

National teachers corps fills schools' needs

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LA JOLLA, Calif.(U-WIRE) — In 1998, Marshall senior Emily Green knew she was interested in pursuing a career in teaching, but she did not know what steps to take in order to achieve her goal.

Then, a friend told her about Teach For America, a national corps comprised of recent college graduates who commit two years to teach in urban and rural public schools that have minimal resources.

Curious about the program, Green attended an information session and knew right away that she was interested in participating.

Two years later, Green is teaching at Willowbrook Middle School in Compton, Calif.

"I felt lost in terms of how to begin my teaching career," Green said. "Teach for America seemed like a great, organized way to be introduced to the field of teaching."

Green is one of more than 6,000 people who have participated in TFA since its creation in 1989.

TFA began as an idea of Wendy Kopp, then a senior at Princeton University. Driven by the concern that children in this nation do not have equal access to an excellent education, Kopp used her senior thesis to propose her idea of a national teacher corps.

Shortly thereafter, the Mobil Corporation approved a \$26,000 grant to start the organization, and Wendy Kopp began making her thesis a reality.

In the first year, a group of highly experienced teachers organized a training institute for the 500 selected corps members.

These students immersed themselves in a rigorous, five-week training session complete with guidebook seminars, workshops and teaching experience.

Corps members often refer to this

training session as a teacher "boot camp" because of its demanding and fast-paced curriculum.

The purpose of the training session is to indoctrinate all participants with superior teaching practices.

UCSD graduate David Carr, a former TFA participant, is now the program director for the Los Angeles Bureau.

"Most aspiring teachers take up to four years to learn the skills that we were made to learn in five weeks," Carr said.

To date, TFA has received more than 33,000 applications, and the number of applicants increases every year.

In the past four years, there has been a 37 percent rise in the number of TFA applications. In order to accommodate the incredible response to the program, TFA is expanding and hopes to double the number of members accepted this year.

Those interested in applying for the program must begin by completing a written application. About 80 percent of these applicants are invited to interviews.

This year, 4,065 people from all over the United States applied to the program, and about 25 percent of those will be accepted.

Corps members have impressive backgrounds: 87 percent held leadership positions on their college campuses, their average SAT score is 1247, and this year's corps had a 3.40 average high school GPA.

TFA selects applicants with the qualities necessary to make excellent teachers — the ability to overcome challenges, strong ambition and a commitment to setting the highest expectations for themselves and their students.

Monica Vasquez, who graduated from UC Berkeley in 1993, taught at an L.A. elementary school for three years through the program.

Now the western recruitment director for TFA, Vasquez cherishes her time spent teaching.

"This program is unique in that it really capitalizes on a time in people's lives, right after college, where they have the ability to commit to a program like this," Vasquez said.

Over the last 10 years, TFA has served as a catalytic force in public education because of its ability to take young, energetic people who are passionate about inequity and give them practical exposure to public education.

Each year, more than 100,000 children in public schools throughout the United States benefit from this program.

A 1999 study by Kane, Parsons and Associates found that 90 percent of principals think the presence of TFA corps members is advantageous for students and for schools.

However, the incredible impact of corps members is clearly shown in the progress made by students they teach.

A survey revealed that 79 percent of parents of students taught by TFA members rate corps members better than their children's other teachers at improving reading skills.

TFA alumni are also involved with running more than 10 charter or experimental schools within the public school system. One Houston charter school reported a 36-point average increase in students' standardized test scores.

"These are bright kids," said Green, who is completing her second year of teaching this year. "The problem lies in the fact that no one has ever told them that education should be a priority."

While TFA consists of a two-year teaching commitment, according to the program, 54 percent of its alumni have remained in the field of education, serving as teachers, principals or administrators. Only 13 percent said they would have gone into education on their own, regardless of TFA.

The remaining participants have pursued other careers, nonetheless able to apply all that they learned in the two-year program to their respec-

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Teach for America western recruitment coordinator

tive fields.

Many alumni who have gone on to medical school have started practices in inner cities and low-income areas. Many others have pursued careers in law, making it their goal to fight for educational equity.

