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## Cal Poly Humboldt's School of Education: Pathway to a Life of Service and Social Change

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# CAL POLY HUMBOLDT'S SCHOOL OF EDUCATION: PATHWAY TO A LIFE OF SERVICE AND SOCIAL CHANGE



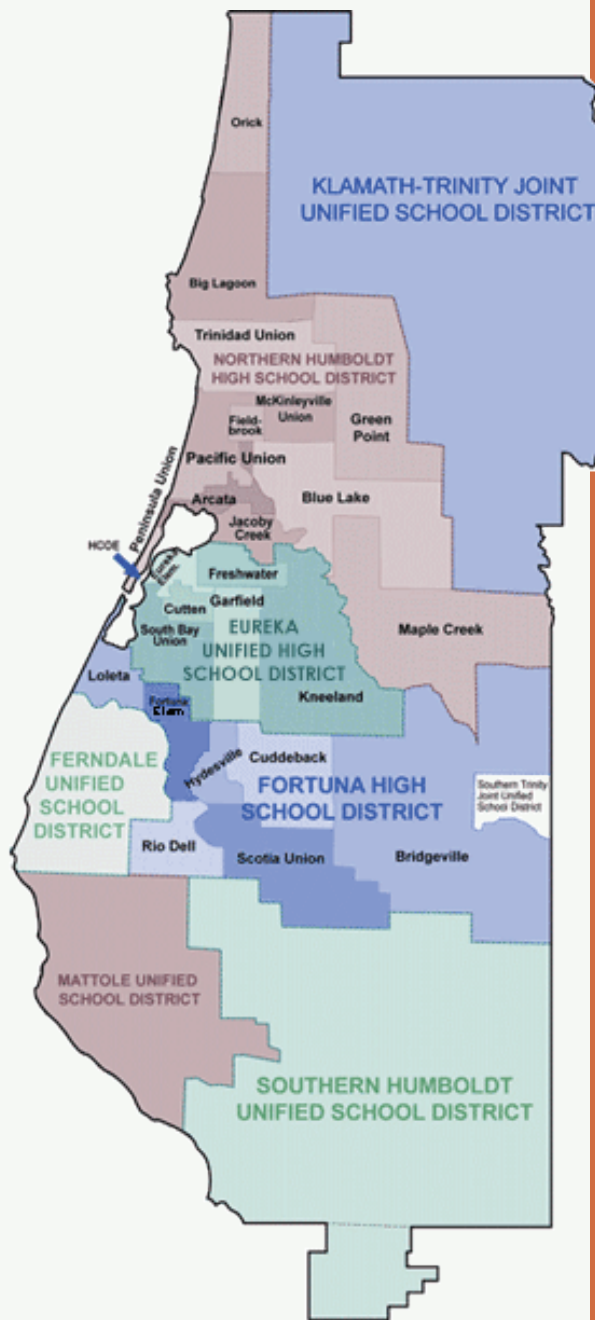
By Mireille Roman and Loren Collins

Humboldt has been preparing students for careers as teachers since opening for classes in 1914, when the State of California issued its first call for more trained and qualified teachers. Over a century later, the University will be graduating its first class under the new name of Cal Poly Humboldt this May. Even under the new campus name, the School of Education still answers that earlier call for more teachers throughout California, but the kind of teachers California and the University are calling for now have changed significantly. California, and the School of Education, are now cultivating teachers who serve as agents of change and envision classrooms as places where social justice and equity can grow. Humboldt's School of Education has a vision that elementary through high school students will be able to see themselves in those who teach their classes, the books they read, and their curriculum. "Teachers are where social change begins in our schools," stated Libbi Miller, Chair of the School of Education.

If a polytechnic education means that students will be trained to meet the needs of our times and learn through hands-on application, then the School of Education has been operating as one such program for a long time. All School of Education programs integrate fieldwork and coursework in order to create robust, hands-on learning experiences that go beyond just professional development, and seek to generate systemic change and address the needs across communities. Marissa Miller, a Liberal Studies Elementary Education (LSEE) major said, "When I think of my student teaching and future teaching positions, I think of the empathy that drove me to this field. Learning and using best practices kept me intrigued throughout my coursework. But, it was building continuous connections with my fifth grade students that made me want to stay in this field. Their meaning-making and energy never cease to amaze me." Social justice and social change are at the center of what it means for the School of Education to be a polytechnic program, giving students the opportunity to advance equity and meet community needs through their work as they learn in real classrooms in our local communities, and deal with the real issues of our time.

