Hearst Foundations' gift supports future teachers

by Jennifer Huber - June 8, 2009

An endowed gift of $100,000 from The Hearst Foundations is boosting scholarships and the University of Connecticut's Teachers for a New Era (TNE) program.

The William Randolph Hearst Scholarship Fund will provide awards to students studying to become teachers, and support diversity initiatives at UConn.

UConn is one of 11 institutions nationwide participating in TNE, an initiative established by the Carnegie Corp. of New York to assist exemplary programs in creating best practices for K-12 teacher preparation.

"With that charge, we set out to strengthen UConn’s teacher preparation program in ways that would not only distinguish strong aspects of our program but would also inquire into why and how our processes produce talented, effective teachers," says Marijke Kehrhahn, associate professor of educational leadership in the Neag School of Education and director of the TNE program at UConn.

Mason Granger, director of grants for The Hearst Foundations, says, “The Neag School of Education at UConn is one of the premier institutions of its type in the nation. We admire the vision of the leadership and the inspired, inclusive approach of the faculty and curriculum. Together they reflect a dynamic commitment to teachers and students, which, we believe, will produce substantive improvement in children’s education and performance in the years to come.”

TNE seeks to reform teacher preparation through integration of liberal arts and education curricula so that students receive thorough instruction in pedagogy and the subjects they intend to teach.

At UConn, 30 faculty and staff from the Neag School work closely with more than 30 faculty and staff from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), who teach and advise in content areas associated with teacher certification. Faculty in the School of Fine Arts and the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources are also involved.

Kehrhahn says that, since the initiative began at UConn in 2003, a number of goals have been accomplished. A modification to UConn’s five-year integrated bachelor’s/master’s degree program enables students to earn bachelor’s degrees in both education and a subject area as well as a master’s degree in education.

TNE staff have started conducting surveys of CLAS students to assess their interest in becoming teachers, in addition to developing a database to analyze data about education students and graduates.

Many projects have been implemented to foster cross-college collaborations and grant writing. UConn has also launched a study to compare the academic achievement of K-12 students taught by alumni of UConn compared with other institutions.

In the future, the TNE program will focus on addressing pressing and emerging needs, including recruiting and preparing a diverse and culturally competent educator workforce. Kehrhahn explains that, while minority student enrollment is projected to increase, minorities represent less than 10 percent of the teacher workforce.

“The Hearst Foundations’ endowment will provide financial support – an important aspect of any minority teacher recruitment effort – to young people of color pursuing a degree in teaching,” says Kehrhahn.

The Hearst Foundations’ Granger says, “Students at schools across America are increasingly representative of a myriad ethnic
and social backgrounds. We must have teachers who can relate to those youngsters and can provide them with the support and counsel they need to dream big and achieve their ambitions.”

Kehrhan hopes the commitment from The Hearst Foundations may help attract additional support. UConn’s TNE program has been largely supported by private gifts.

In addition to the original $5 million grant from the Carnegie Corp. of New York, the University received $250,000 from the McLeod Blue Skye Foundation and $141,000 from the estate of Dorothy Goodwin.

Kehrhan notes that a scholarship to a student entering the teaching profession has the potential to impact thousands of lives.

“One teacher times 25 students per class times 5 classes per year times 30 years equals 3,750 students,” she says.

“If you want to change the future, support a teacher!”