

Outside Assignment 2: News Service Story

March 11, 2009

Purdue grad student wins prestigious award in higher education

Purdue University graduate student Elizabeth Munz, 29, was one of 10 graduate students nationally to receive the K. Patricia Cross Future Leaders Award.

The award, according to the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U) web site, “recognizes graduate students who show exemplary promise as future leaders of higher education; who demonstrate a commitment to developing academic and civic responsibility in themselves and others; and whose work reflects a strong emphasis on teaching and learning.”

As the 10 award winners, the doctoral students, from a variety of disciplines, were invited to a four-day conference in Seattle to meet the other recipients and higher education faculty and administrators.

“I didn’t realize what a huge deal [the award] was until I got to the conference,” said Munz.

Purdue professor Melanie Morgan and Munz’s academic advisor, professor Steve Wilson, were the nominating force for Munz, who then had to submit her résumé and a student statement. In the statement, she focused on three elements: teaching, civic engagement, and her experience in the Peace Corps.

In education, she described her enjoyment of having been a teacher for two communication courses at Purdue and serving as assistant course director for the freshman-level public speaking course, Com 114.

For civic engagement, Munz detailed a project she is currently working on with Wilson for the Lafayette Community & Family Resource Center that deals with early childhood education.

She also included what she gained from the two years she spent in Suriname as a Peace Corps volunteer with her husband Joshua. The couple taught English to adults, helped with small business endeavors and drinking water initiatives, and facilitated a seminar on caring for the elderly.

Upon winning the award, Munz and the other nine recipients headed to Seattle in late January for the conference, which featured photographer and environmentalist Chris Jordan as the opening speaker and also included a reception, a women’s networking breakfast, a panel for the award winners, and more.

“The best thing about the conference was meeting the other grad students,” said Munz, who liked that, coming from different schools and different disciplines, the 10 of them had the opportunity to compare programs, plans of study, research, and other elements of their lives.

Munz is not the first in her family to pursue education; her mother, grandmother, mother-in-law, and sister have all been educators as well. Maybe the teaching gene will pass to her 10-month-old daughter, Sydney, too.

Munz says the most difficult thing about balancing her education and service and family is finding a block of time just to work.

“I can check my e-mail and do tasks like that while Sydney’s asleep,” said Munz. “But we pass her back and forth to get our work done [on weekends].”