Master’s Students Use Real-World Connections to Engage in Education Policy

Jeremy Friedman always had a passion for education and business, but was torn between which direction he would take this. So in 2010, shortly after the University of Rochester economics graduate ('08) discovered a new pathway within the University that would allow him to pursue an educational career on a more global level, he enrolled in the educational policy master’s program at the Warner School of Education.

Launched in 2009, the master's degree in educational policy, which can be completed in one year, has demonstrated to Friedman that he does not have to be a certified classroom teacher in order to have a meaningful impact on schools and the lives of children.

“My Mom’s a teacher so education has always been very important to me growing up,” explains Friedman, who also hopes to make a difference for youth. “I always thought that you go into education to become a teacher, and I didn't think that I wanted to be a teacher.”

The condense, intensive program was created for individuals who want to help improve education—but not necessarily in a classroom or school—and want to become skilled and effective advocates for education policy at the local, state, and federal levels. The program is interdisciplinary in nature, allowing students to examine complex policy issues from multiple lenses, like sociology, politics, economics, business, and law.

Field research projects are a key feature of the master's program, combining cutting-edge research and theory with hands-on, real-world experience necessary to affect tangible positive change. The four-month project, which typically runs concurrently with spring semester, gives students the opportunity to conduct an applied policy project in a local organization as part of their coursework. Each student, with the help of his/her advisor, secures a placement with a nonprofit,
governmental, or policy organization. Students then gain hands-on, real-world experience while examining a specific educational policy issue or problem.

“Our goal is to have students gain additional knowledge and skills by expanding upon the types of things they learn about in our classes through their master's program,” explains Kara Finnigan, who directs the educational policy program, “and applying these understandings by focusing on a real-life policy problem. Another benefit of these field projects is that they give students a chance to give back to the community.”

This year’s cohort is working on policy issues at the local, state, and federal levels.

Friedman, whose policy interest concerns out-of-school-time—in particular afterschool and summer schools, worked with a local agency called The Children’s Agenda as part of his field project. He devoted most of his time to working on community development grant findings. Ways to get urban youth more of the resources they need to succeed. In this role, he also works with various lobbyists, funders, and community organizations on ways to allocate funds toward youth services for afterschool programs and buildings.

“I'm getting practical, relevant, real-world policy experience that I probably would not have gotten otherwise with a traditional program where this is not built in,” he says. “I definitely think that I'm developing great skills in reaching out to people and asking the right diplomatic questions, while also honing my research skills. I've also learned a lot about the roles of perception and the politics of policy in education and funding—that’s definitely been a valuable lesson for me.”

Carolyn Lee-Diots, who oversees Friedman at The Children’s Agenda, says that their goal is to offer graduate students an opportunity to practice their skills in the real world. “We want to give them a chance to analyze local policies that affect outcomes for children and youth and a glimpse into what legislative advocacy looks like,” she explains. “We’ve been glad to have this chance to connect with Warner and very impressed with the students we have received—they walk in ready to work and have offered valuable expertise and analysis to our organizational work.”

Nicholas Rastegar, who teaches French and Spanish at Brockport High School, chose to enroll in the master’s program after seeing the dearth of teaching positions and the class policy and the community. Going through a traditional teacher preparation program had left him well equipped for the daily operations of doing to address race and poverty concentration across the country.

“In highlighting this issue, it will outline the ways in which we as a society can bring about change that offers disadvantaged students more equal resources and educational opportunities,” adds Williams, who believes that race and poverty are significant barriers to effective and equitable education in the United States.

Other students in the cohort have been placed at WNYC, Rochester City School District Parent Engagement/Student Placement, and the Warner School’s Department of Educational Leadership.

This year’s cohort is a diverse group of students with different backgrounds in economics, psychology, women’s studies, business, political science, and education. “These students connect with each other around policy issues, but they have diverse backgrounds that they bring to the program,” says Finnigan. “While they go out into different directions for their field placements, they have forged strong relationships and, as a result, are able to support each other along the way.”

Students agree that the cohort experience has been a critical part of their field research projects and the educational policy program as a whole.

“It is a unique and valuable resource that I have drawn on numerous times since starting my program,” says Finnigan. “The members of my cohort have been my support network, my editors and, most importantly, my peers. Someday when we are all employed, I know that the bonds we have formed will extend far beyond River Campus, and hopefully contribute to a sense that allows us to arrive at real education reform that works.”

