



Alumni Spotlight: Samantha Nolte, M.A.E.

Samantha holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Dance and Art Education and a Master of Art Education from VCU School of the Arts. She has taught dance and art in a variety of K-12 environments, including public schools. Samantha is currently a graduate fellow at Pennsylvania State University working on her doctorate in Art Education. She plans to teach licensure-track, pre-service art educators in higher education upon the completion of her degree.

PFF Program: What does the “Preparing Future Faculty Program” mean to you?

Samantha: To me, the Preparing Future Faculty Program was about allowing graduate students seeking to enhance their pedagogical skills find a supportive community in which to do so. And a way to connect with others of a similar interest. Graduate studies involve a variety of responsibilities, including teaching opportunities. The PFF Program is a good venue to develop and/or strengthen a graduate student’s pedagogical foundation.

PFF Program: How did your experiences in the PFF Program enhance your understanding of what it means to be faculty and impact your plans for a career in academia?

Samantha: As an already practicing educator, the PFF Program allowed me to examine the service and research aspects of being a faculty member, while refining my instructional skills with a different student body in mind. I am now more confident that good teaching is good teaching, regardless of the context. The reflective practices, energy, enthusiasm, and planning are the same regardless of whether your students are 5 or 25. Becoming aware of the different facets of “being faculty” has helped me to understand what my future job options might be and what type of college or university might be a good “fit” for me.

PFF Program: How did experiences with the PFF Program and receipt of the PFF Program Certificate of Achievement give you an “edge” in your career?

Samantha: The best “edge” that the PFF Program allowed me to hone was two part—I have a better understanding of the responsibilities of faculty, thus allowing me to go into a faculty position with my eyes open; and I have developed more confidence that the teaching skills that I already have and am continuing to develop are suitable for a higher education environment.

PFF Program: Tell us a little bit about your internship/externship experience, and share with us the impact that the project and the mentoring relationship had on you.

Samantha: I had the luck and the honor to co-teach the Art Education Secondary Practicum course with Dr. Sara Wilson McKay for both the fall and spring semesters of the 2009-2010 school year. The experience was invaluable. I discovered where my strengths and weaknesses were in working with pre-service teachers, and I observed and experienced new ways of interacting with students that I would not have generated on my own. Co-teaching has its own challenges. Blending two visions and pedagogical styles is a symbiotic experience at best and a mess of miscommunication at worst. American education does not often afford the opportunity to have two teachers working in tangent in a classroom, but for me the experience was positive, insightful, and encouraging. I will be a better professor and classroom teacher as a result.

PFF Program: What is the most crucial piece (or pieces) of advice that you would give to students currently enrolled in the PFF Program coursework?

Samantha: Many of my classmates in the PFF Program were coming from fields and departments where they had little prior opportunity to teach. This made many of these bright and creative minds very nervous. If you are this person, try not to be too nervous (a little nervous can be good). Remember you are a reflective and critical thinker as a result of your other academic and research pursuits. Those skills can only enhance your pedagogy. As problems and dilemmas come up, approach them in a reflective and observant way, just as you would any other process. Also, you know more about teaching than you realize. Examine your own experiences—what were the qualities of your best and favorite teachers, what were the qualities of the worst? Use that reflection to give yourself a starting point for developing your pedagogy.

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E-mail: pffprogram@vcu.edu

Phone: 804.827.4544; 804.827.4545

Mail: 1001 Grove Avenue, P.O. Box 843051, Richmond, Virginia 23284

Visit: The Moseley House, Room 203, Monroe Park Campus