

Interview with Caryl Hodges, Ed.D., Dean of the School of Education and School of Psychology

We are delighted to feature Caryl Hodges, Ed.D., Dean of the School of Education and School of Psychology for this month's administrator profile. Caryl has over 50 years of experience in teaching and administration, ranging from early childhood to graduate levels.

Dr. Hodges came to NDNU from the University of San Francisco (USF), where she was most recently associate dean of the School of Education and an assistant professor in the Teacher Education Program. Prior to her nearly 20 years at USF, she worked as a consultant for Broderbund Software, writing curriculum, developing classroom activities, and reviewing educational software, including "Where in Time is Carmen Sandiego?"

She holds an Ed.D. in International and Multicultural Education from the University of San Francisco and a Master of Arts in Curriculum, Teaching and Learning from Sonoma State University.

Enjoy!

Can you talk a bit about the teacher shortage in this area? Besides the wave of baby boomers moving into retirement and the challenges of online instruction brought about by the pandemic, what other factors have contributed to increasing need?

There has been a teacher shortage crisis brewing since the 90s due to a combination of factors. Probably the biggest factor contributing to this crisis is the general lack of respect and understanding for the demands of the job. We depend on teachers to hold the future, but don't pay them what their work is worth. Ironically, a silver lining to the pandemic is that it brought home how difficult and demanding the work is, and the amount of energy required.

It also goes without saying that we live in the more affluent part of the Bay Area, and it's difficult to live here unless you have significant financial resources. So we're trying a different angle to recruit teacher candidates, looking at individuals who have been successful in their careers and are now open to giving back to their community by becoming teachers. To accomplish this, we are partnering with the local school districts to help us identify people who might be good teachers, teaching assistants or classroom aides and using Sequoia High School District as a model.

What are the different degree and credentialing programs offered at NDNU?

We offer multiple subject credentials for K-8, single subject credential for secondary education, two special education credentials and one in Administrative Services for those who want to become principals or other school leaders. We also offer masters' degrees in Education and Curriculum, Special Education and Teaching English as a Second Language. In addition to educators, we often have individuals working in non-profit agencies with an education focus or museums pursuing a credential or MA in Education.

Why NDNU – for you, as an educator?

I was an Associate Dean at the University of San Francisco and knew most faculty and staff in the School of Education when someone encouraged me to apply for a Dean position at NDNU. While I loved the Jesuit mission at USF and wasn't looking to move to another university, I also love the Sisters' mission too. So, I decided to go for it, and remember on my first drive over to campus being greeted by a herd of

deer. I was surprised to be offered the job, but it's turned out to be a perfect fit. The campus is just idyllic, and there's something about the space – both the grounds and the culture – that calls you to be part of the mission.

Why NDNU – for a prospective student? Are there particular types of students that thrive in an environment such as NDNU?

While there are other plenty of other options available for earning a teaching credential or master's in education, what NDNU has going for it is the type of education we offer, one that's grounded in the Hallmarks and steeped in our inclusive mission of peace, justice, diversity and service. Our graduates are at the top of the list of school districts looking for top-tier teachers. Our program is deeply personalized; we do our best to mentor each and every student, even if that means late night texts or phone calls to problem solve or address concerns. They see in NDNU a place where they can become the teacher and person they want to be.

Are there any stories or anecdotes from your teaching experiences that especially stand out?

It's very gratifying to keep in touch with students that I taught as children early in my career, many of whom are doing incredible things as adults. I very much enjoy working with graduate students; they are amazing in their own right and so inspirational. One graduate student who stands out was doing her student teaching in special education when she was involved in a serious accident. She managed to return to her class within 10 days, so devoted was she to her students. Other students who have raised the bar include a homeless student who persevered and made it through graduation and another who delivered a baby and was in class the following day.

How did you find your professional path? What led you to pursue a career as an educator?

I grew up on a farm where I was active in 4-H; in fact, I still am and this is my 38th year as a 4-H leader. In many ways, 4-H prepared me for teaching. I originally planned to earn my degree in biochemistry but decided working in a lab wasn't for me. I changed my major at the last minute and went into teaching - and never looked back. I've taught art, vocational education, K-8, preschool, secondary education, special education, undergraduates and graduate students; I love the diversity of ages and subject content. Education to me is about the development of the whole person, and it's so gratifying. Teaching is a lifestyle choice – you'll never be bored, you'll never have a free moment, and you'll have lots of "yeah" moments.

What are some of your outside interests?

In addition to 4-H, I love to travel with my family, and I breed and show English Setters. I co-own eight dogs and have two that are licensed therapy dogs.

What else? What would you like to communicate to our readership?

I would like to ask our alumni to help recruit for us; they know first-hand the value of an NDNU education. I would also like to see our alumni mentor undergraduates who will be entering our degree completion program later this year. We are offering scholarship opportunities for students who are undocumented; perhaps there is some interest in sponsoring a student. And finally, please remember the Sisters of Notre Dame and thank them for creating such a vibrant learning community.

Which of the seven Hallmarks resonates the most for you and why?

I carry the hallmarks with me; they are at the core of what I do as an educator, and our faculty include them in their course syllabi. The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur are very inclusive, and the Hallmarks speak to everyone, Catholic and non-Catholic alike and provide an ethical foundation for living in the world. While picking just one is difficult, Hallmark Seven – *We Develop Holistic Learning Communities Which Educate for Life* – encompasses the rest of them.