



Photo Credit: Shuana Niessen

Front (L-R) Jerry Orban, Manager, Student Placements and Field Experiences and Dr. Xia Ji, newly appointed Director of Professional Development and Field Experiences, and Louise Laverdiere, Assistant to the Director.

# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND FIELD EXPERIENCES

*By Shuana Niessen*



## Internship Seminars

One of seven internship seminars was held August 18 - 20 at the Faculty of Education for a group of fourth-year students who are interning in schools for 16 weeks in the fall term. Internship seminar is where students and cooperating teachers meet, usually for the first time. The seminar facilitates the development of a collaborative and respectful working relationship between students and their cooperating teachers..

At the seminar assembly, a variety of scenes were role played to show how issues can arise during the internship: the overworked, exploited intern; the intern who

isn't quite taking their internship seriously, and so on.

Dr. Xia Ji, the newly appointed Director of Student Placements and Field Experiences participated in the seminar this year. She replaces Dr. Twyla Salm, who has diligently directed the Professional Development and Field Experiences (PD&FE) office over the past 7 years. Manager, Jerry Orban and Assistant to the Director, Louise Laverdiere, also work throughout the year to ensure all students have placements.

## Working Out Expectations at Internship Seminar

During the seminar, interns and cooperating teachers could be found in every nook and cranny of the Faculty of Education. As Teacher Cathy Truong discusses plans with Intern Kristen Lowe, she comments, "This seminar is really helpful and valuable." Intern Kristen Lowe agrees, "I feel really lucky to be participating in this seminar."



Intern Kristen Lowe and Cooperating Teacher, Cathy Truong

As interns and cooperating teachers work together, some of their discussions are focused around the Internship Placement Profile (IPP) evaluation sheet, which lists qualities, skills, and competencies necessary for preservice teachers to develop personally and professionally throughout their internship and program. Further, Lowe says, "Going through this list helps to establish expectations for the internship."

Using a template, interns and cooperating teachers also develop a contract together. Orban says,

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“The contract details the working relationship between the interns and the cooperating teachers, everything from where to park to what each will be doing, in which classes, and what dates to expect. It’s a work in progress and each contract will be different.” The understanding that interns and cooperating teachers reach during internship seminar supports the working relationship throughout the internship.

The internship seminar provides a 3-day block of focused time for interns and cooperating teachers to establish working relationships and to discuss their expectations before the busy school year begins. The fourth-year internship is one way that the Faculty of Education demonstrates its commitment to assisting preservice teachers in becoming knowledgeable, competent, and caring teachers.

### **The Professional Development and Field Experiences (PD&FE) Office**

The Faculty of Education places a strong emphasis on field experiences, which help students to integrate the theory they are learning in their programs with practical applications.

The PD&FE office organizes internship seminars and internships along with placements for other student field experiences that occur in each level of 4-year education programs.

### **An Interview With the New Director**

#### **1. What is the scope of your work as Director?**

After almost three months into the PD&FE office, I am still feeling its scope and boundaries. What I have learned is that there seems to be much room for our collective



Dr. Xia Ji, Director

(re)imagining of the roles and responsibilities of the PD&FE office. I am grateful for such trust and openness.

#### **2. What do you see as being of value about the work of the PD&FE office?**

Field experience is the living laboratory for someone learning to become a teacher. This office plays a crucial role in facilitating the integration of field experiences in every year of our mostly four-year teacher education programs. We do this in consultation and collaboration with our various partners. *It takes a village to raise a child.* It takes a whole city and province to educate a teacher. The team of the PD&FE office, namely Louise Laverdiere, Jerry Orban and myself, continue to build upon and strengthen the relationships we have with various communities and partners in Saskatchewan. Both Louise and Jerry have accumulated years of experiences, knowledge, and insights regarding the work related to the PD&FE office. I am truly grateful to be working alongside of them. I am also thankful for the support from our educational partners.

A unique feature of our teacher education program is the 3-day internship seminars where “teaching for social justice and for a better world” is valued and modeled, and where interns and their mentor teachers develop close relationships, and learn to work together to set goals, to plan, and to problem solve. The

PD&FE office works with a team of dedicated seminar leaders to ensure these seminars run successfully. Finally, as our Faculty and University continue to evolve and transform, I hope the value of the work of the PD&FE office will also evolve and transform.

#### **3. What is your vision for the future direction of this office?**

With the launching of our University’s new Strategic Plan (2015-2020), *peyak aski kikawinaw*—Cree for “We are one with Mother Earth,”—I anticipate the PD&FE office will play an important role both within our Faculty and in inter-Faculty, university-wide collaborations in supporting student success, research impact, and commitment to communities. I see civic discourse as a tool to invigorate life at work places. The PD&FE office is positioned to support wide engagement within and beyond our own Faculty so as to imagine possibilities for our services and programs. We will continue to maintain and strengthen the relationships we have with our various partners locally and internationally. By working with other offices and programs in the Faculty and with our education partners in Saskatchewan, we hope to support the recruitment and retention of teacher candidates from more diverse backgrounds. The strong links we have with partner Aboriginal teacher education programs could lead to further conversations and sharing of ideas and practices in regards to professional development and field experiences for people drawn to our Faculty. There is also much to learn from one another regarding the concepts, values, and practices around Indigenization and sustainability.