

## **RIVIER'S DOCTORAL PROGRAM OFFERS INNOVATION IN EDUCATION**

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(From: *Rivier Today*, Spring 2010)

In 2008, Rivier launched its first doctoral program: the Ed.D. in Leadership and Learning. The two cohorts of students progressing towards their degrees give the program high marks for innovative content, design and philosophy.



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— Dr. John Gleason, Doctorate of Education Program Director

When Audrey Rogers was hired as an assistant professor of education at Southern New Hampshire University, she knew she wanted to get her doctorate. She was looking at online programs to accommodate her children’s

schedules as well as the demands of her job. Then she attended a presentation on Rivier’s program, which combines online coursework with face to face meetings—courses typically meet on campus one weekend a month. “The philosophy of leading and education appealed to me—logistically, it also worked for me,” she says. “The online aspect of the courses helps me balance my family’s needs with my doctoral work.”

Jill Campbell, a middle school teacher in Lady Lake, Florida, was accepted into other doctoral programs but couldn’t afford to quit her job and attend school full-time. She flies to New Hampshire one weekend a month. “To me, it’s worth it,” she says.

Campbell says that Rivier hasn’t sacrificed academic rigor in order to accommodate busy schedules. “People may think because the program is designed for working professionals, it involves less work, but that’s not the case,” she says.

Rogers agrees, praising the program’s innovative teaching. “The faculty force us to think creatively—they ask what would you do differently, how can you connect this to yourself,” she says. She cites an assignment in her Leadership and Special Needs class that called for students to develop an alternative approach to Individualized Education Plans. “Our assignment is not to just repeat or show that you can do an IEP—it’s to show what you’d do if you didn’t have this. I find the coursework very relevant to my job.”

Program Director Dr. John Gleason explains that one of the unique characteristics of the program is team teaching in content area courses. Students in each class learn from two professors with different experiences, such as a researcher and a practitioner or two practitioners with different perspectives. “One of the outcomes of having two instructors is that dialog between the instructors and the students becomes an outcome of doctoral study—how to make sense of multiple, conflicting ideas; what research says and how it relates to content; understanding the difference between what research says and what practice is,” Gleason says.

“The two professor model is really fabulous,” Rogers says. “We’re learning from two sets of research-based experts, people who publish differently. It becomes a little more complicated and not so straightforward.”

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Campbell says her fellow cohort members also offer a variety of viewpoints. “Everyone brings their own rich experience. I’m a classroom teacher with administrators, guidance counselors—people with diverse experience in education.” She finds the opportunity to hear from people who see the same issue from different perspectives intriguing.

The program has been designed to be dynamic, Gleason says. “The program’s content follows student ideas in research and gives students the tools they need to conduct their own study, and base their own leadership on what they have learned and researched.” Rivier’s program also differs from others in the

ways in which student dissertations will communicate the implications of their research in terms of economic impact, an ethical or moral position, social justice, and the politics within systems, institutions and organizations.

“With most programs, students draw implications from research. We’re asking them to look at the implications up front,” Gleason says. “Even within the notion of transformative leadership, we’re redefining transformation in terms of process and how it proceeds for an individual, then moves to another. It moves from the self to the other to the practice and finally to the institution or system.”

Students in the program are forming bonds and networks that are sure to transform systems in the years to come. “Each course has allowed me to personalize material to my work,” says Rogers. “The doctorate is helping me learn the research behind what I do every day to improve.” She and other students plan to collaborate on research and projects outside the doctoral program.

Overall, Gleason says, “We’re trying to make the mission of the College meaningful in dissertation research and students’ own lives.” ■

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