



From Benedictine University

Attention: Managing, News and Education Editors

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Desire for more rewarding career sends some back to school

Program helps new teachers find career satisfaction

Lisle, Illinois –High unemployment is forcing many Americans to change careers. However, a few are changing careers because they feel a higher call.

As an environmental engineer for 10 years, Daria Pennington of Aurora used super science to make the world a cleaner and better place. Now, the recently-certified high school teacher is helping sculpt the minds of eager young learners.

Pennington is part of a growing group of career-changers leaving engineering careers behind for happiness as a math or science teacher. Juggling the desire to be gainfully employed during a recession and having a job that brings personal happiness, these career changers have abandoned higher-paying jobs for what they say is a fulfilling career as an educator.

“I know I need the fulfillment of watching our youth grow,” said Pennington, who completed the Alternative Teaching Certification Program offered by Benedictine University and is now teaching at Neuqua Valley High School in Naperville.

“I don’t believe it’s a profession meant for everyone, but I am fortunate enough to have found the right career for my personality.”

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Laboring away at a job that provides no personal reward is causing some to look beyond their career border. Seasoned career engineers are choosing university alternative teaching programs as a fast track toward finding their niche in teaching.

Scientific research has dominated much of Tom Juliano's professional career. After earning a bachelor's of science in mechanical engineering and a Ph.D. in materials engineering, the Crystal Lake native experienced career successes in research and publishing.

As an expert in understanding how things align, Juliano said his natural talents are more closely aligned with teaching, where he encourages his students to think beyond the status quo.

"I want my students to come away from my physics classes having their minds stretched into thinking and considering things they never have before," said Juliano, a physics teacher at Mother McAuley High School in Chicago and a 2011 graduate of Benedictine's Alternative Certification Program.

"Being excited about learning and being in an environment with others excited about learning is a state of being that cannot be beat," he added.

Both Pennington and Juliano agree that the abbreviated teaching program, allowing for completion and certification during an eight-week intensive summer session and yearlong paid internship, drew them to the Alternative Certification Program at Benedictine.

The path to certification was alternative but the quality was not. Both graduates rave about the program's quality instruction, mentoring and classroom teaching components, which provided sufficient preparation to lead their own classrooms.

A school bell was ringing inside Pennington and Juliano, and they answered the call to teach.

"I imagined myself as a teacher many times since my first job out of college," Pennington said. "I was a recycling coordinator for a county in Georgia and was able to visit schools to teach students about recycling. That experience sparked my interest and desire to teach.

"Also, throughout my engineering career, one of the most rewarding pieces of my job was to mentor incoming employees," she added.

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Juliano’s epiphany was quite similar.

“I had a great experience with my advisor in graduate school for whom I served as a teaching assistant,” he said. “I continued to mentor and teach other students, and I found that these experiences were becoming the highlights of my career, despite other successes related to research and publishing.

“In the engineering field, there are a fairly limited number of ‘teaching-only’ positions across the United States with the bulk of college or university professor positions being focused on research,” Juliano added. “Most engineering professors I talked with were in the position because they enjoyed research more than students or the art of teaching.

“I was the other way around, and so I decided I needed to teach in a high school environment where I could be surrounded by those who could help teach me the art,” he said.

Benedictine’s Alternative Certification Program provides an eight-week intensive summer training program with an individualized mentor who guides students toward teaching success. Graduates earn an initial teaching certificate and a paid one-year internship through the school district of hire. More than 96 percent find employment within one year of completion.

For more information, visit www.ben.edu/altcert or contact program director John Zigmond at jzigmond@ben.edu or (630) 829-1364.

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Benedictine University is an independent Roman Catholic institution located in Lisle, Illinois just 25 miles west of Chicago. Founded in 1887, Benedictine provides 53 undergraduate majors, 13 graduate and four doctorate programs. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* recently ranked Benedictine University as the seventh fastest-growing campus among private nonprofit master’s universities, and *Forbes* magazine named Benedictine among the top 20 percent of America’s colleges for 2011. Benedictine University’s Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) program is listed by *Crain’s Chicago Business* as the fourth largest in the Chicago area in 2011.



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