

Eastern Washington teacher preppers address K-12 shortages



Gonzaga freshman Kyle Fuxa, a music education major, works with sixth-grader Nelson Phillip during Saturday literacy tutoring. Department Chair of Teacher Education Deborah Nieding said about 87 percent of the kids who attend are learning English as a second language.

With the end of an overall teacher shortage, programs east of the Cascades have set their sights on special ed, English learning and rural schooling

By JARED BROWN

In 2015, headlines warned of a looming teacher shortage in Washington State. And, that year 93 percent of principals surveyed by the state's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction described filling teacher positions as a "struggle" or a "crisis."

Initiatives to expand full-day kindergarten and mandate smaller elementary school class sizes, along with more rigorous high school graduation requirements, Common Core and teachers retiring in a stronger economy, all contributed to a hiring boom still going on today.

Around the same time, to help with the shortage, the state decided to promote and fund alternative routes to teacher certification programs, in addition to scholarships and loan forgiveness for students enrolled in traditional post-secondary teacher preparation programs.

Fast forward to late in the summer of 2018, the overall shortage is over and concerns are more about budgeting than hiring. The number of classroom teachers in the state jumped from 60,543 in 2014-15 to 65,310 by 2017-18 — less than 10 percent. Meanwhile, teacher unions around the state successfully negotiated for pay raises.

Entry-level teachers in Spokane public schools will see a 9.1 percent pay raise from \$45,031 to \$49,056, The Spokesman-Review reported in August. Meanwhile, in Yakima first-year teachers will make \$43,000 and in Seattle they'll earn \$57,000. These raises in bigger districts could exacerbate recruitment issues at rural K-12 schools, which are disadvantage by state pay scales, while special education and English language learning (ELL) remain ongoing needs.

Each teacher preparation program, whether in a university setting or not, has its own philosophy as to how to prepare teachers for the classroom and address shortage areas. Meanwhile, the fight in the state Legislature for how to best fill the never-ending holes in Washington's K-12 classrooms rages on.

Traditional Routes

East of the Cascades, some major traditional higher education programs preparing future K-12 teachers for the classroom include Central Washington University, Eastern Washington University, Washington

State University, Gonzaga University and Washington State University Tri-Cities.

All of the programs involve at least one quarter or semester of full-time student teaching to meet Washington's Professional Education Standards Board (PESB) requirement for clinical practice in a classroom setting with a mentor teacher. Each program also has practical classroom application courses, referred to as practicum or field experiences, in classrooms leading up to full-time student teaching.

The largest program, CWU, awarded 23.57 percent of its 3,140 total bachelor's degrees, about 740 BAs, to education majors last year, according to the school's Common Data Set (CDS), a nationwide initiative to produce comparable data from higher education institutions. The school says about one in five Washington K-12 teachers are CWU graduates.

Dr. Ron Jacobson, the CWU executive director of the college of education, said one ongoing focus for the university is filling positions in the "wide swath through the middle of the state of tiny school districts that really struggle to find teachers" with CWU grads.

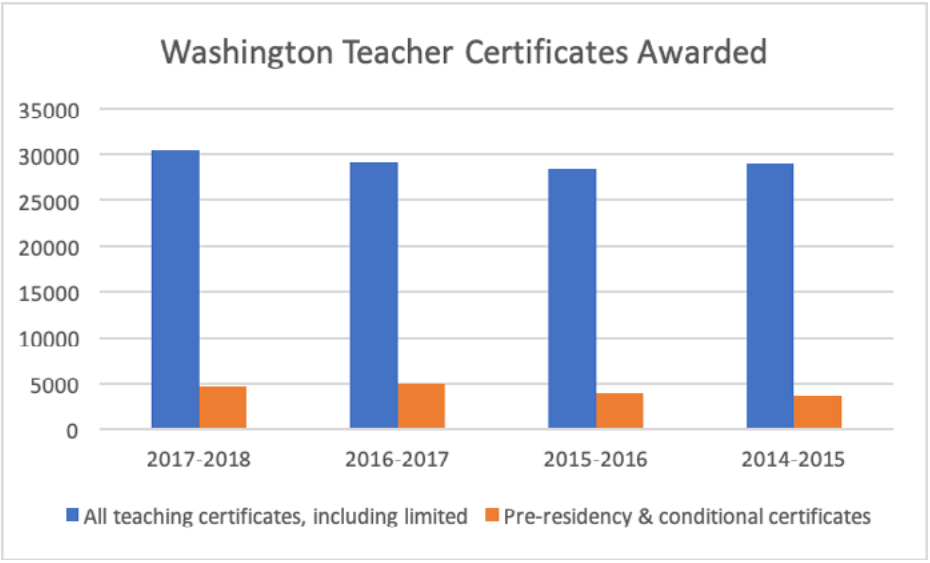
In June 2018, there were 65 open teaching positions in rural Yakima Valley school districts, according to a report for the Yakima Herald-Republic. At the beginning of the 2015-16 school year, 36 teaching positions were unfilled in the Yakima School District alone.

