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International Experiences Prepare Future Teachers

CEDARVILLE, OHIO -- Student teaching can be daunting as well as exciting — offering a glimpse into full-time employment as an educator and a chance to put classroom knowledge into practice. And, for a small group of Cedarville University education majors, they experienced their first day of school jitters in classrooms all across the globe.

The international classroom experience allowed Alex Teters, a [middle school math and science education](#) major from Waterford, Ohio; Garrett Lashuay, a [health and physical education](#) major from Oakwood, Illinois; Abigail Brandner, a mathematics and [mathematics education](#) double major from Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania; and Hannah Steger, a [primary \(P-5\) special education](#) and [primary \(P-5\) education](#) double major from Lafayette, Indiana, to gain practical experience in a different culture. Teters was in a classroom in the Dominican Republic, and Lashuay was in Kenya. Brandner's experience was in Puerto Rico while Steger taught in the Czech Republic.

"This is a distinct program that offers an opportunity to live, learn and develop cross-cultural skills of engagement and interaction with people outside of the United States," said Dr. Brenda Mackay, associate professor of education. "Our students come into student teaching with multiple field experiences, which gives them an opportunity to compare their experiences in the United States with a global experience."

Teters, who teaches sixth through eighth grade mathematics at the Duolos Discovery School in Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic, was nervous upon arrival but was greeted with a warm welcome.

"Living in a different culture has introduced me to new ideas and traditions that have encouraged me to evaluate my own perceptions of both American and Dominican culture," said Teters. "In my initial cultural training I received upon arrival, they stressed how warm the Dominican people tend to be. The community-minded, friendly and welcoming attitude was so encouraging to me as I settled in. The people here are kind and patient, despite the language barriers."

Students pursuing global student teaching must be adaptable and able to initiate relationships to become part of their new community.

"Living in a foreign country alone and traveling independently builds self-confidence. It increases personal growth and global awareness," said MacKay. "I find that students come away from being immersed in a new culture and language feeling empowered- even learning how to order in a restaurant or shop or have simple conversations helps students feel at home even while living abroad."

But this time abroad wasn't always easy to adjust to. For Steger, it was a shock to see soup sold in bags at the grocery store. Brandner had to learn to navigate new traffic rules in a 15-passenger van provided by the school. Teters had to refine her Spanish (with the help of Google Translate) to buy food in town.

It is not just personal growth that students gain through the experience. Student teaching provides professional skills and classroom experience, but for students teaching abroad, soft skills like interpersonal and relational adaptability and the ability to tailor teaching to diverse groups of students are invaluable.

“Global student teaching is a valuable learning experience. Many of our teachers have students who speak multiple languages and are learning English, so teacher candidates develop skills that sharpen their ability to teach English language learners,” said MacKay.

Steger, who worked in a first and second grade classroom at the Christian International School of Prague, has learned to adapt to the wide variety of languages and cultures in her students.

“Prague is known for its international community,” said Steger. “I had a class of 13 students, but five different languages and eight different nationalities are represented! There were so many differences in cultural classroom expectations — like raising your hand or different methods of discipline — that I had to adapt to.”

Many students pursue global student teaching experiences in order to understand education as missions, a mindset that is important to Cedarville’s school of education. For Brandner, who taught 9th, 11th and 12th grade mathematics at Wesleyan Academy in Guaynabo, the experience has solidified her passion for teaching, and she has begun considering moving overseas postgraduation.

Despite radically different experiences and locations, Cedarville students participating in global student teaching have not only the experience to expand their skills, but also to grow in their confidence and faith.

Located in southwest Ohio, Cedarville University is an accredited, Christ-centered, Baptist institution with an enrollment of 5,082 undergraduate, graduate and high school dual-enrolled students in more than 175 areas of study. Founded in 1887, Cedarville is recognized nationally for its authentic Christian community, rigorous academic programs, including the school of education, high graduation and retention rates, accredited professional and health science offerings, and high student engagement rankings, and a 100% job placement rate within six months of graduation in 2022 for school of education graduates. For more information about the University, visit www.cedarville.edu.

Written by Halle Johnson

Cutlines:

1. Alex enjoying her time in the Dominican Republic
2. Someone gives Alex some flowers during her international classroom experience
3. Hannah makes a point to a student in her classroom
4. Hannah enjoys her classroom