

Smart Start puts money in students' pockets

Thousands of dollars can find their way into the pocketbooks of student teachers if they know where to look and are willing to invest the time.

Thanks to a state grant secured by the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education, student teachers, along with other volunteers in education, will be rewarded for their time with tuition vouchers worth up to \$2,362.50.

"It's really for education; it's not like we give you the cash," said Bill Weeks, Oklahoma State University professor of agricultural education. "If you want to go to college, you could volunteer, and in exchange for that, we will give you a tuition voucher."

The Smart Start program, which is funded by an AmeriCorps award, is designed to help increase the proportion of Oklahomans with college degrees by the year 2010 by strengthening the academic and financial bases of individuals throughout the state. Volunteers, such as student teachers, are rewarded for their efforts to assist people in their education and are then assisted financially with their education.

"The idea of service learning, of giving back to your community, is important to us as a department also; it just happens that our students are already volunteering," said Weeks.

Volunteers who dedicate 300 hours,

425 hours, or 900 hours or more and fill out the paperwork, receive AmeriCorps Education Awards in the form of vouchers that can be applied to current or future college costs. This includes Stafford or Perkins loans.

"It's like a contract; if you do the 900 hours, they will give you that voucher," said Weeks.

Student teachers are not the only people who are eligible to receive this award. Undergraduate students, graduate students, future college students, alumni, teachers and community members are all eligible as long as they apply the award toward college costs.

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New lecturer assists student teachers

The agricultural education program welcomes John Ramsey of Cushing, Okla., as the newly appointed agricultural education lecturer.

Ramsey, a graduate of Oklahoma

State University, was in the high school classroom for 14 years. He taught agricultural education at Cushing Public Schools and Atoka Public Schools before returning to his alma mater.

"It feels great to be back at OSU," said Ramsey. "The faculty and students are highly motivated, and working in this environment is challenging as well as rewarding."

Ramsey's duties include coordinating the resident teacher program and working with the student teachers during their teaching experience.

As a faculty member within agricultural education, Ramsey said he hopes to increase departmental visibility within the state, develop a list of schools willing to be used as cooperating centers for student teacher placements and cultivate relationships with the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education.

"I am in touch with the educators who are working in the classroom today," said Ramsey. "I share their view-

points and concerns. With a united effort that brings the best to Oklahoma State, we can provide the best education possible for students."

Ramsey said he credits his strong desire to teach and assist others during the transition into the working field to OSU and the affiliation and education he received here.

"I want to provide a 'hands-on' opportunity for student teachers," Ramsey said. "I would like to improve the partnerships within the department and enhance communications within cooperative centers."

Along with teaching and assisting student teachers, Ramsey serves as the faculty adviser for the Collegiate FFA chapter and is professionally involved in the Oklahoma Agriculture Education Teachers Association and the National Association of Agricultural Educators.

Ramsey is committed to providing student teachers and agricultural education students with the opportunity to become the best teachers they can be. ❖



News from the Department Head



It has been a busy fall for students, staff and faculty with lots of challenging activities!

Student enrollment in the department continues to increase. A total of 344 undergraduate students (195 agricultural education majors and 149 agricultural communications majors) and 56 graduate students were enrolled during the fall semester. This means that 40 additional students (an 8 percent increase) have joined the department compared to fall 2000.

New courses have been added to the agricultural communications curriculum in the areas of Web design and pho-

tography. In the agricultural education curriculum, new graduate courses in advanced qualitative research methods and grant seeking have been added. These courses have been introduced in response to emerging needs of students and employers.

More than 200 agricultural teachers were on campus during the summer for in-service education. Dr. Bill Weeks, professor in agricultural education, and Les Tilley, consultant with the Oklahoma Department of Career and Technology Education, coordinated the workshops. Topics included the use of technology in the classroom, leadership, communications and technical agriculture workshops.

James White, senior professor, went on sick leave during the fall semester and has returned for the spring semester. Dr. White has been undergoing treatment for cancer and spending time at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Research Hospital in Houston, Texas.

Edwards joins department faculty

A bright, new face can be found among the inhabitants of the fourth floor of Agricultural Hall thanks to the addition of Craig Edwards to the Oklahoma State University family.

Edwards, OSU associate professor of agricultural education, took over his duties as instructor and director of the student teaching program Aug. 1 and has been pleased with OSU's program.

"OSU, in the context of agricultural education, has a very rich history," said Edwards. "They are very well known for producing outstanding ag teachers and for having a strong research component in agricultural education."

The programs aren't the only draw to OSU for Edwards. He said working with students in the student teacher program has put him in contact with a variety of students who are serious about wanting to become good teachers who can make a positive difference in the lives of young people.

"Part of what I do is going out to supervise and visit the student teachers," said Edwards. "You get to see them teach, grow, develop and deal with issues and challenges as they go through their 12 weeks of student teaching."

Edwards dealt with some of those issues and challenges himself during the 15 years he served as an agriscience and technology teacher in Texas. After receiv-

ing his Ph.D. in agricultural education from Texas A&M University in 1999, he taught at both Texas A&M and the University of Georgia before coming to OSU.

He said making the transition to OSU has been easy because the programs are among the best.

"I don't know of any parallel for OSU's undergraduate scholarship program in the nation," said Edwards. "That's impressive to someone who is new and an outsider: that sense of commitment to agricultural education."

Edwards teaches four classes: AGED 3103, Foundations and Philosophy of Agricultural Education; AGED 4103, Methods and Skills of Teaching and Management in Agricultural Education; AGED 4200, Student Teaching in Agricultural Education; and AGED 5863, Methods of Technological Change.

He works to integrate into those classes the principle that national agricultural education supports student learning in science and mathematics.