"One of our areas of passion is to really build within the heart of our students to go into those communities, set up shop and become teachers," he said.

Education students are encouraged to work in rural schools during their practicum experiences and meet with rural district employers during career fairs, while the university asks districts to provide housing to student teachers as an incentive to work there, Jacobson said. He added that research has shown this affects where candidates choose to work as professionals.

EWU, another one of the largest programs in the state, awarded 7.3 percent of its 2,399 total bachelor's degrees, about 175 BAs, from 2017-18 to education majors, according to the school's CDS. The school claims 40 percent of teachers in the region are EWU graduates.

18-19 Traditional Tuition	18-19 Alt-route Tuition
WSU: \$10,000	WSU Tri-Cities: \$20,000
EWU: \$6,300	WSU Pullman: \$15,000
GU: \$42,300	EWU Route 1: \$14,800
CWU: \$8,000	EWU Route 2-4: \$8,500
Whitman: \$51,000	CWU Routes 2-4: \$12,000



Data supplied by Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI).



Gonzaga special education major Kate Shikany smiles with David Herman at GUSR.

Teachers take different paths to classroom

By JARED BROWN

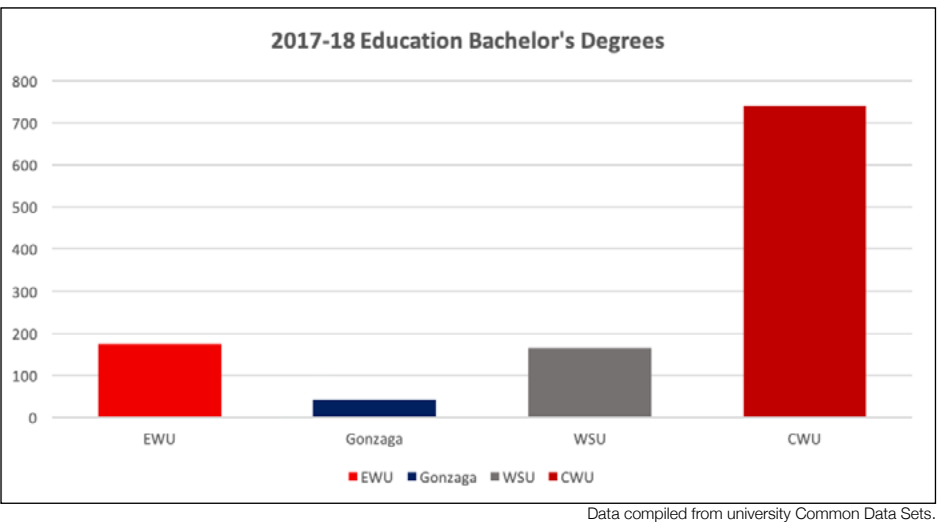
The stories of five recent graduates — two current teachers and three prospective — highlight the varying paths an educator can take to get to the classroom.

Kate Shikany, a soon-to-be graduate of Gonzaga's only teaching degree in special education, came to Spokane undecided on a major. It was only after she selected Gonzaga University Specialized Recreation (GUSR) for her service learning requirement in an introduction to psychology course that she discovered her interest in special education.

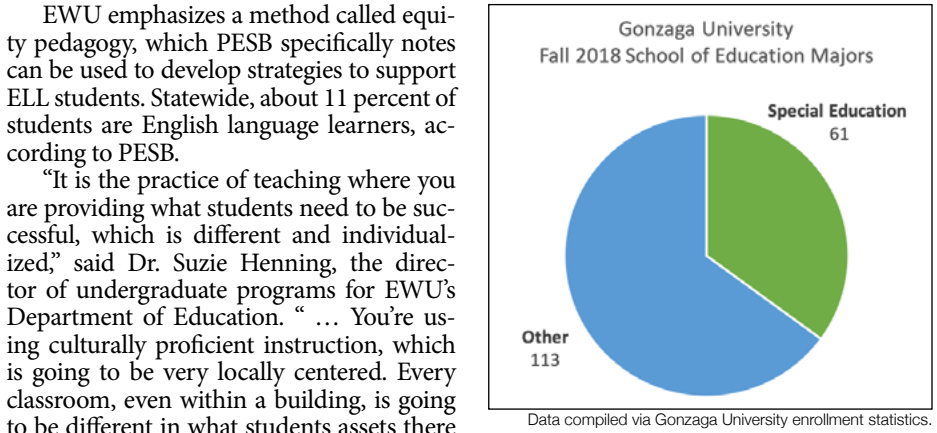
"I had never worked with individuals with disabilities before," she said. "... And I just remember after my first practice, I just kinda knew I wanted to work with individuals with disabilities and the special education major at Gonzaga seemed like the best fit."

