

Faculty Travel South of the Border for Global Study

School of Education faculty from East Carolina University traveled to Mexico this summer, as part of a global study program that examines how cultural factors for limited English proficiency students affect learning and achievement.

The "Preparing K-12 Teachers to Educate Latino/Hispanic Students" program, sponsored by the N.C. Center for International Understanding, enables educational institutions to develop teacher training that addresses pedagogical strategies for Latino/Hispanic students.

Vivian Covington, director of teacher education, Todd Finley, associate professor of English education, and Christine Shea, foundations of education professor, participated in the study. They visited schools and universities in Mexico, observed classes and met with teachers and school administrators.

Covington said her immersion into the Mexican culture was a life-changing experience. The group traveled into small communities, meeting families who are unable to find work in their own country.

These families are dependent upon

relatives who cross the border into the United States to earn money.

"I knew jobs were sparse," Covington said, "But I had no idea just

how sparse they really were." Many of the people have no other option but to cross the border into the U.S. for work.

When families cross the border, they often bring young children with minimal English skills into American schools. If those students cannot comprehend the lessons being taught, they will eventually drop out of school, she said.

Covington said that teachers can benefit from knowing some conversational phrases and from engaging Latino/Hispanic students' extended families in the children's school activities. Information sent home should be bilingual, for instance, so that families with minimal English proficiency can understand how their children are doing.

While ECU teacher education already addresses diversity, participants from the trip hope the experience will help them improve ECU's process of teacher preparation.

Their studies can help new teachers develop the skills to not only retain students from other cultures but also to help them succeed in the classroom.



A North Carolina team visiting schools in Mexico included (left to right) Francine Madrey and Donna Benson (partially hidden from view) of Winston-Salem State University; Vivian Martin Covington, ECU; and Manuel Vargas, Appalachian State University. Vargas, a native of Mexico, was one of the program coordinators and translators. (Contributed photo)