"One of my goals is to help aspiring agriculture teachers better understand how they have a great opportunity, through agriculture, to teach and to reaffirm scientific and mathematical principles and concepts and really help kids learn science and math better in the context of agriculture, food and the environment," said Edwards.



This particular goal is part of a national initiative that Edwards supports.

"We have a multitude of opportunities to make sciences real and contextual," said Edwards. "I want to be sure that when ag teachers leave OSU that they understand the opportunities they have for doing that and the importance of doing that."

Edwards will be given many chances to ensure that agricultural educators throughout Oklahoma understand this principle as he guides each class of future OSU graduates through the student teaching aspect of their education. ❖

Leadership and service internship expands student experiences

Internships within the leadership and service option allow students to seek new opportunities and experiences.

James White developed the leadership and service internship program more than 10 years ago. The program was formed to enable students to branch out into a variety of areas within agricultural education.

The leadership and service internship is modeled after the agricultural education student teaching program. Students are required under the curriculum to establish goals with their employer at the beginning of the internship, accomplish those goals and conduct a presentation about the internship at the end of the summer.

Last summer, 17 agricultural education students participated in leadership and service internships throughout Oklahoma and other states.

Some of the organizations students have interned with are the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Services, Arkansas

4-H Center, Estes Chemical, National Resource Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Murphy Farms, Tyson, Seaboard Farms, Oklahoma Farmers Union, Farm Credit Services and several others.

“There is a huge variety of opportunities available to students with leadership and service internships,” said Penny Pennington, agricultural education assistant professor. “Students are able to take skills from the classroom and apply them and use them in the working field. Some students have had the opportunity to be research



James Bunch, agricultural education senior, interned with Murphy Farms in Laverne this summer. Bunch interned for 10 weeks, worked in the farrowing barns, participated in leadership training and traveled to the national headquarters in Iowa.

SMART START

“State FFA officers all do this because they are really volunteering and they accumulate over 900 hours, so they earn a tuition voucher,” said Weeks.

This program can help ease the extra financial burdens facing students during their student teaching experience.

“Student teachers are out 12 weeks, and they don’t get paid,” said Weeks. “They can’t live in Stillwater and drive back and forth; they have to go out into the community and rent a house.”

Some students end up paying double the rent because of leases they are already committed to in Stillwater. Rent and other expenses have created problems for student teachers for years.

Since the spring of 2001, everyone who student teaches can earn a tuition voucher of \$2,362, if they apply for 900 volunteer hours.

“We promote the program to all students in intern courses such as student teaching,” said Jeana Locke, OSU professional education manager. “If they are eligible to teach in public schools, they are eligible for Smart Start.”

When the program first appeared in

2001, not all student teachers took advantage of the opportunity. This fall, however, all 10 of the agricultural education student teachers participated.

“There was probably some skepticism about the program particularly in the first group,” said Weeks. “Until the first student got her tuition voucher, we didn’t know for sure that if you do the work you will get it.”

The application process is relatively simple. Applicants must fill out an application that includes a placement request and a personal profile, complete an enrollment form, and provide a photo ID, a birth certificate copy and letters of recommendation.

“Once you have your birth certificate or permanent resident card, the application takes about 30 minutes to fill out,” said Locke.

Not only is the application process quick, but educators are working to speed the process along even more.

“I regret that we didn’t push it harder in the beginning, and we’re pushing a little bit more now. We’re filling out the recommendation letter for them and

assistants to work directly with extension agents.” ❖

trying to make it easier,” said Weeks. “This fall we didn’t make it optional; we just said bring this in, and I think that’s what we will do in the future.”

Besides earning money, there are other benefits volunteers can glean from the program.

“Our career consultants say it looks great on a résumé and are really encouraging it,” said Locke.

One downside to the program is that it is not permanent. It must go through a renewal process every year.

“We have money for this year, and it looks very positive for next year,” said Locke.

While the program is still in effect, there is plenty of opportunity for agricultural education student teachers to minimize their costs while continuing to help the community.

“I’ve gotten a great response from two groups: agriculture and social studies,” said Locke. “Last year social studies had more people in the program, but this year agriculture is looking good.” ❖

Fall 2002 student teachers

| <u>Student</u> | <u>Teaching Center</u> | <u>Hometown</u> |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|
| Summer Ashcroft | Frontier | Broken Arrow, Okla. |
| Alison Blanchard | Oologah | Elgin, Okla. |
| Jennifer Bridges | Coyle | Lake Providence, La . |
| Amber Edwards | Afton | Howe, Okla. |
| Craig Edwards | Adair | Hartford, Ark. |
| Tiffany Erb | Durant | Fort Gibson, Okla. |
| Travis Jinkens | Mulhall-Orlando | Seiling, Okla. |
| Josh McDonald | Drummond | Atoka, Okla. |
| Jay Parker | Roland | Fort Gibson, Okla. |
| Jerome Sterling | Cave Springs | Tecumseh, Okla. |

Fall 2002 scholarship recipients

| <u>Student</u> | <u>Hometown</u> |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Jean Bond | Galatia, Ill. |
| Travis Bradshaw | Sterling, Okla. |
| Tyke Greer | Blackwell, Okla. |
| Jon Derek Mitchell | Empire, Okla. |
| Joe Stafford | Sterling, Okla. |
| Jeremy Teel | Lone Grove, Okla. |
| Kevin Tinkle | Thomas, Okla. |
| Kendall Whittington | Grandfield, Okla. |
| Natalie Wilson | Norman, Okla. |

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Do you have a story idea, announcement or award you would like your fellow alumni to know about? Send story ideas via e-mail to coxjk@okstate.edu.

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