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IWU Receives Grant to Grow Future STEM Education Workforce

Sept. 27, 2022

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – A grant from the National Science Foundation will support Illinois Wesleyan University’s efforts to increase the number of students pursuing a career in STEM education.

Through an award from the Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program, eligible Illinois Wesleyan students can receive annual scholarships, paid undergraduate research opportunities and mentorship. The program will provide up to \$600,000 in scholarships over the course of five years for at least 20 Titans over the life of the grant who are studying to earn dual degrees in [secondary education](#) and a STEM field (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math).

The grant proposal “Authentic Research in STEM Educator Preparation for Issues of Culture, Justice and Equity,” was authored by Emeritus Miner Linnaeus Sherff Endowed Professor of Botany David Bollivar and Associate Professor of Educational Studies Maggie Evans. With Bollivar’s recent retirement from IWU, [Associate Professor of Biology](#), Loralyn Cozy, has joined the project as co-principal investigator.

“STEM, a broad term that includes math, science, technology and engineering disciplines, is fundamental to America. We need scientists. So much so, that this need has been identified as a presidential priority because there are simply too few college students pursuing degrees in these fields,” said Cozy. “The U.S. Department of Labor notes that there are more than a million job openings in STEM-related fields, but not enough qualified graduates to fill them. The NSF funded the Noyce Teacher Scholarship Program to recruit, prepare and sustain highly effective elementary and secondary STEM teachers in high-need school districts to help address this shortage.”

During their undergraduate studies, students will learn by observing and teaching in STEM classrooms at local schools, including McLean County Unit 5 and Bloomington Public Schools District 87. Each scholar will be paired with two Wesleyan faculty mentors to enhance their time in the program. The mentorship will continue for two years after graduation as the new teachers work in under-resourced schools.

On Aug. 31, the inaugural group of Noyce scholars — Kate Meyers '24, Seth Albin '24 and Amanda Wilson '24 — were recognized during a ceremony at the IWU President’s house. Each student is dual-majoring in secondary education and a STEM field. President Georgia Nugent congratulated the future Titan teachers and praised their action through the scholarship as an example of the ways Illinois Wesleyan seeks to provide service in the local community and beyond.



Front from left to right are Noyce scholarship recipients Amanda Wilson '24, Seth Albin '24 and Kate Meyers '24; with Associate Professor of Educational Studies Maggie Evans, back left; and Associate Professor of Biology Loralyn Cozy, back right.

“Sometimes when we think about preparing teachers, people may think of the big public institutions of Illinois. Obviously they do a lot, but the small private colleges like Illinois Wesleyan prepare about 40% of teachers in the Illinois school system,” said Nugent.

A primary goal of the program is to create a pipeline for students in McLean County to become STEM teachers in their own community.

“Local schools are full of talented, intelligent students who can become amazing STEM teachers,” said Evans. “IWU will provide a pathway to their STEM teaching career, particularly for students in McLean County.”

In the process of recruiting students to enter the program, the University will make an effort to encourage and support prospective students of color to apply, with the goal of creating a more diverse teaching force for future STEM classrooms.

“IWU is excited to invest in a diverse group of students from McLean County who are passionate about becoming STEM teachers for social justice,” said Evans. “Our graduates will be exemplary educators who help bridge the opportunity gaps in STEM education.

Prospective high school students and currently enrolled undergraduate students are eligible to apply for this scholarship program. More information is available at www.iwu.edu/noyce.

By Julia Perez