Recently, one alumnus won election to the state Legislature in Maine on an education platform. Other former corps members have become passionate advocates of providing education to disadvantaged students from fields such as journalism, business and politics.

"One great aspect about the Teach for America program is the fact that it allows you to do something about the inequity in public education, and still pursue other goals that you might have," Vasquez said. "Students are worried that if they commit to teach, that they will be unable to go to graduate school. Teach for America allows them to teach for two years and then pursue other goals."

TFA encourages its corps members to choose teaching as a career and to make a positive impact on the students they teach.

The long-term mission of TFA is to create an ever-expanding force of leaders who have been changed by their experiences and will operate in all sectors of society.

"Many corps members take on the noble notion that they will be able to make a difference in every child they teach," Green said.

"Perhaps the most difficult part of our job is the realization that we will not be able to reach all of our students."

Ten years after Kopp proposed her idea for a national teacher corps, TFA has grown in both numbers and strength. Over the past decade, \$60 million in grants from corporations, foundations, private donors and the federal government have been awarded to TFA.

Kopp, now 32, remains president of TFA.

"Teach for America has already accomplished a great deal, yet as a nation we are far from the day when we can safely say that every child has an equal chance for success," Kopp said. TFA has become a driving force in the fight for equity in education. Corps members see it as their responsibility to reflect and think critically about the changes that are needed in public education. Those who participate take with them, among other things, the realities of the public education system.

Perhaps TFA's potential to affect American youth in the public education system was best expressed by Michael Johnston, who graduated from the program in 1997.

"If Teach for America succeeds in its mission, we will go on to lead a generation that is characterized by service, not as a hobby or recreation, but as a lifestyle."

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Universities disburse record amounts for student loans

The GW Hatchet
George Washington University

they have the same financial worries as students do nationwide.

WASHINGTON (U-WIRE) — The number of college students taking out loans to finance their education has skyrocketed despite the leveling of college costs in recent years, according to a CNN.com report.

According to the October report, universities handed out a record \$64 billion in financial aid last year. Student loans made up the bulk of the money.

On average, students at public institutions received about \$3,350 each in federal loans. Private universities granted almost five times that amount, totaling close to \$15,400 a student.

"I would say that George Washington University is typical of a private institution when it comes to student loans," said Daniel Small, George Washington's director of student financial assistance. "We might be a little bit higher. I would say that George Washington students average about \$16-17,000 in loans."

Federal loans are the most popular and accessible types, Small said. The two most common federal loans are Perkins and Stafford loans. Most students opt for Staffords, which are easier to obtain and offer larger money grants.

Nonetheless, students and college administrators said repaying federal loans can be stressful.

"The fact that everybody needs to go to college to get a middle-class job ... the fact that you have to borrow more than you used to, this is a problem," said Patrick Callan, who runs the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, in the CNN.com report.

George Washington students said

"I'm getting close to 12-grand a year (in federal loans)," said freshman Andy Wilson. "And that's going to be close to \$50,000 when I graduate. I'm always worrying how I'm going to be able to pay back that money. It's always hanging over my head."

George Washington students are encouraged to participate in entrance interviews, which are handled by government loan organizations to provide financial guidance. If they do receive loans, students must participate in an exit interview to plan a graduating student's payback schedule, Small said.

"We try to educate students about the positives and drawbacks of federal loans as much as possible," Small said. "(We) offers several loan packages that try to meet the students' needs, including a self-help component involving work-study programs."

Students who receive federal loans have 10 years after graduation to repay the loans following a six-month grace period, during which the government repays all interest collected on the loan. This system allows students to settle into a post-college routine, including finding housing and employment.

Despite increasing costs of attending college, College Board President Gaston Caperton said the gains outweigh the sacrifices, according to CNN.com. During a 40-year career, the difference in earnings between a high school and college education is about \$1 million, Caperton said.

"That's the value of a college education," he said. "I don't know anywhere in the world where you can make an investment and make that kind of return."

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