She first started community college in 2001, right out of high school, and dropped out in 2003. She returned in 2006 and earned her CNA. Last fall, she moved to Wyoming to attend Casper College in hopes of earning a spot in the nursing program.

Meghann's friend, Justine Swenson, is a 19-year-old from Lusk. Right out of high school, she's the traditional student, attending college for the first time and hoping, as well, to eventually complete her associate's and make her way into nursing.

Though they are from different states, different backgrounds, and even different age groups, their academic experiences have been similar – shocking, difficult, disconnected, but for today, at least, successful enough to keep moving



Photo by Jenni Lockett

Meghann Dillon (left) and Justine Swenson study for a physiology quiz outside the Life Sciences building at Casper College.

forward.

For Justine, the biggest adjustment has been the size of the school.

"In high school, you knew everyone," she said. "There were 120 kids in my whole school, grades nine through 12. You could go talk to the teacher. It was more one-on-one. I mean, my (high school) anatomy and physiology class was four kids.

"The bigger classes are harder for me. I had no problem speaking up in high school, but now, I'm, like, 'God, don't pick me.'"

Meghann never made a connection with a professor or advisor during her first college experience in Oregon. She took courses in business, accounting and sign language, as well as other basic requirements, but never had a sense of where it would take her.

"In high school, you have to take classes and you choose a few electives. You jump from no

decisions to a million. You have to know what's going to prepare you," she said. "I couldn't get information on what I needed to do to reach my potential, or even to get into a program. I dropped out because I wasn't getting enough out of it."

Now, both women said they are acclimating to an atmosphere with far more responsibility and demands than they knew were coming.

"It took me until this year to actually do the weekend studying," Meghann said. "I was so used to school being structured from 7:30 to 2, then you're done. In high school, you have in-class time to do homework, too. Here, they want you to get out and do it on your own time."

"In Lusk, we had a lot of time for homework," Justine agreed. "Here, if you don't have it done, you get a zero."

See STUDENTS, page 8

'I've upped my standards'

Douglas teacher uses science summits to set expectations for students

By Jenni Luckett

As a high school chemistry teacher, Tanya Seeds hopes she's preparing students to succeed at the next stage of their education.

She expects that most of her students will go on to college, and she loves the chance to pick their brains when they return for visits.

"They'll tell you what they were missing or what they were strong in," she said. "For the most part, I've been very pleased."

For the past couple years, though, Seeds has had an extra opportunity to assess how well her classes prepare students for college. She's taken part in each of the statewide High School to Higher Education Life Sciences Summits held since 2006.

The summits bring together secondary and postsecondary instructors to discuss the transitions students experience from one level to the next.

"The summit meetings are a great way to sit down and discuss what we're seeing, or what's lacking, from (the postsecondary) perspective, in students leaving our realm and getting into college," Seeds said.

For example, Seeds said she heard from some professors that first-year college or university students often struggled with lab reports.

"Some professors said students' abilities to write a conclusion are lacking," she said. "As a high school teacher, that's one area I can work on."

She also said that while her teaching strategies haven't changed based on participation in the summits, her expectations have.

"I've upped my standards," she said. "I see what professors at that level expect, and I set my sights a little higher. I think the students can achieve more, and they have."

The summits aren't just about changing high school teaching, though, Seeds said. They are about networking, building relationships and creating better education for students at all levels.

"There's no finger-pointing," she said. "You get great ideas and make great connections. It's a wonderful way to network."

"I know it's tough getting away from school. It's hard to be gone," she said. "But it really is worth the effort and time to sit down with people above and below your level and see what's happening or not happening."

"I hope they keep it up. I'll keep going."



Tanya Seeds

Laramie 1 works toward life sciences alignment

Mike Wallace, science coordinator for Laramie County School District No. 1 in Cheyenne, is a believer.

A participant in the first and second statewide life sciences summits in 2006 and 2007, Wallace asked teachers in his district to focus on the big ideas in science. Working together, they broke down the big ideas into components. Wallace reported the results of this work at a recent school board meeting. He was able to tell the board that a variety of school, district, state and national level assessments, among them ACT, PAWS and others, now are aligned with expectations for UW's entry level life science course.

"Absolutely, we're aligned," Wallace said. "We're trying to bridge the gap, us and you. We want kids to learn and be successful."

The district's biology teachers focused on four big ideas: ecology, evolution, genetics and cell structure and processes. First, they focused on changing a philosophy that was content based to one that was more process based. According to Wallace, the change had a "more obvious focus on learning," as opposed to lecture. The changes that the district is making will help students make the difficult high school to college and university transition. These are "the ability to think skills," Wallace said. "Students doing the same kind of work all the way through school."

