First Careers in Education Professions
Trek to Boston is a Resounding Success

By Noraida Colón ’15 and Lindsay Ewing ’15

During interterm 2015, a group of students, interns and staff—nine from Amherst College and three from Mount Holyoke College—embarked on the first Education Trek to Boston, Massachusetts. Organized by Robert Siudzinski, Director of Amherst’s Careers in Education Professions Program, and Sarah Frenette, Coordinator of the Five Colleges Teacher Licensure program, the “trek,” or experiential trip, aimed to expose students interested in the field of education to a variety of educators, educational settings, and pedagogical practices.

Over two and a half days, the group visited six learning environments. These included the Jeremiah Burke High School in Dorchester, Excel Academy in East Boston, the Dorchester Boys and Girls Club, the City Year headquarters, the New England Aquarium Education Department, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Comparative analysis and reflective discussions and writing followed each of the teaching and learning contexts experienced by participants.

Burke High School is a public high school in an underserved area of Boston. It is the school attended by many City Year corps members. City Year, part of AmeriCorps national service network, works to bridge the gap in high-poverty communities by increasing graduation rates. In September of 2014, Burke became the first school in the state to shed its “underperforming” designation. Headmaster Linda McIntyre and 9th grade math teacher Casey Brennan’11 welcomed the college students with tours, information, and allowed them to sit in on instruction.

After an engaging morning at the Burke, students travelled to Excel Charter School, a high performing, “no excuses” charter middle school in East Boston. The school was started by Yutaka Tamura’94 with the help of Seth Reynolds’94, a management consultant who served with Teach for America, and Owen Stearns’94, current CEO of the Excel Academy charter schools and a former strategy consultant to non-profit foundations. Stearns, Reynolds, and Excel Board Trustee Steve Mugford’89 graciously answered the visitors’ numerous questions, provided another engaging tour, and treated the cohort to lunch.

The crew also received an informational tour of the Dorchester Boys and Girls Club, a 4,000-member organization that provides access to over 200 recreational and educational programs each year for a reasonable yearly membership of $5. The day concluded with an informational session at City Year Boston.

On Monday morning, the Careers in Education Professions cohort, or “Ed Pros” met with the education department at the New England Aquarium. The group enjoyed the exposure to an informal learning environment and was impressed by the quality and quantity of resources the aquarium provides to school groups and teachers, both on- and off-site. Later, the students traveled to the Harvard Graduate School of Education for a thought-provoking conversation with alumna Laura Schifter ’03. Schifter is a lecturer at Harvard, as well as a policy analyst focusing on education for children with disabilities.
The trip was a resounding success. The students were honored by the alumni’s and educators’ willingness to give of their time and energy to discuss their careers and by students’ patience with and acceptance of visitors to their classes.

“This trip was an amazing opportunity to see the different aspects of education. We were able to see every cog in the machine, as well as become motivated to better that machine” remarked Kathleen Kelly, MHC ’15.

Gabby Vieira, a junior at Amherst, echoed this sentiment. “It was great to see the amount of people who are passionate about improving education on all levels.”
Over lunch, Seth Reynolds ‘94, Owen Stearns ‘94, and Steve Mugford ‘89 share the challenges and rewards of opening three, soon four, charter schools in Boston.

Owen Stearns ‘94, CEO of the Excel Academy charter schools, discusses leadership with students considering education administration.
Students learn about informal learning environments, community engagement, and school partnerships with the Education Department at the New England Aquarium.

Current EDU Co-President, Bao Tran Tran’17 (on left), gets a historic perspective on the creation of the Amherst College student organization from the founding mother of The EDU, Daniela Fragosa Cho’13, now a history teacher at Boston Preparatory Charter.
In his classroom at Burke High School, Casey Brennan’11, a former Boston Teacher Residency Fellow, discusses his journey to becoming a math teacher.

Harvard Graduate School of Education’s Laura Schifter ’03 discusses education policy with students interested in education advocacy, district leadership, and curricular reform.