

# Truman alumni help Teach for America

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Staff Writer

While Truman State alumna Rachel Foster might have received a degree in communication, her job now is to teach first grade. Foster, like many other Truman alumni, decided she wanted to educate students in low-income rural and urban school districts.

Through programs such as Teach for America, Truman graduates are working as teachers across the country.

TFA is one of the most common programs recent college graduates turn to when considering teaching. TFA is an Americorps program that employs young people across the country to work as teachers in high need areas.

Foster, who graduated from Truman during May, said she currently is teaching first grade with TFA at the Lee A. Tolbert Community Academy in Kansas City, Missouri.

Foster said she was interested in TFA because she was not sure what she wanted to do after graduating from Truman and knew TFA had many leadership opportunities. Foster said she wants to continue teaching even after her TFA program is finished.

Foster said she loves TFA and thinks it is a great program that provides a lot of support for its teachers.

"I really believe in the foundation of Teach for America," Foster said. "They recognize that there is this need in our country for equal and accessible education for everybody regardless of financial background or anything like that. There are places of high poverty where children aren't getting the education they deserve."

Foster said though TFA is a challenging program that is not for everyone, she encourages anyone who is interested to apply.

Another Truman alumnus who currently is working for TFA is Justin Rottnek, who graduated from Truman during May. Rottnek teaches fifth grade at Brownsville Road Elementary School in Memphis, Tennessee.

Rottnek said he loves the TFA program. He said the program provides a lot of support for participants such as him who do not have education degrees.

"They take a lot of people who have a desire to help in these low income communities, and you don't even have to be an education major," Rottnek said. "You just have to have a passion."

Other opportunities outside TFA also are available. Alumna Emily Randall, who graduated from Truman during December 2006, currently is teaching sixth grade reading at the Kauffman School, a charter school in Kansas City, Missouri. Randall said this is a great school for first-year teachers such as her because it offers a lot of support and instruction for teachers.

Randall said she was a communication major at Truman, and she pursued a career in journalism and the nonprofit sector after graduating, but she finally turned to teaching and was hired at the Kauffman School. She said her mother is a teacher, and Randall said she has wanted to be a teacher since childhood, but she pursued other careers before going back to school to get her Missouri teaching certification.

Randall said one of her favorite parts of the job is working with the kids. She said students come into her classroom at least two grade levels behind in reading. Seeing the strides they make and their improved reading level scores after being in her class makes her proud, she said.

"These are kids from Kansas City's urban core, and they deserve the best opportunities and the highest education we can provide them," Randall said. "I'm just proud to be a part of offering that to them. I know all our kids can go to college, then come back to Kansas City and have an impact on our city."



Submitted photo  
Truman alumna Anna Selle teaches her students essential reading skills in the classroom. The Literacy Lab in Kansas City, Missouri, where Selle works helps students catch up to read at their grade level.

Randall said she would advise students who want to teach to consider the education gap between richer and poorer areas and what they can do to help fix this problem.

Another Truman alumna who is helping to close this gap is Anna Selle. After graduating from Truman during May, Selle went to work for the Literacy Lab in Kansas City, Missouri.

Selle said the Literacy Lab is an AmeriCorps organization that works to help kids meet the reading level for their grade.

She said the Literacy Lab used these methods in the Minnesota Reading Corps for about 12 years, but this is the first year the program has been used in Missouri.

"The school district that I work in had few students reaching the literacy benchmarks that they need to," Selle said. "At third grade, you stop learning to read and start reading to learn. If you're behind in reading by the time you're in third grade, then it catches up to you, and you're significantly less likely to graduate high school."

Selle said she works as a literacy tutor in a preschool classroom at the Ervin Early Learning Center. She provides reading support for the 18 students in the class and assists the primary classroom teacher.

Selle said while working at an early learning center can be stressful, she enjoys it.

"It's 600 really tiny humans running around, and it can be really crazy and hectic sometimes, but we're all just making it through the day together," Selle said. "It's a very cool place to work because it's a very progressive program."

Selle said she became interested in working at the Literacy Lab because she wanted to do something service oriented after graduating, and she was



Submitted photo  
Truman alumna Anna Selle plays guitar for her students at the Literacy Lab in Kansas City, Missouri. The Minnesota Reading Corps developed the teaching methods the Literacy Lab uses.

attracted to this program because it is in her hometown.

"There are a lot of students in the world who are not able to achieve certain goals because they're in a setting that's not functioning for them," Selle said. "Knowing that was something that was effecting our city so heavily, it was something I was interested in working

toward. Regardless of whether or not I have an education background, I'm still able to make a difference."

While Selle double majored in communication and art history at Truman, she said teaching interested her because closing the education gap is a campaign that Kansas City, Missouri, Mayor Sly James currently is advocating for.

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