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First Noyce Fellows graduate from SF State

May 21, 2013 -- A year after the launch of the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program at SF State, its first set of graduates say the program has prepared them to be more informed, compassionate and powerful educators.

The Noyce program provides financial support, special seminars on science and math teaching and learning, and hands-on opportunities in research and teaching for those who receive the scholarship.

Funded by the National Science Foundation, the program is open to undergraduates with science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) majors, as well as STEM graduates enrolled in the University's teaching credential program. The students' experiences in the program equip them to teach at some of California's high-poverty, urban schools where a shortage of STEM educators is expected within the next decade.

The 12 graduating Noyce Scholars are "teacher-inquirers" who conduct research within a classroom and bring their findings to bear in their teaching practices.

"I am incredibly proud of all our current and graduated Noyce Scholars," said Larry Horvath, assistant professor of secondary education and principal investigator on the Noyce grant to SF State. "Their commitment to provide high quality math or science instruction for all students is inspirational and a valuable asset for our local school districts."

The Noyce program is directed by Jamie Marie Chan, and is a collaboration between the SF State Center for Science and Math Education in the College of Science & Engineering, and the Department of Secondary Education in the Graduate College of Education.

Serving a diverse student body

Norma Hernandez

Norma Hernandez discovered that she wanted to be a math teacher after realizing in college "that I enjoyed doing my math homework a lot more than anything else and was willing to help out my fellow classmates with their math homework." Hernandez graduates this spring from SF State's teaching credential program after attending the University as an undergraduate. The single mother is now a student teacher at Philip & Sala Burton Academic High School for 9th grade geometry and pre-calculus. "Many of the students that I serve come from diverse cultural backgrounds and from a mixed socio

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economic status," Hernandez said. "They all require different needs and as a teacher I have to make the material more interactive for those special needs. I have found that staying conscious of how students are learning has enabled me to diversify my teaching style."

Preparing immigrant children for success

Stan Voong

Stan Voong, who will also graduate with a teaching credential, is a student teacher at George Washington High School, where he teaches advanced algebra and geometry. After earning his bachelor's from SF State, the Hong Kong immigrant worked in management at Starbucks and "tutored my baristas on their math" before returning to school to become a teacher. "Growing up in Chinatown, I saw many immigrant children going to gangs or working in menial jobs because they did not succeed in our public schools," Voong said. "I want to help change that." He conducted a classroom study of group learning in math. Voong said his support system of professors and fellow students in the Noyce program "played a big part in shaping my research question, by allowing me to bounce ideas off of them and giving me honest feedback."

Building confidence and collaboration in science

Mia Hiles

Teaching credential student Mia Hiles never thought she would become an educator when she was studying biology as an SF State undergraduate. But in her last year of that degree, she took a class that put biology undergraduates into K-12 classrooms, and she was hooked. She is now a student teacher for 8th grade physical science at Visitacion Valley Middle School. Her Noyce project focused on how receptive students were to the idea of integrating art into the science classroom. One aspect of art integration "is to encourage collaboration -- a skill that is essential to learn far beyond the science classroom," she said. "I want to build community in my classroom and build confidence in learning science. A lot of students come into the classroom already feeling like they are 'bad at science' and automatically don't think they can learn it."

Meeting the needs of the changing math classroom

Ryan Cox, an undergraduate majoring in mathematics with an emphasis in teaching, is currently observing four middle school math classes at two schools, one in Oakland and one in Berkeley. His Noyce research focuses on how well students learn and remember when they are taught by their peers. "Every day that I visit my classrooms there is at least one notable challenge, success and surprise," Cox said. "There are no normal or routine days at these schools, something is always different than the day before. I constantly have to adjust to meet the needs of a changing classroom." He would like to pursue a teaching credential after graduation. "I do plan to teach, hopefully 8th grade but I am not set on that yet," Cox said.

Ryan Cox

Creating connections between students and teachers

Maya Cook

Noyce Scholar Maya Cook, another math major with an emphasis in teaching, also plans to enroll in SF State's teaching credential program after she graduates this spring. "I come from a close, big family where I was influenced to be passionate about education, cultural heritage and social justice," she said. "My ability to teach might come from my family but my desire definitely comes from the youth I've had the privilege of learning from." Cook conducted her Noyce research at June Jordan School for Equity, observing an algebra class to learn more about what high school students need to succeed in math class. The answers, she said, sometimes went beyond the classroom.

One of her students who had trouble with the materials began to ask Cook personal questions about her family and upbringing. "When I told her my son has autism, she told me that her younger brother had speech problems as well, as a child," she said. "This experience taught me that students want to know a teacher's heart. She wanted to know who I was and why I was really there."

"The improvement I saw from spending a few minutes talking blew me away," Cook said. "I hope to be able to find a respectful connection with every single one of my future students."

To learn more about the 2013 Commencement, visit the SF State Commencement website.

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