To make the change, Wallace said he allocated about \$18,000 for meetings with teachers K-12.

See **SCIENCE**, page 4

Educators assess writing expectations across levels

Lisa Schuldes couldn't have been happier when 2006 PAWS results were released.

That year, all but one junior in her school scored proficient or advanced in both the reading and writing portions of the Proficiency Assessment of Wyoming Students.

"It was amazing for them to make those gains," said Schuldes, the high school English teacher at Guernsey High School. "I really had all the confidence in the world that when they went to college they would be fine."

Earlier this year, though, those same students – now freshmen at the University of Wyoming – said they felt English was the subject they were least prepared to tackle

at the college level.

Schuldes was in shock.

"They said they needed more college-level papers, more focus on academic writing and less creative writing, more research-based writing," Schuldes said.

Her experience isn't unique. Educators throughout the state – and likely the country – are learning of bigger and bigger gaps as their students move from high school to college. That's why Wyoming educators are getting together to understand each others' teaching and help their students have a smoother transition.

Schuldes was one of about 50 educators from Wyoming high



Educators meet for the Wyoming Writing Colloquium in Douglas.

schools, community colleges and the university who gathered in Douglas in April for the first Wyoming Writing Colloquium.

See WRITING, page 7

Quick facts

The Wyoming School-University Partnership, in collaboration with the UW Biology Program, UW Science & Math Teaching Center and local Wyoming school districts, have hosted three statewide life science summits, as well as three regional summits. The reach of these summits has been significant.

- * 18 percent of participants attended more than one summit.
- * All seven community colleges were represented.
- * Four UW colleges, 10 academic departments and three academic offices were represented.
- * 54 percent of all school districts were represented.
- * 72 percent of Partnership member school districts were represented.
- * Participation tripled from 2005-06 to 2007-08.

— Partnership data

SCIENCE continued from page 3

He also met with UW life sciences faculty to talk through representative assignments and assessment. For one meeting, he brought seven junior and senior high teachers to UW for a meeting with the faculty, including the heads of UW's Botany and Zoology & Physiology departments, and the director of the Life Sciences Program. The Laramie meetings, on top of the life sciences summits, enabled postsecondary teachers to understand challenges for K-12 teachers and for K-12 to understand challenges for postsecondary teachers.

Over a period of time, Wallace led the Cheyenne teachers to make changes in their assessment for grades three, four and five, and high school.

Teachers identified several key problems for students.

For example, students typically take biology in the ninth grade, then do not take another biology course until they enter college as first-year students. The vocabulary of biology also can be very challenging for ninth-graders.

Wallace also reports that the statewide science summits were helpful, even if he wasn't in attendance at the most recent one.

"The summits were and are critical," he said. "I read all of the e-mails to keep up. I'm 100 percent behind anything you want to do that will help kids. From listening to teachers, the articulation meetings — teachers across levels talking with each other — is working."

Mark Lyford, UW Life Sciences Director, is equally positive: "We're resources for each other."

Math, languages expand articulation

Mathematics educators are leading the way in creating a comparison document to help educators, as well as students, understand the fundamental differences in high school and postsecondary experiences.

Bernie Schnorenberg, a math and science teacher from Sundance and a member of the Wyoming P-16 Education Council, collected

feedback for the document from Wyoming math teachers.

Similar documents are being prepared for writing, modern languages and life sciences through the sponsorship of the P-16 Council. (The modern language work is being facilitated by Carol Kirkwood, Laramie High School instructional facilitator and French teacher. It will be presented to the P-16 Council

at its next retreat for approval and distribution to students, parents and teachers.)

Following an articulation meeting in February in Torrington, a small group of postsecondary math teachers also has been convening through a Web-conferencing program to talk through issues around math for elementary education courses taught at the community colleges and university.

Comparing high school, college expectations

P-16 Council member Bernie Schnorenberg, a Sundance math and science teacher, has provided leadership to create a comparison document outlining key differences in experiences and expectations between secondary and postsecondary school. While small groups are working on similar documents for writing, life sciences, and modern languages, math is the furthest along in the process. The documents will be shared widely with high school students, teachers at both levels, and parents. The set of comparison documents is a Wyoming P-16 Education Council initiative. The following is a sample of the information included in the math draft document.