Friedman adds, “Aside from the pay-as-you-forward mentality of each of us trying to help the other person, it’s just nice that we’re all working together because often there’s so many disconnected pieces in policy, and it’s nice to have them all connect.”

The master’s program in educational policy remains a new and exciting option at the Warner School for those individuals who are interested in system-wide educational change. “We are currently looking for individuals from diverse backgrounds who are interested in learning more about policy design, implementation, and evaluation at the local, state, and federal levels,” Finnigan says.

For more information about the Warner School's educational policy program, please visit the Warner website at www.rochester.edu/warner/programs/edl/policy or contact Kara Finnigan at kfinnigan@warner.rochester.edu.
The researchers hope that the study will impact early childhood professional development practices and influence teacher change and work satisfaction among early childhood teachers by promoting a system that provides more administrator support, positive co-worker relations, and teacher autonomy in pursuing various professional development activities.

According to the article, teachers who work in early childhood classrooms are likely to feel empowered by the support of their supervisors and co-workers to perform at higher levels and take advantage of the professional development program itself. The study found that teachers who work in early childhood programs had higher levels of satisfaction, engagement, and change in their teaching practice. They point to Morrell’s work as a strong example of the balanced relationship possible between theory and practice in literacy research.

Hyrson presents at NYU

Doctoral student Nadine Hyrson presented at the 2011 International Education Conference at the Steinhart School of Culture, Education & Human Development at New York University in March. Hyrson’s presentation examined urban-suburban programs and how they have evolved to provide access to educational opportunities and services to lower socioeconomic status urban minority children.

Kirschenbaum Presents Workshops in Europe

Howard Kirschenbaum, interim professor, presented two one-day workshops on Re-Discovering Carl Rogers and the Person-Centered Approach to Teaching Academic Literacies. The workshops focused on how Rogers’ work can inform literacy instruction and research.

Husts, Henderson Co-author Article

David Hursh, associate professor, and doctoral student Joseph Henderson co-authored the article “Contesting Global Neoliberalism and Creating Alternative Futures” which was published in (Vol. 32, Issue 2) Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education. In the article, Hursh and Henderson argue that neoliberalism has been marginalized as part because the power elite who benefit from the policies have gained control over both public debate and policy-making and that by dominating the discourse and logic regarding economic, environmental, and education decision-making, neoliberal policies have largely succeeded in marginalizing alternative conceptions.

Douglas Awarded AERA Travel Grant

Doctoral student BI Douglas was awarded a travel grant of $500 from the Susan B. Anthony Institute for Women in Leadership. The grant will support the student to present her research at the AERA (American Educational Research Association) conference held in New Orleans in April. For more information on Warner participation at AERA, see pages 6-7.

Hundley Presents at AERA

Mary Jane Curry, associate professor, and doctoral student EdM Amy Hyneman co-authored a review of the book Critical Literacy and Urban Youth: Pedagogies of Access, Dissent and Liberation by Ernest Morrell. In the review, published in the January issue of Pedagogy: An International Journal (Vol. 6, Issue 1), Curry and Hyneman analyze and summarize Morrell’s book, in which he presents an overview of critical literacy as a transformative approach in literacy education that has been influenced by a number of critical theoretical movements. In addition, they discuss Morrell’s research on the implementation of critical literacy approaches with urban youth and the implications of this work for more equitable and transformative teaching. They point to Morrell’s work as a strong example of the balanced relationship possible between theory and practice in literacy research.

Emery Receives Conference Scholarship

Doctoral student Kristen Emery has received a 2011 Golden Key NASPA Annual Conference Scholarship. This scholarship was created in an effort to support the first time NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) conference attendance of the future generation of student affairs professionals. The funds covered pre-conference workshops and conference registration fees, travel to and from the conference, and other conference expenses. The 2011 NASPA conference was held in March in Philadelphia, Penn.

