

Increasing the Number of Teachers with Bachelor's Degrees in the U.S.-Affiliated Pacific

By Jackie Burniske

In an effort to assist the Pacific region with developing more qualified teachers, Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL) has partnered with Park University to offer a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree for International Educators through distance education. This program prepares individuals to become competent and effective K-8 teachers in the U.S.-affiliated Pacific region. Teachers who already have an associate's degree progress through the program in cohort groups. Course delivery is through distance education with PREL and Park University instructors, facilitated by onsite educators from PREL and the State Department of Education.

The program has three stages leading to the accumulation of 60 credit hours and a BS degree. Teachers with an associate's degree from an accredited institution and teaching experience begin at the certificate level. Teachers earn a Level I Certificate after successful completion of the first five courses in the first year and a Level II Certificate the following year after the completion of five additional courses. The cohort groups take the 8-week courses one at a time. After successful completion of the Level I and Level II Certificates, students can be considered for admittance to the BS for International Educators degree program at Park University. It will then take 2 additional years and 30 more credit hours to earn the BS degree.

The program has begun with its first cohort of 20 teachers in Pohnpei. In Pohnpei, 69% of the teachers have an associate's degree, 30% have a bachelor's degree, and 1% have a master's degree. Through this program, the percentage of teachers in Pohnpei with a bachelor's degree will increase.

The first course is Basic Reading 1: Foundational Knowledge about Language and Reading Development, taught by PREL instructor Jennifer Padua. The students, instructor, and onsite facilitators are enthusiastically meeting synchronously once a week, using Elluminate, a Web conferencing system that allows for voice, video, document sharing, and interactive instruction.

PREL and Park University look forward to expanding the program to more entities. The program aligns perfectly with PREL's mission of Building Capacity Through Education and Park University's vision statement that it will be a

renowned international leader in providing innovative educational opportunities for learners within the global society.

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"There are a few reasons why I am taking this course. Most importantly, I am taking it because it is a good opportunity. I want to work as a teacher, and at the same time, take a class that would help me earn credit to improve my payment. Not only this, but I want to earn credits that would help me get a BA/BS degree. I expect to take this course and increase my knowledge in reading that would also help me help my students more. By the end of this course, I expect to pass this course, and with much more knowledge about reading."

-Jessicalynn Reyes, 6th grade teacher, Ohmine Elementary School, Pohnpei

"In the last 10 years there's been a lot of research done about what makes a difference for student achievement, and it's now clear that the single most important determinant of what students learn is what their teachers know. Teacher qualifications, teachers' knowledge and skills, make more difference for student learning than any other single factor. Clearly that means if we want to improve student learning, what we have to do is invest in teachers' learning."

-Linda Darling-Hammond

Linda Darling-Hammond, EdD, is a distinguished scholar and expert on education and teaching. She is a professor of Teaching and Teacher Education at Stanford University. This quotation is excerpted from an interview with her published September 1, 2001, on the website of the George Lucas Educational Foundation, available at: www.edutopia.org/php/interview.php?id=Art_832&key=039.

