Asking the Right Questions

They are headed to the computer lab. In groups of four, the buzzing groups of fifth graders will research biomes in preparation for designing a poster and presentation for their class. But, even before they headed to the lab, Senior Alyssa Schneider asked them two important questions: What do you already know and what do you want to know?

When they finish the unit, she will follow up with one final question: What did you learn? “Students ask questions that help shape the unit,” she says. “And from those questions, I know what I need to cover even if it is outside the textbook. It is our opportunity to find out together the answers to our questions.”

Schneider came to the University of Minnesota Crookston from Racine, Wis., to play volleyball and to major in the health sciences. Her desire has long been to help children so she was considering a career as a pediatric physical therapist.

In her second semester on campus, she found herself revisiting her goals. “I was doing well in the classes in health science, but I wasn’t enjoying them in the way I thought I should be,” Schneider explains. “I love science, I love math, and I love children, and I wanted a major that had the potential for me to combine all three. That’s when I decided I needed to consider teaching.”

As an elementary education major, Schneider discovered her way to help children. It was a perfect match. She delights in seeing elementary students make connections. “They comprehend a great deal, and watching them grasp concepts and relate them is really exciting for me,” she smiles.

Her interest in teaching might be attributed to important teachers in her own life. She recalls her first grade teacher asked the Right Questions

Written by Ruth Navarro ’13 who worked as a communication assistant in University Relations.

When Steffanie Berg had the opportunity to attend U of M Crookston as a Post Secondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) student, she didn’t think twice. Berg knew she would eventually have to start thinking about attending college, so she figured coming to U of M Crookston would help her with that transition. Interestingly enough she knew she didn’t want to stay in Crookston all her life, especially not for her college experience. She wanted to experience being out on her own and having a college experience in a different area.

After her first year at UMC, she decided she would stay. “I loved that professors were so encouraging and the small campus feeling,” Berg explains. Even though she had no clear idea what she would major in, she decided to stick to it. She first tried business management, but later learned about the communication major and decided to go for it. “It was the best choice I could’ve made,” Berg says. She enjoyed the classes she has taken and looks forward to finding a job where she loves what she is doing.

Over the summer she had a wonderful internship experience working at the Detroit Lakes Community & Cultural Center (DLCCC). During her three months at the center, she assisted with marketing strategies for the upcoming theater season, taking and editing pictures, and putting together programs and season books. Berg had the chance to put her skills to the test and learn more about non-profit organizations. “I hope I can get a job where I love what I do, and I think working at a non-profit will suit me well,” explains Berg.

Berg is excited about her upcoming study abroad trip to Greece that will be taking place right after she graduates in May. She has always had a passion for learning about mythology and has taken all the literature courses offered on campus.

“This trip will be an experience of a lifetime,” Berg explains. For eighteen days, students will travel to several locations including Athens, Crete,
who inspired students with her positive, upbeat attitude along with her high school anatomy teacher who made learning fun by engaging students in activities to help them remember. “We were always doing something in anatomy class,” Schneider says. “And, doing is the way I learn best.” It is also the way she loves to teach.

Schneider credits another teacher, her advisor, Marsha Odom, with playing a key role in her success. “Marsha Odom has been so supportive and provided guidance all along the way,” she shares. “I am so grateful to her. Elementary education majors benefit so much from her experience and knowledge in the field.”

In the spring, Schneider will be student teaching at Highland Elementary in Crookston. Following graduation, she will take the two tests necessary to teach in her home state where she hopes to land a job teaching in fourth or fifth grade. “I knew teaching was for me after my first field experience in the second semester of my sophomore year,” she reflects. “After observing, we had the chance to teach, and I taught a class on vertebrates. I was nervous, but once I started, I was comfortable right away and I loved it.

“I just knew from that moment on, I was where I belonged.”