Her course topics have ranged from autism and sign language to setting up

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Data compiled from university Common Data Sets.



Data compiled via Gonzaga University enrollment statistics.

teachers in classrooms all over the state, said teaching and learning department chair Dr. Tariq Akmal, and about 15 candidates from Spokane end up moving back home from Pullman to student teach.

The lone private school among these programs, Gonzaga University, awarded 4 percent of its 1,077 total bachelor's degrees, or about 43 diplomas, in 2017-18 to education majors.

Gonzaga's only teacher preparation major is in special education, and in fall 2018 more than one-third of the university's 174 education students were enrolled in the special education program.

For comparison, a little more than 6 percent of CWU's education degrees from 2016-17 were in special education, and about 10 percent of education students at EWU in fall 2016 were enrolled in the special education program.

Soon, Gonzaga plans to roll out another undergraduate degree in community, culture and literacy, which will certify students to teach kindergarten through eighth grade with endorsements in reading and ELL through 12th grade.

"The [need for] ELL is growing exponentially," said Department Chair of Teacher Education Dr. Deborah Nieding. "... and we want to be right up there on the frontline with our teachers."

She said she's witnessed the growing need for ELL educators in the Saturday literacy tutoring program she supervises on campus. Maybe one English language learner used to attend, she said. But now, 87 percent of the students are learning English as second language, many of them immigrants and refugees. The program has also expanded to an adult program taught by master's degree students.

Alternative Routes

From 2015-17, the Alternative Route Block Grant started by the legislature was so popular that funds requested were twice of those available, according to PESB's 2018 supplemental budget request to the Legislature. Now, there are 25 alternative route programs throughout — 11 of which have been approved since 2016 by PESB — but only nine of them are grant-funded.

And for fall 2018, 79 students were enrolled at the College of Education at the Tri-Cities campus.

Dr. Judy Anne Morrison, the academic director for the department of teaching and learning, said most students receive an ELL or bilingual endorsement, especially because many are Spanish-speaking and some are Russian.

"Most of our students are going to go out and teach in very very diverse classrooms, and a lot of our students are bilingual," Morrison said of the program, which focuses on culturally-responsive teaching in all classes and has one course devoted to diversity.

Students are in classrooms several hours per semester as a part of practicum experiences, and they are required to have at least one placement in each of the surrounding Tri-Cities school districts.

"They can't just teach in Richland which has very low diversity," Morrison said. "They have to do at least one and usually two practicum experiences in Pasco, which Pasco has 90 to 95 percent minority [students] within their schools and a lot of English language learners."

The main WSU campus in Pullman had 638 students enrolled in the School of Education, more than eight times that of the Tri-Cities campus.

The Pullman campus places student

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SCHOOLS

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The Alt-Route programs at EWU and WSU Tri-Cities started after the first grants came available in 2015, around the same time CWU started its own self-sustaining version. WSU Pullman started a program in 2016 with grant funding to specifically recruit and train Native American teachers. Each of these schools offers different ranges of four alternative route options laid out by Washington's Professional Education Standards Board.

Route one was created for school staff members, like paraeducators, who have an associate's degree; routes two and three are for staff or career changers with a bachelor's degree; and route four is for staff with bachelor's degree and a limited teaching certificate. Limited teaching certificates — a conditional, transitional or intern substitute certificate — must be requested by the prospective employer, generally for someone in a teacher preparation or student teaching program.

What each route has in common is a required 540 hours of clinical practice, or about half of a school year of full-time student teaching, but they diverge in terms of coursework that the university requires.

WSU Tri-Cities only has route one, while CWU offers routes two through four and EWU offers all of them.

CWU — which only offers route two through four to students already with bachelor's — uses a hybrid program with a two-week summer bootcamp and the rest of the education curriculum online throughout the year.