Secondary School

- ✓ Classes typically include 165 sessions, 45 to 60 minutes each, spread over 36 weeks.
- ✓ Textbooks are loaned to students free for the duration of the course.
- ✓ Individual help sessions are initiated by the teacher based on the teachers's review of the student's performance.
- ✓ Classes are a mix of lecture, whole-class discussion, small-group work and in-class discussion of tests.
- ✓ Emphasis is on developing students prepared to use specific techniques such as those on the PAWS exam.
- ✓ Homework includes two to five assignments per week, each requiring 20 to 40 minutes of work.
- ✓ Students take an average of one quiz a week in class to assess understanding of current material.
- ✓ Students take 12 to 18 session-long tests covering blocks of course material with cumulative midyear and final exams.
- ✓ Final grades are based on some quizzes, all session-long tests, homework, participation in whole-class discussion and small-group work.
- ✓ Instructors also may sponsor student organizations and social events, communicate with parents, attend faculty meetings, serve on faculty committees, participate in professional organizations and participate in school or district professional development.

Postsecondary School

- ✓ Classes typically include 30, 75-minute sessions or 45, 50-minute sessions spread over 15 weeks.
- ✓ Textbooks may cost \$105 to \$170 new, \$75 to \$120 used, if available.
- ✓ Group help sessions are conducted by graduate students. Attendance is voluntary.
- ✓ Classes are lecture only in large group or a mix of lecture and whole-class discussion.
- ✓ Emphasis is on developing students who can select and apply skills in problem solving.
- ✓ Homework includes one to three assignments per week, each requiring 60 to 150 minutes of work.
- ✓ Students take one or two quizzes per week, often out-of-class, to assess understanding of material.
- ✓ Students take four session-long tests including midterm and final exams.
- ✓ Final grades are based mainly on session-long tests. Some instructors may assign minor weight to class attendance and participation, completed homework or quizzes.
- ✓ Instructors also may sponsor student organizations, conduct and publish research, guide research of graduate students, serve on faculty committees and work with professional organizations. Many classes are taught by graduate students.

-- Partnership data

P-16 Council continues its work

The executive committee of the Wyoming P-16 Education Council recently named Glenda Tucker its executive director and also director of the State Scholars Initiative.

Tucker formerly worked at the Wyoming Department of Education on the Hathaway Scholarship program. She will pick up from Sheila Martin who left to pursue other opportunities.

The council also has met several times this spring to continue its work. The council established four subcommittees to work on its key goals, including communications, data availability, secondary to postsecondary transitions and sustainability of the council.

The council also has continued efforts to distribute materials about SSI to business communities to help citizens understand the value of a rigorous curriculum for students' current and future academic success.

The council next will meet for a retreat Aug. 4 and 5.

In other news, students who completed the Hathaway-Plus Success Curriculum in participating SSI districts are receiving a certificate and medal for their work. Participating districts include Big Horn 3, Fremont 25, Laramie 2, Natrona 1, and Niobrara 1.

A delegation from Wyoming also participated in the State Scholars Initiative national summit in Boston in April. Delegation members included Rollin Abernethy of the University of Wyoming, Mike Ceballos of Qwest, Rob Black of Gov. Freudenthal's office, Teri Wigert of the Wyoming Department of Education, and Ron Ladd of Laramie County School District No. 2.

Info: www.wp-16.org

The advantages of joining the Partnership

By Joy Mockelmann, Ph.D., WDE

Member schools of Wyoming School-University Partnership fulfill the original premise of public education -- to empower and support a thriving democracy. There cannot be a democracy without citizens who participate with other people to solve issues of the larger community.

Carl Glickman addressed the 2008 ASCD conference stating that we need to get back to our roots. "Democracy has to be practiced as an educational theory first, before it really can be a political theory that works." In Glickman's view, math, science, language arts and social studies are a set of necessary skills not only for personal advancement but for the advancement of the society as a whole. In his upcoming book, Leadership for Powerful and Purposeful Schools, Glickman declares that student achievement is related to student engagement. He calls this engagement "participation."

Democracy should be an important aspect of school curriculum. Students become knowledgeable about how to be responsible citizens and assume responsibilities in classes that practice democracy. In schools where democracy is visible in everyday decision-making, the population is most likely homogenous—a majority of the same ethnicity, family values and recognition in the community. There is trust.

Students in schools that have more diversity in their student population do not have that same kind of trust. They are less likely to participate in diverse groups that make decisions, and they are not likely to practice democratic processes. They vote less when becoming adults, and they do not know how to interact with others in the community in decision-making processes. They do not believe in the system, nor do they trust it.

Society entrusts its children to educators. It is our responsibility to take care of them, care about them and teach them about democracy and how to participate. It is imperative that we offer them intellectually interesting lessons. Then, the academic gap among diverse groups will diminish.

Glickman said the only place people can learn to participate is in school. Adults in schools need to model good citizenship in classrooms by presenting interesting facts, commentary and challenges that promote student participation. The participation will lead to the growth of sound decision-making processes by knowledgeable citizens.