The Humboldt County Office of Education (HCOE) serves 32 different school districts, many of those are in very rural areas; Los Angeles County, in comparison, has one school district. To support these districts, the Cal Poly Humboldt School of Education has developed close ties with HCOE and places student teachers all over the county. Many members of the School of Education staff and faculty have expressed gratitude to HCOE and recognized that they could not run any of these programs without those strong partnerships within the region. Christie Lampro, a participant in the Special Education Credential Program said, "It is really the generous grant from HCOE that paved the path that allowed me to even consider the SPED program at [Cal Poly Humboldt]. Since then, I have been overwhelmingly impressed by the cadre of instructors in the program and the amazing cohort of student teachers that I get to share this journey with. Each and every future teacher in the program are amazing individuals who genuinely care about the education and social emotional wellbeing of our youngest citizens. It is an honor to be in this cohort and program."

Rouhallah Aghasaleh, Assistant Professor, Liberal Studies and Elementary Education, explained that there are advantages that come with being placed in Humboldt as a smaller, rural area, "You get to know about and learn from everyone. I think this provides a healthy environment both as a professional and as a community member." The School of Education staff hope that students will develop close ties with the community which will encourage them to remain in the area after graduation and positively impact the local community.





"This has overall been a life changing experience and I hope to make many positive contributions to our community."

-Christie Lampro, Special Education Credential Program

While efforts continue to cultivate Humboldt teachers who will remain in the area, the School of Education also strives to meet the needs of students where they are at. Particularly during the pandemic, when many students continued their education virtually from their homes in other areas, the School of Education equitably built in solutions for these students in innovative ways. Heather Ballinger, faculty for the Secondary Education Program (SED) highlights one such innovation when she pointed out Cal Poly Humboldt's position "as the only CSU with an online credential program for secondary education." The program makes it easier for teachers to train within their communities and then eventually become teachers for their communities of choice.

Sara Sterner, faculty in the LSEE program, explained that the program was recently redesigned, with the help of Mary Dingle, John Lee, Shannon Morago, and Marisol Ruiz. The new iteration allows students to graduate with a degree and a credential in four years. Every course has a community-based service component, providing students the opportunity to work with diverse K-12 classrooms. The recurring theme of service lays the foundation for a lifelong commitment to a career of learning and service. By the time LSEE graduates enter the field, they have served in half a dozen classes as part of their educational experience.

The School of Education actively seeks to promote curriculum and pedagogies that advance efforts toward diversity and inclusion—and dismantle those that promote inequities. Creating equitable environments, and having teachers that represent the makeup of the classrooms they teach has become some of the School's key priorities. The team recognizes, due in part to a lack of representation and inequities within the education system and surrounding communities, that some teachers do not make it past their first five years in this profession. To address this, staff and faculty are actively seeking to change the makeup of the educational system by supporting diversity in the teaching profession. Miller shared, "It is our responsibility to prepare teachers who can go into the schools with equity and social justice, and culturally sustaining frameworks to create meaningful learning environments that sustain the lives and knowledge of students in the classroom."

Every member of the School of Education's team places equity and service at the core of their approach. Sarah Green plays a central role in the School of Education as the Elementary Education Department (EED) and SED Programs Coordinator and Head of Logistics. Green highlights the way their programs have prioritized social justice in their training. Before their first semester, credential students will engage in an intensive, weeklong, multicultural foundations course, prioritizing social justice and equity ahead of other curriculum and laying a foundation for their approach as future educators.

For Aghasaleh, the Liberal Studies and Elementary Education program's work with emerging bilingual education is as much about equity as it is about education. Aghasaleh routinely works with his students to integrate lessons across all subject matters and incorporates the home languages of K-6 bilingual students to show their languages can be as present in the classroom as they are at home. Aghasaleh spoke of learning English as a second language as a skill for these emerging bilingual students that will benefit them the rest of their lives, but it is important they do not think of their first language as only to be used at home. Ana Juna, an LSEE major expanded on this sentiment and said, "If we as teachers want to address and support all of our students' needs, then we must also advocate and include purposeful strategies and pedagogies that also meet the needs of our emergent bilingual students. Creating an inclusive classroom to me means creating an equal learning



opportunity for all students no matter their background, disability or cultures. All students should be seen, heard and valued for who they are.”

