

## WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY'S NC TEACH PROGRAM PREPARES NON-TEACHERS FOR EDUCATION CAREERS

Jerome Hughes was very happy serving as coordinator of a program for “students in the middle,” as he describes the Asheville City School system's Advancement via Individual Determination program, better known as AVID.

When the decision was made to add teaching responsibilities to that position, Hughes said he had to think long and hard about whether he wanted to change course. “I didn't know if I had ‘it’,” he said, referring to the ability to manage a classroom. “What convinced me was the rapport I had already developed with students in the AVID program.”



Jerome Hughes (left) and Susan Dryman at work in the classroom.

For Susan Dryman, the choice was much different. Dryman had been a successful newspaper reporter for 14 years, covering education issues and crime, among other things, when she decided to change direction. Since several members of her family were teachers, she had thought about studying education in college, but went into journalism instead. “I was the kid in the neighborhood who played school when I was growing up,” she said. “But I never went in that direction until now.”

In spite of their different paths to careers in education, both Hughes and Dryman are just the kind of people that Western Carolina University is attracting to its NC TEACH program. NC TEACH (Teachers of Excellence for All Children) is designed to help alleviate a statewide shortage of public school teachers by training, supporting and retaining highly skilled, mid-career professionals who are interested in becoming teachers. Initiated in 2000, NC TEACH is a joint, statewide effort of the State Board of Education and the University of North Carolina.

“NC TEACH is aimed at people just like Dryman and Hughes – adults who realized after they began working in other professions that they have a strong interest in becoming educators,” said Janice Holt, coordinator of Western's NC TEACH effort.

“The program helps professionals who want to make a career change and who want to make a difference in the lives of young people today,” Holt said.

At Western, NC TEACH participants take graduate-level courses that can lead to a teaching license or to both a master of arts in teaching degree and a license. Either way, they can become teachers in North Carolina public schools.

Hughes, who also is a minister, now teaches at Asheville High School. “NC TEACH seemed to capture the heart of what I wanted to do as a teacher,” he said. “I had talked with some people who had been through it and found that it offers a great support system, even after graduates get through the program. It offers a very practical foundation for teaching, not just a theory.”

Dryman agreed. “NC TEACH provides a great crash course in getting mid-level professionals ready to step into the classroom,” she said. “With that preparation, I entered the classroom with a behavior management program in hand and two months worth of lesson plans ready to go. It was a really good start.”

Now a language arts teacher at Erwin Middle School in Buncombe County, Dryman says her biggest surprise in the classroom was the emotional reward and the things students do to make her feel appreciated. “You do work very hard,” she said. “Teaching will challenge you intellectually, emotionally, physically and spiritually.” Still, she says, “I should have done this 15 years ago.”