Carry, Radigan Co-author Book Review

Mary Jane Curry, associate professor, and doctoral student EdM Amy Hyneman co-authored a review of the book Critical Literacy and Urban Youth: Pedagogies of Access, Dissent and Liberation by Ernest Morrell. In the review, published in the January issue of Pedagogy: An International Journal (Vol. 6, Issue 1), Curry and Radigan analyze and summarize Morrell’s book, in which he presents an overview of critical literacy as a transformative approach in literacy education that has been influenced by a number of critical theoretical movements. In addition, they discuss Morrell’s research on the implementation of critical literacy approaches with urban youth and the implications of this work for more equitable and transformative teaching. They point to Morrell’s work as a strong example of the balanced relationship possible between theory and practice in literacy research.

Successful Dissertation Defenses Announced

Following is a list of recent dissertation defenses completed in April. (Only those who have given permission to announce have been included.) To read the abstracts of these and other dissertations, visit warner.rochester.edu/research/epod dissertations.

Cathy Hauser, EdD, school leadership

The Phyllos-Cliffon School District Wants to Meet the Needs of Students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

Margie Hodges Shom, EdD, educational policy and theory

Coaching as a Form of Instruction and a Component of Medical Ethics Education

Christine M. Mecke, EdD, school leadership

The Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning: A Program Evaluation of a Universal Pre-Kinder Garden Program

Kathy Zodarecky, EdD, school leadership

The Journey to Becoming a Writer: A Program Evaluation of a Universal Pre-Kindergarten Writing Curriculum

Kate Avery, EdD, school leadership

Decreasing Freshman Failure Rates at Brockport High School: A Decision Analysis

Lisa Hiley, PhD, teaching and curriculum

“Hang On to it Until September”: Literacy Experiences for Children with Complex Communication Differences During Summer Months

Stefanie Rich, EdD, school leadership

Implementing Rigorous Programming at Gates Chili High School: A Decision Analysis

Mindy J. Hopper, PhD, teaching and curriculum

Positional as Bystanders: Deaf Students’ Experiences and Perceptions of Informal Learning Environments

The researchers hope that the study will impact early childhood professional development practices and influence teacher change and work satisfaction among early childhood teachers by promoting a system that provides more administrator support, positive co-worker relations, and teacher autonomy in pursuing various professional development activities.

French, a former Spencer Fellow and Fullbright Scholar, teaches courses in child development, language and literacy development, learning theory, informal learning, and early childhood education at the Warner School. Her research explores the relationship between language and cognitive development during the preschool years, with emphasis on the roles of social interaction and prior knowledge.

Daly Wagner, who received her doctorate in teaching, curriculum, and work attitude surveys, coupled with qualitative analysis of teacher interviews, points to factors within the workplace that influence teachers’ intrinsic motivation for professional growth and factors that contribute to change in their teaching practice.

According to the article, teachers who work in early childhood classrooms are likely to feel empowered by the support of their supervisors and co-workers to perform at higher levels and take advantage of the professional development program itself. The study found that teachers who work in early childhood programs had higher levels of satisfaction, engagement, and change in their teaching practice. They point to Morrell’s work as a strong example of the balanced relationship possible between theory and practice in literacy research.

More for information about the study, read Daly Wagner and French’s article, “Motivation, Work Satisfaction, and Teacher Change Among Early Childhood Teachers,” that was published in the April-June 2010, volume 24, no. 2, issue of JRCE.
Listed below are University of Rochester participants in the 2011 AERA Annual Meeting.

Nancy Ares
Forstering the Lives of Residents in a Community Change Initiative

Nancy Ares
Learning What ‘Hers’ Unexpected Interactions in Learning Science and Youth Participatory Research

Julie Ann White, Andrew Wall, Nakihoku Kawaiku O’Connor, Margaret Verden, and Chelsea Bailey Shek
Alcohol Use, Power, and Gender: Reconfiguring Students’ Alcohol Use in Social Fields of the Community College Setting

Andrew Wall, Nakihoku Kawaiku O’Connor, Julie Ann White, Margaret Verden, and Chelsea Bailey Shek
Back to Basics: Why College Needs to Reorientize Concern Over Student Alcohol Consumption

Tomas Bauman
Coloring Outside the Lines: A Queer of Color Epistemologies and Pedagogies: Redefining Modes of Educational Scholarship

Edward Brockenbrough (chair)
SHE’S On Top (?): Public Pedagogies of Gender and Sexuality

Edward Brockenbrough (chair)
Working Group: Building Theoretical and Research Collaborations Among LGBTQ Communities - Presidential Session

