

News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Education students give back to community; gain experience at science fair

KOKOMO, Ind. — In just a few years, Miguel Tovar will have his own classroom as a secondary English teacher.

Even before he graduates from the Indiana University Kokomo School of Education, he will have valuable experience working with children, not only from student teaching, but also from community volunteer opportunities in area schools.

Tovar, along with classmates Megan Baer, Todd Clark, and Liz White, spent a morning judging the Sts. Joan of Arc and Patrick School science fair. They walked among exhibits, clipboards in hand, asking questions, examining display boards, and evaluating written reports, helping to determine the best projects.

Tovar said even though he's not going to teach science, the volunteer service will benefit him as a teacher.

"You can't just read a book about teaching and then teach kids," he said. "You have to learn to work with them. This gave me more experience working with kids. Even though it's not my specific area, I learned from it."

The four students are taking a scientific inquiry class, and Julie Saam, associate professor, said the hands-on experience would allow them to apply what they are learning.

"Judging a science fair is a valuable experience, because our education students can witness the results of a scientific inquiry project, and talk to students who have conducted the projects," she said. "This insight should help in their development of an understanding of how to conduct scientific inquiry, and how to teach it."

Baer said while she was helping the school, she also was gaining experiences that will make her a better teacher.

“It’s a chance to work with kids and be in a school atmosphere,” she said. “It’s important for us because we’re going to need this kind of volunteer help when we’re teaching.”

Liz White, who plans to be an elementary teacher, said she gained some ideas for inquiry projects she could do with her own students.

“It’s interesting to see what the kids have done,” she said. “It gives us a lot of ideas for experiments we never would have thought of, that we can teach later.”

Todd Clark, a future English or special education teacher, said he also saw some good ideas for how to present a project.

The four IU Kokomo students were among 16 community volunteers judging the fair. Marcia Gillette, lecturer in chemistry, also was a science fair judge.

Sts. Joan of Arc and Patrick science teacher Stacey Hatfield said having a large panel of judges gives students the chance to have their projects evaluated multiple times. She was glad to have the students there to help, and said they will benefit from it as well, especially if they lead science fairs at their own schools later.

“They’re seeing how the kids communicate at this age,” she said. “As an education student, you’re always looking for a chance to work with children.”

Judging was also a chance to give back to the community, Saam said.

“We appreciate when the community asks for our students to serve,” she said. “Our students are considered pre-service teachers, and they have skills in curriculum development, assessment, and instruction. They enjoy sharing their skills to enhance student learning in our community.”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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