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Cavender '21 Earns Grant for Local High School Literary and Art Journal

July 17, 2020

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Through Illinois Wesleyan's Action Research Seminar, Katie Cavender '21 earned a \$3,310 "Beyond the Books" grant to fund a student literary and art journal for local high school students.

Cavender applied for the grant while enrolled in IWU's Action Research Seminar last fall taught by [Action Research Center](#) (ARC) Director Deborah Halperin. In addition to reading works on community engagement and volunteering with the West Bloomington Revitalization Project, the students were asked to develop and implement an original community service project.



Katie Cavender '21 recently earned a \$3,310 "Beyond the Books" grant to fund a student literary and art journal for local high school students.

"As someone going into the teaching field, I felt that whatever I did with my project should relate to youth, and if possible, my teaching placement," explained Cavender. "This grant opportunity was recommended to me by Halperin and together with my cooperating teacher, Ryan Kerr, we developed a plan for a literary magazine that would give students the opportunity to showcase their creative work."

Cavender, a double major in English literature and secondary education, partnered with Beyond the Books. This organization is dedicated to funding innovative enrichment programs for the students of McLean County Unit District No. 5 and Bloomington District 87 Public Schools..

"To me, applying for a grant through this organization seemed like the perfect opportunity to enhance my experience as a student teacher," Cavender said. "In the past, most of these grants have gone to STEM related subjects or elementary teachers, and I felt it was important for us to examine the ways in which English instruction could evolve and become more engaging and innovative as well."

While Cavender originally intended for the journal to be printed and run by an editorial board of high school English Honor Society students with submissions open to the entire student body, the COVID-19 pandemic put these plans on hold. The journal may transition to an online format depending on local school districts' plans for the fall.

According to Cavender, the process of applying for and earning the grant embodies the educational values she's learned during her time at Illinois Wesleyan.

"Ever since I began my journey to become an educator through the IWU Educational Studies Department, I have been encouraged by faculty members and peers to constantly ask myself, 'What more I can be doing for my students?' I quickly realized once I started studying to become a teacher that just doing what works for me as a student is not enough — high schoolers need a range of opportunities to demonstrate what they are learning and express their interests in order to get the most out of their education," Cavender said.

"Because of IWU Ed Studies, I am always pushing myself outside of my comfort zone and exploring new ways to reach my students. I am committed to supporting my students' success no matter what their background or learning style is. When I was made aware of this grant opportunity, it was a no-brainer for me to pursue it."

By Megan Baker '21