April Luchmann and Rachel Claffter
Redefining Science as Re-Authored: An Inquiry Club With an Academic Best

Jeffrey Choppin (discussant)
Influence of Teachers’ Knowledge and Beliefs on Instructional Practice

Jeffrey Choppin
Impact of Resources in Curriculum Materials on Teachers’ Instructional Practices

Judy Marques Kiyama, Donna Marie Harris, Amalia Zuleyman Duque-Gerbitz, and Emily Marie Martinez-Vigo
Fighting for Respect: Latina Stories of Resistance Shaping Educational Opportunities

David Hudson and Joseph Henderson
Contesting Global Neoliberalism and Creating Alternative Futures

Brian Bailey (Nazareth College), April Luchmann, and Joseph Henderson
Telling Stories Out of School: Youth Identity Construction Through Participating in Scientific Investigations in Belize

Kevin Meuwissen
Reframing Practices and Practicing Social Studies Teachers’ Conceptions of Pedagogical Autonomy

Constance Fishlove-Smith, Nikki Fangland, and David Miller
Capitalizing on Social Networking Practices to Increase Adolescent Literacy Engagement: A Study of Six Classrooms Using Literacy Engagement and Achievement Passport (LEAP)

Sandra Quiniones
Educators Enterrner: Exploring the Concept of Sex-Biased Education With Puerto Rican Diasporic Communities

Félix Rodrigo
The Office: The Construction of Disability in a Test Anxiety

Warner Heads to New Orleans for AERA

The 2011 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) was held in New Orleans in April. This year’s program, “Inscribing the Social Imagination: Education Research for the Public Good,” was intended to address the conceptual, methodological, policy, and pragmatic challenges and opportunities in re-imagining the promise and potential of education research.

Joanne Larson, Michael W. Scandling Professor of Education and chair of teaching and curriculum, was the 2011 program committee chair.

Larson says the 2011 AERA Annual Meeting was a resounding success. “All the hard work over the past year paid off,” says Larson. “Keynote speakers pushed themselves and were at the top of their game. Many seasonal, even cynical academics, told me they were going to more sessions than ever and that this was the best AERA yet. I was enormously proud of the work 2011 President Kris Gutierrez and I accomplished.”
Sunser ’10 (EdD) Named GCC President

With parents who never had the chance to go to college, James Sunser ’10 (EdD) grew up to appreciate education as a fundamental piece of the American dream.

“It was important to get an education not only because nobody could take it away from you, but because it allowed you opportunities to do more—and to give back more,” says the newly appointed president of Genesee Community College, effective August 2011, and a recipient of Warner’s Tyll van Geel Award. The honor recognizes a doctoral student in educational leadership who demonstrates the commitment to leadership, decision making, and practice demonstrated by van Geel, professor emeritus and a renowned scholar of education law and applied ethical issues in education.

As vice president of continuing and extended learning at Onondaga Community College (OCC), Sunser has helped to create programs that support nontraditional students, including adults and those who have been away from the college scene for awhile. One new initiative, to be implemented in fall 2011, is a three-credit-hour course for adjunct professors. Building on his dissertation at Warner, which centered on applied principles of student success in the community college’s accelerated business degree program, Sunser is designing the course to help adjuncts recognize different learning styles and then identify various ways to teach to those styles.

He hopes the course will evolve into a series leading to certification.

Sunser says the lessons he learned at Warner, particularly how to conduct “good, solid and credible research,” has been instrumental in saving time otherwise spent on questioning bias and challenging strategy.

“The structure of the program exposed me to multiple facets of higher education, administration, and leadership on a much more granular level,” he explains of his decision to attend Warner, where he commuted from Syracuse, N.Y. “Getting into the mechanisms for synthesizing research and using it to guide decisions was really important because we were dealing with scholars and faculty members who valued that.”

While Sunser enjoys setting policies and procedures that help OCC’s overall mission, he makes time to teach graduate and undergraduate business courses as an adjunct professor at Keuka College.

“Sometimes you put in so many hours and get so wrapped up in what you have to do that it’s hard to imagine doing anything else,” he says. “But I just missed working with students and making those connections on a more personal level.”

And that brings him back to his parents.

“Not only did they instill the importance of education, but it became a lifetime commitment for me.”