

Area Educator Donna Hill Awarded Scholarship

“Working with students who need remediation is my passion,” says Donna Hill, English Instructor at Ouachita Technical College. And it’s a good thing she is passionate about it; she found out this week she has been awarded a National Association of Developmental Educators scholarship to attend the month-long prestigious Kellogg Institute at Appalachia State University in July of this year.

The Kellogg Institute is an intensive training institute in developmental education—on how students learn, and how educators can do more to help students learn. During the Institute, Hill will learn best practices—practices proven successful—in developmental education.

Then, she will bring that expertise back to the state and the College. She’ll be a Certified Developmental Education Specialist, and she’ll have a year-long supervised practicum on the campus of Ouachita Technical College. That suits her just fine, because for the last two years she has been working on the College’s Achieving the Dream initiative, helping students who face barriers of income, race, or educational background succeed in college.

Hill points out, “I was originally hired at OTC to teach Basic Grammar and Basic Composition and to reorganize those classes under our Achieving the Dream grant. Achieving the Dream has provided the funds and support we’ve needed to revamp our basic skills courses to provide the best possible classes for our students.”

What she discovered in the revamping was common throughout the nation. “So many students simply don’t learn best by traditional teaching methods and didn’t acquire the knowledge and skills they needed in high school. Yet, I know that a college education is the key for many of our students to break out of a cycle of poverty. Knowing the difference a college degree can make in their lives motivates me to ensure my students have every opportunity to succeed,” says Hill.

Like her students, Hill is seeking further education as a conduit to both professional and personal growth. “I applied for the Kellogg Institute in September because I knew that in attending the Institute, I would learn the most up-to-date principles and practices for developmental student success. I figured that everyone who goes to the institute would apply for the NADE scholarship (I mean, why wouldn’t you?), so I doubted I had a chance to win it. Now that I have, however, I’m more determined than ever to put that money to good use and comeback with new ideas to help our developmental students achieve their potential.”

Hill’s philosophy of reinvesting her learning in the community is, coincidentally, one of the great payoffs of developmental education. Community monies spent on developmental education are quickly recouped as those developmental skills students go on to earn degrees, as they return to the community as productive citizens, as they earn higher salaries than their uneducated peers, and as they create not only a better skilled workforce but a larger tax base. For Hill, for the College, and for her students, it’s a pay-it-forward, win/win situation.