It is important for students to see that math, science and other subjects can be learned in their first language and Aghasaleh works hard to make sure that future teachers in his program commit to helping students see themselves, their families, and culture throughout their curriculum. Rosemary Allison-Brown, an LSEE major, reflected, “What is most important is holding [students] up as they discover their identity, and a huge part of that is fostering their home languages and their cultures and traditions. I do my best to prevent a divide between home and classroom, child and peers, and teacher and students. It takes a village, and I intend for my classroom to be a place of comfort and discovery within that village.” Additional reflections from his recent Emerging Bilingual Education course are published on the Cal Poly Humboldt Digital Commons. These demonstrate the positive impact that these pedagogies of equity have had on Aghasaleh’s students.

For Jayne McGuire and Bernie Levy, faculty in the Special Education Program (SPED), the focus is on ending the segregation of students with disabilities from the larger school population. Moving students with special needs back into the classroom is proven to benefit those students and the entire classroom, as it adds rich diversity to the learning process. Placing students with disabilities in their own classroom full-time reduces their connections and eliminates the chance to learn from subject matter experts, such as a teacher trained specifically in one subject, or to participate in rewarding programs such as sports, performing, and the arts. Levi and McGuire explain that Special Education teachers serve an entire community, including their students, parents, administrators, and teachers by providing equitable spaces for students with special needs.

For James Woglom, who works with students in the Art Education Pathway and coordinates the placements for Elementary Education, universal access to the arts and creative expression drove him into the field of teaching. Art was foundational for his health and growth as a child, and when he realized that his access to the arts was not something many kids throughout California shared, he decided that teaching art and bringing new art programs and teachers into the classroom was his calling. Currently, Woglom leads dozens of students in the creation of more equitable art programs across the county and in schools that otherwise would not have an art program. Some of the host sites are programs staffed by students Woglom himself taught, and he sees himself as preparing the next generation of his colleagues. Woglom shared, “I like to think of art education as a sort of ecosystem where we are hoping for universal integration of the arts in every K-12 school and throughout our civil life; and our students are compatriots working for that same aim, to make sure every kid has a crayon in their hand and can work on some meaningful expression of who they are.”

Marisol Ruiz is a faculty member who pioneered the Promotorx Transformative Educator Program

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-Marissa Miller (she/her),  
Liberal Studies Elementary  
Major



(PTEP). PTEP allows current Humboldt students to explore teaching through a grassroots education approach; students learn about transformative education and non-dominant pedagogies that address the rigid ways we educate future generations. The overall goal is to provide a platform for students from different backgrounds and colleges to bring in alternative histories and alternative teaching methods. These students meet weekly and work diligently in teams to unpack topics of their choice, ranging from understanding colonization to encouraging folks to reclaim their power through writing, reading, and teaching. Not only do students plan out their lessons, but they travel to diverse sites and encourage the classes they visit to incorporate indigenous and anti-colonial methods to educate students in local schools about equity, justice, and community.

According to Miller, "Teaching is a pathway that leads directly into a career of doing service for the community, and teaching is a place where you impact every family, every child, and can make sustained social change." Many of us have known a teacher who changed our world, made us believe in new possibilities, or found something in us we did not know was there. Teachers empower, challenge, and shape us, and in doing so have the chance to recreate the world in better versions with every encounter. The program Leads, placement coordinators, faculty, and staff in the School of Education now feel that their vocation, their calling, is to help new teachers enter the field ready for all that it entails, and ready to take social change and equity to the center of the classroom. If you are interested in attending, partnering with, or hosting student teachers from the School of Education, you can contact them at [education@humboldt.edu](mailto:education@humboldt.edu).

Student Reflections:

[Haley Fedalizo](#)

[Rosemary Allison-Brown](#)

[Lesaya Howard](#)

[Garrett Clark](#)

[Ana Juan](#)

