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SLU Launches Billiken Teacher Corps

Saint Louis University's School of Education and the Archdiocese of St. Louis have partnered on a unique new program for students pursuing graduate degrees in education. The Billiken Teacher Corps combines service and teaching to offer a unique opportunity for faith driven college graduates to have a transformative impact on Catholic schools in the St. Louis Metro area and live the Jesuit mission of serving a higher purpose for a greater good.

The goal of this academic program is to attract graduates who possess the compassion to care for those most in need, a commitment to their communities and courage to carry out their convictions. Students in the program will receive two years of tuition for a master's level degree in education and teacher certification, a monthly stipend and nominal rent to live in the old convent of St. John the Baptist parish in south St. Louis.

Applicants apply to the program through SLU's graduate school admissions. Selected applicants are interviewed by both the university and St. Louis Archdiocese School Administration. Students for the inaugural class were confirmed and moved into their new residence in May. The summer has included a retreat and coursework at SLU before they begin teaching full time in the fall.

The seven members of the inaugural Billiken Teacher Corps are:

- Sarah Staten - St. Louis (University of Notre Dame): Teaching math and religion at St. Louis the King Cathedral School, grades 6-8
- Elise Earley - Ballwin (University of Missouri - Columbia): Teaching science at St. Cecilia School, grades 6-8
- Jennifer Bruns - Cincinnati, Ohio(Xavier University): Teaching science at Christ the Light of Nations, grades 4-8
- Kelsey Kerr - Lisle, Illinois (Saint Louis University): Teaching at St. Francis Cabrini, grade 3
- Michelle Ehrhard - St. Charles (Truman State University): Teaching at Holy Trinity School, grades 3-4
- Mitch McCurren - Zionsville, Indiana (Saint Louis University): Teaching biology and theology at St. Mary's High School
- Marjorie Plurad - Webster Groves (Columbia College - Chicago): Teaching at Our Lady of Guadalupe, grade 3

The Billiken Teacher Corps is patterned off a program begun by the University of Notre Dame a number of years ago, and while programs like this have been in place at a handful of other Catholic universities, John T. James, Ed.D., Director of SLU's Institute for Catholic Education, says this is a first for the St. Louis metropolitan area.

"It's something we've wanted to get started for some time, and it finally all came together this year due in large part to the collaboration and hard work of the many partners in the program," James said. "Everything fell into place this year!"

James adds that the collaboration is a win-win for everyone involved.

"Leveraging SLU's national reputation, we will be able to attract highly talented and motivated candidates from across the country who wish to make a two-year commitment to serve in an urban Catholic school," James said. "The candidates benefit by growing as individuals within an intentional faith community, and by completing a Master's degree in Education with state certification while performing their two years of service. Of course the schools and their students benefit by being taught by these highly talented, motivated and faith-filled young people under the careful tutelage and supervision of SLU faculty and staff. Finally, the University benefits by advancing our mission and strengthening the pipeline of Catholic educational



The Billiken Teacher Corps students will spend the summer preparing for their fall teaching assignments at local Catholic schools. Front Row: Sarah Staten, Marjorie Plurad, Michelle Ehrhard; Back Row: Elise Earley, Jennifer Bruns, Kelsey Kerr, Mitch McCurren. Photo courtesy of Weston Kenney, St. Louis Review

opportunities for all by supporting urban Catholic education in the city."

[Click here for information on the Billiken Teacher Corps.](#)

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