

Dynamic Duo

Helping rural New Hampshire meet its education needs

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KAYLA CROTEAU '15G AND ALEXZANDRIA STEINER, A STUDENT IN UNH'S TEACHER RESIDENCY FOR RURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM (COURTESY PHOTO)

When Kayla Croteau earned her [master's in secondary education](#) from UNH in 2015, she never imagined that she was only three short years away from another teacher education experience — this time as a teaching mentor for the [University of New Hampshire's Teacher Residency for Rural Education \(UNH-TRRE\)](#) program.

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UNH-TRRE, designed to prepare elementary and secondary math and science teachers to work in rural, high-need New Hampshire schools, is working with its second cohort of future teachers.

These UNH students, known as teaching residents, live, learn, teach and volunteer in rural New Hampshire communities over the course of the 15-month master's program.

Croteau serves as a UNH-TRRE teaching mentor to Alexzandria Steiner, a native of St. Johnsbury, Vermont, and current teaching resident in the TRRE program. Steiner, who is seeking secondary certification in life sciences, works with Croteau at Groveton High School, one of the UNH-TRRE partnership schools in Coös County.

The UNH alumna and teaching resident have forged a successful partnership thus far, co-teaching biology to Groveton sophomores and planning ways to connect their curriculum with the values, needs and interests of the surrounding community. But teaching wasn't always a part of their plans.

"I went to UNH to do science but not necessarily teach," says Croteau, who earned her B.S. in zoology from UNH in 2014. Croteau's passion for science led her to the [Noyce Scholarship](#) program, a decision that opened the possibility of a future in education. Both UNH programs, TRRE and Noyce, address teacher shortages in science, technology, engineering and mathematics by encouraging talented students to consider teaching these subjects.

Teaching residents, embedded in the areas in which they will teach, make connections with local families and begin to identify assets and resources each rural community has to offer.

Steiner, too, was on a different career track as an undergraduate at Clarion University in Pennsylvania. Upon completion of her pre-med program, she entered medical school with plans to become a physician. After a year, however, Steiner says that it became clear that medicine wasn't for her. Having always been a peer tutor and passionate about life science, teaching seemed a natural choice.

But Steiner didn't want just any teacher preparation program. Having demonstrated strong command of subject knowledge, Steiner wanted a program that offered not only practical classroom experience but also a connection to the wider school community. She found that in UNH-TRRE's emphasis on community engagement and her summer internship in a community-based organization.

"I worked at the rec center across from Groveton High School," says Steiner. "I got a chance to interact with kids and parents in the community and formed connections with some students."

The internship is required of UNH-TRRE residents during the first summer of the program. The goal is to emphasize a consciousness of the unique features and resources of each community as a crucial component of the TRRE experience. Teaching residents, embedded in the areas in which they will teach, make connections with local families and begin to identify assets and resources each rural community has to offer.

These goals resonated with Steiner, who has always been drawn to rural areas. She sees the natural connections between science teaching, rural communities and forming relationships with her students. As a teaching resident in Croteau's classroom, Steiner has been able to draw on student interests and their natural curiosity to explore various science topics.

"The nice thing about science is that there are so many directions you can take the class and really focus on things kids like," she says.

Croteau has a similar philosophy and seizes any opportunity to connect the work of the classroom to the wider Groveton community; her students have participated in roadside cleanups and water testing in the area to connect the curriculum with the local interests as well as global scientific issues. And, the school staff and administration make a conscious effort to connect with families and community members.

“I like the community aspect,” says Croteau, who hails from Lempster, a rural town in western New Hampshire. “I have some kids for four years, and I feel like I can have a bigger impact because I see the students longer, and we can do more.”

Croteau plans to stay in Groveton for the foreseeable future and is open to teaching a variety of science topics. She and her husband, Alexander Croteau, also a UNH alumnus and Noyce scholar, have set down roots in the school not only through teaching but also by advising clubs and coaching sports teams.

Steiner, too, has plans to stay in the Granite State. As part of the UNH-TRRE program, teaching residents commit to teaching in rural, high-need New Hampshire schools for at least three years after graduation. UNH-TRRE graduates are offered mentoring and professional development support during their first two years.

Based on her experience so far and how welcoming the school and program have been, Steiner is looking forward to remaining in New Hampshire for several years.

The presence of teachers like Steiner and the Croteaus in rural schools is a huge benefit to New Hampshire, where the Department of Education has designated secondary math and science as critical shortage areas for teachers. Rural schools often face significant challenges in recruiting and retaining certified teachers, in part due to the lack of teacher preparation programs in rural communities. [UNH-TRRE has taken up this](#)

challenge by bringing teacher education to rural schools across the state, and consequently increasing the pool of highly qualified teachers.

*TRRE, Teacher Residency for Rural Education, is funded by the US Department of Education Office of Innovation and Improvement Teacher Quality Partnership Grants Program.
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*Interested in a career in teaching? Learn more about the degree options available through the **UNH Graduate School**.*

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