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Aspiring biology teacher from Roxbury wins \$150,000 grant

BY LAURA BRUNO • STAFF WRITER • June 14, 2010

ROXBURY — Kristin Germinario didn't think the sciences were her forte. As a Roxbury High School student she was considering pursuing a graphic arts or communications career. That is until her sophomore year and Julie Bohrer's biology class. That is until her sophomore year and Julie Bohrer's biology class.

"Thanks to Ms. Bohrer, she got me excited about biology and made me feel like I can do this, too," Germinario said.

Six years later, the 22-year-old graduated with top honors this spring from Drew University with a bachelor's degree in biology and plans to pay it forward by inspiring a new generation of students to embrace the sciences.

And she's getting help to make sure she doesn't lose faith along the way like nearly 50 percent of new teachers who drop out of the profession within the first five years.

Germinario is one of 32 aspiring teachers chosen from 200 applicants to receive up to \$150,000 worth of support over five years by the Moorestown-based Knowles Science Teaching Foundation.

Germinario, who is already attending Drew's master of arts in teaching program, knows it's not the best of times to be entering the profession with thousands of teachers being laid off in the state and more nationwide.

"I like to challenge myself, so I see this as a challenge to improve teaching and show the public that teaching requires extremely intelligent, hard working people," Germinario said. "I think the best way to go about this is by being positive and trying to make change."

The Knowles Foundation was created in 1999 to cultivate and support high school science and math teachers. During her fellowship, Germinario will receive financial support for tuition and classroom materials, mentoring from experienced educators and access to a network of other young educators struggling with similar new teacher frustrations.

"My feeling is that she'll play a leadership role in teaching in America," said Drew biology professor Sara Webb. "She could have gone on to medical school, she could have chosen to do anything she wanted and she wants to teach, and that's remarkable."

Webb said Germinario was a driving force at Drew, "galvanizing" fellow biology students to do more than just study, but to get involved on campus. As president of the biology honor society, Germinario organized fundraisers and a science day on campus for inner city students. She also founded the Drew Health Organization, a club devoted to public health issues.

"I'm in awe of her," Webb said. "Not only is she one of the most brilliant biology students ... she's a really effective leader."

What set Germinario apart from the other applicants for the Knowles fellowship was everything she did outside the classroom, said Nicole Gillespie, of the Knowles Foundation. Many applicants have good grades, but it was Germinario's internship and work experiences that put her ahead.

She was a research science intern at Wyeth Pharmaceuticals, was a Drew teaching assistant, interned at the Eritrean mission for the United Nations researching the Millennium Development Goals and taught biology to East Hanover middle school students during a summer enrichment program funded by Novartis.

"Kristin has an interesting perspective on what you can do in science," Gillespie said. "And she's gone above and beyond just doing well in college."

While it was her high school biology teacher who inspired her to pursue science, Germinario said it was an East Hanover seventh grader who inspired her to teach.

During the Novartis enrichment program, Germinario said she was pushed to do a better job when one student had a poor attitude and wouldn't do the work. Germinario said she realized she needed to be more creative and engage the students.

At the end of the program, the parent of that student approached Germinario and thanked her because her daughter told her she wanted to be a biologist when she grew up.

"It inspired me to be a teacher, if I can get even one student excited about the natural world and biology," Germinario said.



Kristin Germinario was awarded the Knowles Science Teaching Foundation Fellowship. (STAFF PHOTO: JOHN BELL)

Article Comments

albatross3 wrote:

What an inspiring story in these difficult times! With all the negative press about teachers and unions, and all the squabbling, it's a breath of fresh air and a glimmer of hope for the educators and students in New Jersey.