See **MEMBERSHIP**, page 7

WRITING

continued from page 4

The educators spent two days identifying their goals, discussing their different experiences at various levels of the educational system and – perhaps most importantly – examining student work to understand each others’ expectations of students. They also focused on comparisons of secondary and postsecondary classes, homework and grading.

By the end of the colloquium, co-organizer Audrey Kleinsasser, director of the Wyoming School-University Partnership, said participants were eager to start planning next steps and working with instructional facilitators in the state to better align writing instruction for students at all levels.

“This is a good step to take to opening doors to making things better,” said Carolyn Hicks, a middle school language arts teacher from Carbon County School District No. 1.

“Or to just understanding where we are,” added Robyn Milne, who teaches high school English in Douglas.

“It’s refreshing to hear we all share the same concerns,” Schuldes said. “Sometimes because of the isolation and not having the opportunity to communicate, you think you’re the only one out there.”

Three from Wyoming plan to attend NNER Summer Symposium

Three members of Wyoming’s education institutions will participate in the National Network for Educational Renewal’s summer symposium this July in Seattle.

The Wyoming School-University Partnership is sponsoring registration fees for Dave Barker, superintendent of the Platte County School District No. 2; Roger Humphrey, assistant superintendent of Goshen County School District No. 1; and Ed Janek, assistant professor in the University Wyoming College of Education.

The NNER’s summer symposium is an opportunity for educators to learn more about the Agenda for Education in a Democracy and how to apply its principles in American education settings. The symposium also provides participants with an opportunity to meet with colleagues from across the network, discuss issues pertinent to the health of public schools, universities and communities, and study and interact with leaders of the NNER and the associated Institute for Educational Inquiry who are committed to advancing the agenda.

Participants in the symposium will spend about one week engaging in online activities prior to the symposium, which is July 14-17.

To learn more about the NNER and its other upcoming opportunities, visit www.nnerpartnership.org.

MEMBERSHIP

continued from page 6

The Wyoming School-University Partnership offers members the leadership opportunities of “participation.” Democracy and its educational opportunities are the focus. The popular and highly successful science summits are expanding to math and writing.

You will want your to be able to “participate” in these motivating learning events where those

involved are challenged to high-order thinking skills. Use of them is absolutely imperative by students today to help eliminate the achievement gap as it relates to the participation gap.

If you are a member, the Partnership is important to your schools. If you are not yet a member, consider the advantages of participation – belong to a group that has a partnership with the state’s postsecondary community and other stakeholders.

Upcoming Events

4th Annual Day on the Hill
June 18-19
Washington, D.C.

NNER Summer Symposium
July 14-17
Seattle, Wash.

Governing Board Meeting
July 21
10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Casper, Wyo.

NNER Annual Conference
Sept. 19-21
Arlington, Texas

School Improvement Conference
Sept. 29-30
Cheyenne, Wyo.

UW Fall Assessment Conference
Oct. 27-29
Laramie, WY

STUDENTS

continued from page 2

The fact is, college also is just harder than high school.

Justine praises her high school teachers but also said they didn't challenge her.

"The teachers are good, but we all had good grades because the work wasn't hard," she said. "We watched movies in senior English. I think he wanted us to get down the simple things, but now I can't write a paper worth a crap. I never learned."

Meghann is doing better academically than ever before. In December, she took her first-ever honor roll letter home to our parents as a Christmas gift. (I brag, as Big Sister is entitled to do.) She also received her acceptance to the nursing program last month. (Justine has another year of prerequisites to finish before she can enter the competitive program.)

But it hasn't come without significant effort. Last semester, while taking anatomy, Meghann and Justine were in the lab for hours almost every weekend, taking pictures of bones and muscles to make flash cards, quizzing each other, asking questions and preparing for frequent tests.

This semester, they spend more time seeking help for their separate math classes – though they say they don't always find it.

"Some student (assistants) are, like, 'I don't know,'" Justine said of the math lab.

They also both work (Meghann in the ICU at Wyoming Medical Center, Justine at a golf course) to pay their bills. They maintain personal relationships, and they try

to get home to visit family from time to time.

It's a struggle to succeed – one that many students don't win.

"You've got to really want to do it," Justine said. "You have to push yourself."

Jenni Luckett is a communication consultant for the Partnership and works for the Natrona County School District.

THE PARTNERSHIP

Who We Are

The Wyoming School-University Partnership includes K-16 faculty and administrators statewide along with other education stakeholders. The stakeholders study and promote the role of education in preparing students for life and work in a democracy.

Learn More

[Wyoming School-University Partnership](#)

[National Network for Educational Renewal](#)

[Wyoming National Board Certification](#)

[Institute for Educational Inquiry](#)

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