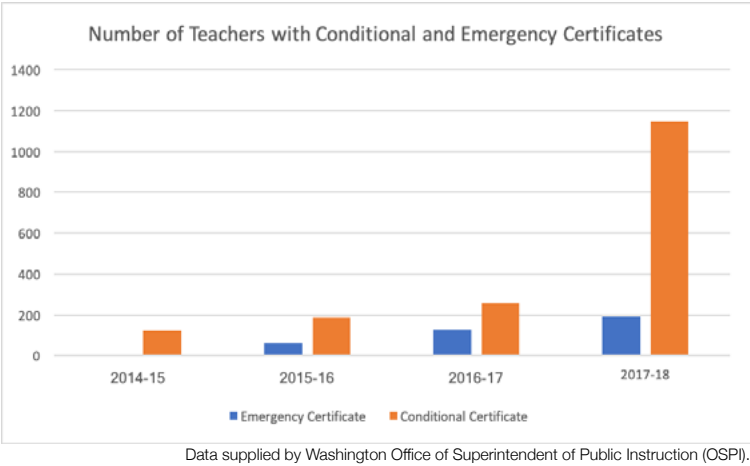
Jacobson, the executive director of the college at CWU, said program enrollment has grown steadily in the last few years: 20 students two years ago, 30 last year, 60 this year and more than 100 expected next year.

EWU's program is a hybrid, too, where students meet twice per month for class in person and the rest of their work is completed online. It is also competency-based, meaning when candidates pass assessments they are able to move on.

Henning, EWU's undergraduate program director, said this can benefit paraprofessionals who have many years of classroom experience working with students, whereas a career-changer might take longer to show mastery of material.

EWU's alt-route program also offers endorsements in special education and ELL.

WSU Tri-Cities graduated its first cohort of 18 alt-route teachers



last May, all of which were full-time paraeducators during the two-year program that started in 2016.

"The districts really like it because they see it as growing their own teachers," said Morrison, the Tri-Cities academic director. "They're not going to just get their degree and leave because they're already settled in the community."

Since almost all of WSU Tri-Cities' alt-route students need to complete a bachelor's, they take classes starting their first summer and throughout the year at night to earn the necessary general university credits.

Now, there are three cohorts with a total of 37 students at different stages of the program, and the school has partnered with a handful of districts to certify paraeducators. About 15 of those students are becoming endorsed in either ELL or bilingual education through a partnership with WSU Vancouver that earned them a \$2.2 million U.S. Department of Education grant. The rest of the students are required to either earn an ELL or special education endorsement through a PESB block grant.

WSU Pullman has the most specialized alt-route program, which specifically recruits Native American teachers, called the Ti'tooqan Cuukweneewit project.

Seven teachers and three administrators in their second year are funded by a four-year Office of Indian Education grant, while another six students, who started this year, are funded by a PESB block grant.

Akmal, the department chair, said the program takes a hybrid approach through video conferences and monthly meetings, while adopting an assets-based approach to complement Indigenous knowledge systems.

"We're trying take what they know and apply that to what's required for teacher preparation, and help them look at teaching and learning and licensure through their lens," Akmal said.

When it comes to science, for example, Akmal said professors might help students develop pedagogy around Indigenous storytell-

ing traditions and sense of community to teach about the water cycle.

Though these programs seem to be successful on paper, there is some debate about their long-term effectiveness for producing a high number of quality teachers.

Jacobson, from CWU, said some of the alternative route programs aren't as rigorous as traditional routes. And since, according to PESB, about a quarter of candidates in these alt-route programs are people of color compared to 11 percent of all teachers, he worries this targets underserved populations with a lesser program.

Takmal, of WSU, disagrees, arguing that a 20-year-old in Pullman just has different experience than a paraprofessional with 15 years of experience.

"That assumes the idea that a traditional program is better, and it also assumes that the kind of student that is going into an alternative program maybe isn't as good. And I don't think that's true, I think they're different."

None of these alt-route programs were very revolutionary, and actually joined a field of other nontraditional paths to the classroom created in 2011, like Teach For America, a nonprofit that has put mostly recent college grads into low-income schools since 1989.

Teach For America Washington places students west of the Cascades in Rainier Prep Charter School and Sumner School District and east of the Cascades in rural Yakima Valley school districts like Sunnyside and Grandview. Since 2014, there have been 250 "corps members," who agree to minimum two-year term, placed in Washington. A total of 52 are in Washington schools this year, including 28 new members.

