June 24, 2013

TO: BU New Orleans students

FROM: S. G. Grant

RE: Independent Study

Folks—A part of your BU masters degree program is the opportunity to construct a project that helps you develop as a teacher. You will register for an Independent Study (EDUC 597) in order to earn the credits, but I’d like to take a few minutes to talk about what this opportunity might look like.

Independent studies can take any number of forms, but the two most common are these:

- A mutually-agreed upon set of readings that you complete in order to improve some element of your subject-matter knowledge and/or your classroom practice. For example, if you wanted to learn more about the American Revolution or using cooperative learning groups, you and I would develop a reading list, you would go off and do the reading, and then you would write a paper that describes your new understandings.
- A mutually-agreed upon project designed to improve some element of your knowledge and practice of teaching. Examples could include using historical fiction to teach a social studies unit, developing a series of hands-on experiments for a science unit, revising the main topics in your math curriculum, or assessing the text complexity of planned student readings in ELA.

These options can, however, be expanded in any number of ways. For example, if you wanted to explore a career in administration, your project might be to interview 2-3 principals about how they think about their jobs. If you wanted to rewrite the school science curriculum, you might work with a colleague to do so. If you wanted to engage your students more fully in their math lessons, you could design an action research study that focused on using a new reward structure. And if you wanted to enlist your students in an out-of-school experience, you could develop a project in which they identify a local issue, meet with community leaders, design an innovative approach to a local problem, and work to get the innovation enacted. The final outcomes of each of these efforts would follow from your intent and so could look very different from those of your peers.

So you can see that the independent study terrain is wide open. Here’s how we’ll proceed:

- Take some time to sketch out one or more ideas for your undertaking and send them along to me (sggrant@binghamton.edu)
- Schedule a time with me for a phone or Skype call so that we can talk through your possibilities
Once we have come to consensus on a plan and product, I’ll be available for whatever assistance you might need.

Given the pace of the masters program, it would be wise to try and complete the independent study by the time your next class starts. That said, if your project can not fit within that time frame, we will develop a reasonable due date.

I’m really looking forward to working with you on these efforts. My faculty rave about how smart, thoughtful, creative, and committed you are as students, so I’ve been looking for opportunities to be involved in the program. They, of course, want to keep all the courses to themselves; they are allowing me to head up the independent study!

So I am ready to start whenever you are.

SG