



Lynn Woodworth, from left, Dan Bowen, James Shuls, Mike McShane, Stuart Buck and Trae Holzman began their studies this fall in the new education policy doctoral degree program in the College of Education and Health Professions.

Doctoral Class Enrolled Fall 2009

Grade-point average and Graduate Record Exam scores

- Median undergraduate cumulative GPA 3.735
- Median graduate cumulative GPA 3.96
- Median GRE verbal score 645 compared to the national average for education graduate students of 449
- Median GRE quantitative score 675 compared to the national average for education graduate students of 530
- Median GRE analytical score 5.5 compared to the national average for education graduate students of 4.2

Much Expected of Education Reform's Inaugural Class

When the department of education reform at the University of Arkansas announced in 2008 that it had received approval for a new doctoral program, some of the nation's leading educational researchers predicted great things.

Now, with the inaugural class of students on campus, the faculty members of the department within the College of Education and Health Professions feel even more confident.

"We are remarkably proud of the first class," said Jay P. Greene, head of the department, while the six students ate pizza on their first day getting to know their professors and the department's staff. "You have very impressive qualifications. You're clearly committed to education reform and have the intellectual curiosity about education policy to drive your work."

In July 2008, the Arkansas Higher Education Coordinating Board unanimously approved the department's proposal for a doctoral degree in education policy. Students will study K-12 education policy, based on empirical and theoretical research in the social sciences and other academic disciplines.

James Guthrie, chair of Vanderbilt's Peabody College department of leadership, policy and organizations, described

an "absolutely terrific" program that would eventually be rated in the nation's top 10. Eric A. Hanushek, the Paul and Jean Hanna Senior Fellow at the Hoover Institution, said other producers of education researchers – Stanford, Harvard, Michigan – would immediately see that they have competition.

Robert M. Costrell, holder of the department's chair in education accountability, shepherded the new doctoral program through the lengthy approval process.

"There is a growing demand for high-quality, innovative education policy research, both nationally and in Arkansas, and this department was created with the mission of filling that demand," Costrell said. "Our new Ph.D. program will stand out in the field by the exceptional rigor of the empirical training and the reform themes that will be researched and debated in our policy courses."

The students and their educational background:

- Dan Bowen of Pensacola, Fla., bachelor's degree in political science and master's degree in education, both from Notre Dame University.

Bowen taught upper-level social studies in inner-city public schools in Montgomery, Ala., for two years of his master's program, plus an

additional year. He learned about the Ph.D. program at Arkansas from his professors at Notre Dame.

"They said a program was being started here and that it would be a great opportunity for me," Bowen recalled.

He is interested in research about school choice.

- Stuart Buck of Springdale, Ark., bachelor's degree in music from the University of Georgia and a law degree from Harvard University.

Buck heard about the department after practicing law for a few years, telecommuting from Arkansas for a Washington, D.C.-based firm, and was hired as a research associate. Because of his strong interest in education, he decided to apply for the graduate program. He has not narrowed down a topic for his research but is interested in the effect of technology on student achievement.

- Trae Holzman of Fort Smith, bachelor's degree in philosophy from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Employed by Teach For America, Holzman taught high school math at Marianna for two years. A professor at UALR who was a mentor to him had worked with Gary Ritter, holder of the department's endowed chair in education policy, and recommended the graduate program to Holzman.

"I was looking for a way to have an impact on the educational system," he said of his decision to apply.

- Mike McShane of Kansas City, Mo., bachelor's degree in literature and creative writing from Saint Louis University and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Notre Dame.

McShane heard about the Arkansas program from

his roommate – Dan Bowen – when he was also teaching in Montgomery. McShane taught ninth- and 10th-grade English. He is interested in issues pertaining to education in urban areas.

- James Shuls of Pacific, Mo., bachelor's degree from Missouri Southern State University in Joplin and master's degree from Missouri State University in Springfield, both in elementary education.

Shuls, who has two children, Tryston, 4, and Taryn, 3, with his wife, Crissy, taught first grade for three years and fifth grade for one year in Republic, Mo. He had read Greene's book, *Education Myths*, written with Greg Forster and Marcus A. Winters and published in 2005 by Rowman and Littlefield.

"I was looking at Ph.D. programs and saw that Dr. Greene was the head of the department and that the emphasis of the program was education reform," Shuls said. "I'm interested in school choice as well as other areas of education policy."

- Lynn Woodworth of Harrison, bachelor's degree in music education and master's degree in educational leadership, both from Arkansas Tech University.

Woodworth taught band in Mansfield, Ark., for 11 years. After considering whether to pursue an administrative position, he decided he wanted to go further. He is interested in high school curriculum development. "I think it will be interesting to be in the inaugural class of this program," Woodworth said. "It's a unique opportunity." 🌟