In 2017, Washington corps members trained for four weeks over the summer to prepare for the 2017-18 school year, according to 2017 Gonzaga business administration graduate and current corps member Lindsey Hand. Most days she taught summer school students for 90 minutes alone and then co-taught an additional hour, and then



went on to lead a third-grade classroom in rural Sunnyside, Washington full-time her first day of school.

One of the concerns about Teach For America is the rate of teachers who leave education, especially with a high turnover rate among traditionally trained teachers already and shortages in rural schools like Hand's. Less than half of new teachers remain in a school after five years, and a little more than 20 percent leave the profession or the workforce in Washington, according to a 2017 University of Washington study for OSPI.

Hand said the handful of TFA alumni who are still employed by the district seem to be the exception, not the rule.

Leslie Rodriguez, a 2015 graduate of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, was a TFA corps member in her hometown of Houston for through the 2016-17 school year. She's one of 34 percent of TFA alumni who still serve as K-12 teachers, and has worked as a Green Park Elementary School bilingual teacher back in Walla Walla since 2017.

Though Whitman College hasn't offered a degree in education for several years, it does send students on to careers in education through a pre-teaching advising program and a large number of classroom volunteer opportunities.

A broad range of programs that put college students in K-12 classrooms have inspired some, like senior Gareth Jones, to pursue careers as teachers and administrators.

The school, which has awarded around 370 bachelor's degrees the last few years, has sent about 20.7 percent of graduates into careers in education, according to its Whitman Wayfinder web application.

"I think Whitman fosters an interest in education even if they don't have a program specifically dedicated for it," Jones said.

Looking Ahead

PESB is lobbying for additional funds to support its Alternative Route Block Grant program, which receives \$1.8 million annually and could only award 29 percent of re-

quested funds for 2018-2020. Since 2016, the grant has supported more than 250 teacher candidates.

Expanding the alt-route program could help diversify classrooms, with 42 percent of block-grant supported participants in 2017 being of color compared to 21 percent of traditional route students, PESB says. It requested nearly \$8.5 million during this year's legislative session to support alt route programs, the Educator Retooling conditional loan scholarship, Grow Your Own programs and the Recruiting Washington Teachers and Bilingual Educators initiatives.

Grow Your Own partnerships, which CWU has several of, offer college credit for education courses taken in high school. Jacobson said CWU hopes to partner on up to 100 within the next several years to get students thinking about careers in education, which PESB says will increase workforce diversity.

Similarly, Recruiting Washington Teachers and Bilingual Educators programs recruit bilingual and underrepresented high school students to become educators and supports them in getting college-ready.

For current teachers, the Educator Retooling conditional loan scholarship awards certified educators up to \$3,000 per endorsement for adding them in shortage areas like special education, middle level STEM and ELL. For paraprofessionals, the "Parapipeline" conditional loan awards up to \$4,000 to paraprofessionals entering a route one program with at least three years of experience.

Earlier this month, the Seattle Times reported the state Senate passed two bills that would improve federally mandated special education services in part through increased funding and teacher training.

With the momentum of the McCleary decision and collectively bargained pay raises, the end of the legislative session in April will show teachers, prospective educators and other stakeholders what the future of teacher development and preparation may hold.

The Gonzaga Bulletin Courtesy Photo

"I'm creating these new citizens that will hopefully help contribute to society."

Gonzaga senior Megan Dillon.

Courtesy Photo

"I truly enjoy and truly love the work that I do. It's really overwhelming at times, but I do love it."

Gonzaga alumna Lindsey Hand.

Courtesy Photo

"Working in the schools the past couple years [has been] consistently the best part of my week."

Whitman Senior Gareth Jones.

Courtesy Photo

"I can make a huge change or I can influence students right in the classroom."

Whitman alumna Leslie Rodriguez.

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classes for students in wheelchairs. She applied some of those skill at her most recent summer job with the Seattle Parks and Recreation Department's specialized summer camp.

"I found out that a lot of times kids with disabilities kind of miss out on some of the things their peers do," which was rewarding to be able to offer, she said.

Right now, Shikany is a student teacher with East Valley High School's Transition Program, which was started by her supervising teacher to help individuals age 18 to 21 gain job skills and learn to access resources.

"Basically, the overall goal of a transition program is that we're helping give them the tools so that they can be included in society and that they can be independent," she said.

Shikany was recently accepted into the University of Washington's Low Incidence master's program — which prepares teachers to work with individuals with severe disabilities — and she said she's interested in working in Spokane afterward. She said Spokane, although smaller than Seattle, has more resources for individuals with disabilities and therefore more exciting job opportunities.

