

November 19, 2015

ASU Mid-South Hosts Open House for Teacher Ed Prospects

College students interested in pursuing careers in the classroom heard presentations from a local school teacher and college and university representatives during an open house at Arkansas State University Mid-South on Nov. 11.



Tabitha Newingham (Avondale Elementary School), Lori Forrester (ASU Mid-South), and Sandra Hawkins and Kennedy Ridgell (A-State) encouraged the students to become teachers.

“Teaching is the most challenging, draining job I’ve ever had, but you can never find anything else in your life that will fulfill that calling,” said Newingham, who completed her first two years at Mid-South Community College and finished with Arkansas State on the West Memphis campus. “I don’t know what I would do without my students.”

“To know that I can live my life every day to make a difference in their lives outweighs any exhaustion I have at 3 o’clock. There is no better feeling. These children are why you should become a teacher. No matter what age they are, you have the ability to make an impact.”

When she graduated from high school, however, Newingham had no intention of becoming a teacher.

“I knew what I wanted to do with my life and was college bound,” she said. “I went straight to ASU at 18 years old and entered the business program.”

The road to a business degree took a detour a year later when she met her husband-to-be and married at 19.

“I thought I knew exactly what I wanted in life. I knew everything; no one could tell me anything. I just wanted to be a newlywed, take a year off from school, and enjoy life. So I quit college and found this ‘really good’ job at a medical supply store.”

One year turned into three years, and the Newingham family grew by one with the birth of the couple's first daughter. At that point Tabitha had long since outgrown her job and was searching for something better.

"I really wanted to go back to school," she said. "When I started college, I had a full scholarship; everything was paid. When I quit, I lost everything.



There was just no way I could quit working with my family situation. I kept trying to better myself and started looking for a better job to make more money."

The family expanded again with a second daughter, and about 18 months after that, the economy began to falter.

"We were really starting to feel the financial heat," she said. "Either my husband was going to have to go back to school and find something else to do, or I was going to have to go back to school. I went through about five jobs before I finally went back to college."

She said she felt divinely guided toward the classroom. "I never thought I wanted to be a teacher and didn't know if I would be good at it. I just knew that God was placing a desire in me to work with children."

So she met with Forrester (then Payne) to talk about her options.

"She told me, 'We're hearing that ASU is going to come to our campus, but that's not a guarantee. So you'll just have to register and start your basics in the Education program.' I just believe God brought that program here for me because that very next year, the education program was available in West Memphis."

"There is no way I could have gone back to school and earned my education degree without this program," Newingham continued. "Jonesboro was a 50-minute drive for me, and I couldn't drive there three or four days a week. But I was able to get my Elementary Education degree right here on campus. I never had to leave."

"I was able to get scholarships and grants, so I had to pay very little out of pocket which was a blessing for me. I did my internship in West Memphis and am just so thankful for that

program. If you are interested in becoming a teacher, I hope my story will inspire you. Become a teacher to ignite the fire. Pass your passion onto children and watch their curiosity catch fire.”

Forrester praised Newingham for her decision and determination.

“Tabitha is one of our former students who earned all of the hours she needed on our campus and is now in a classroom making a difference every day. When she was about to graduate, she had three job offers. That’s a testament to how awesome she is and the impact that she made just in one semester of student teaching.”

Forrester described the ongoing teacher education collaboration with A-State as “awesome.” “As someone who had to commute to earn a degree, I can tell you this is a great opportunity.”

Forrester said 70 students who completed the program are now teaching in local school districts.

“Every school building in West Memphis and Marion has at least one teacher who has gone through the program, and some of them have three, four, and five. We’re hoping that number will continue to grow.”

Hawkins, an A-State instructor who coordinates the second two years of the collaboration, said the Jonesboro university is “thrilled to be a part of this campus. We’ve had a strong presence here for a long time. You get a strong education here.”

Ridgell, who coordinates the A-State Degree Center on the ASU Mid-South campus, encouraged students to plan early for their transfer.

“I want you to be able to take advantage of the transfer scholarship from Arkansas State,” she said. “We have privately-funded scholarships as well, but the application comes out in January. We want you to start early so we can let you know about all of the resources available to you. Plan ahead and come by early.”

For more information about the teacher education collaboration between ASU Mid-South and Arkansas State, call Forrester at (870) 733-6784 or email her at lforrester@midsouthcc.edu. For general information about life-changing opportunities at the college, visit the campus at 2000 West Broadway in West Memphis, contact Enrollment Services at (870) 733-6728 or admissions@midsouthcc.edu, or see the website at www.asumidsouth.edu.