Megan Dillon

Megan Dillon, who will graduate from Spokane's Gonzaga University in May with a degree in sociology and a teaching certificate

in elementary education, is the only student from this small sample who was set on teaching when she started her degree.

Dillon's childhood baby sitter graduated from Gonzaga's School of Education, giving her some footsteps to follow in order to act on a lifelong passion.

"I feel like I've always been drawn to children," she said. "They just have something so inspiring about them, and they're so full of life and light."

At first, Dillon thought Gonzaga not offering an elementary education major, and instead requiring a major from another school on campus, was a hindrance. However, now she appreciates being able to apply her background in sociology to the classroom, especially in terms of understanding family dynamics.

Though she has tremendous respect for kindergarten teachers, Dillon said her wish is to work in an elementary school with kids in third grade or above. With a teaching certificate in Washington State, she hopes to find a job locally. However, she's been in contact with her former school district at home in California's Bay Area about a reciprocal certificate and a sixth-grade teaching position.

"I think it's fun to teach to inspire (students)," she said. "And it's exciting to be able to say ... I'm creating these new citizens that will hopefully help contribute to society."

Lindsey Hand

Lindsey Hand got into teaching

as a post-grad service opportunity through Teach For America. Hand actually graduated in 2017 with a business degree, but will soon earn a master's in initial teaching (MIT) through UW and be in the hunt for a permanent teaching job.

Hand enjoyed working in Gonzaga's youth mentoring programs and walking local elementary students to school through a health district initiative, but she never thought she'd enjoy teaching until she started working with students in her Sunnyside, Washington, third-grade class.

The Teach For America program recruits high-achieving college graduates to complete a summer teaching bootcamp and work in schools that are short on educators. With a two-year commitment, TFA "corps members" earn a teaching certificate their first year and can go on to earn a master's in year two.

Now in her second year, Hand is working in a fourth-grade class with some of her same students from the year before.

"I truly enjoy and truly love the work that I do," she said. "It's really overwhelming at times, but I do love it."

Hand said after she finishes her two-year commitment she'll consider whether to stay in rural Sunnyside or find a teaching job in Seattle.

Gareth Jones

Two other students interviewed, found their own way to teaching without a degree program at Whitman College in

Walla Walla, Washington. Senior Gareth Jones and 2015 alumna Leslie Rodriguez both reaffirmed a passion for teaching through youth service organizations.

Jones will graduate with a degree in biology and environmental studies, but he hopes to work in an elementary school bilingual program like the one he grew up in in Corvallis, Oregon.

"It seems like a really great way to make a difference in these kids live and give back to the (type of bilingual) program that I benefited from growing up," he said.

After backing away from collegiate soccer his freshman year, he started a job as a community service intern leading a bilingual outreach program at Green Park Elementary School. The last two years he's been a leader in the America Reads/America Counts program at Blue Ridge Elementary School, which helps students with both English literacy and math skills.

"Just working in the schools the past couple years [has been] consistently the best part of my week, just working with the kids," Jones said.

After graduating, he's looking to move to Bend, Oregon, enroll in the local Oregon State master's in teaching program and simultaneously work for in a bilingual position at an elementary school.

"I think Whitman fosters an interest in education even if they don't have a program specifically dedicated for it," he said.

Leslie Rodriguez

Like Jones, Whitman alumna and bilingual teacher Leslie Rodriguez worked in the bilingual program at Green Park Elementary School while she was an undergrad.

"So I think that passion really grew (at that time) and that's kind of where I wanted to make a difference," she said. "And I thought about whether it would be outside the classroom or inside, but honestly my thing is I can make a huge change or I can influence students right in the classroom."

To get into the classroom as a full-time teacher, though, she chose to enter TFA and work in her hometown of Houston. She went to a charter school growing up where many of her teachers were TFA corps members, which in part inspired her to join.

However, looking back now, Rodriguez said she wishes she'd gone to school for education for, in some ways, an easier path to the classroom.

"(TFA summer institute) was very fast paced," she said. "... It was an extreme bootcamp very much. I felt comfortable, but I didn't feel fully prepared for that fall."

Though her first year was hard, Rodriguez said she improved her second year and believes those who are passionate about education can succeed with TFA.

Rodriguez went on to earn her master's from Johns Hopkins University, and her path to teaching has come full circle now that she's employed by Green Park Elementary and has Whitman volunteers in her classes.