

ORSP Researcher Spotlight: Dr. Wanda Lastrapes

Dr. Wanda Lastrapes joined the University of North Florida in 2007 as an assistant professor of foundations and secondary education in the College of Education and Human Services. Lastrapes, a teacher educator, earned her Ph.D. at Old Dominion University. Her research interests remain focused on “developing culturally competent K12 educators who understand the unique and complex needs of students of color, specifically in urban contexts, so they are able to address their academic needs with rich, relevant and asset-based learning opportunities.”

Lastrapes’ initial work on developing cultural competence and cultural sensitivity was expanded by a UNF faculty research grant. She and a fellow colleague collaborated to explore cultural competence among preservice teachers by examining students enrolled in the *Introduction to Diversity* course and looking at how they discovered their cultural competence. Lastrapes has also, in collaboration with other foundations and secondary education colleagues and Sandalwood High School, received the internal Engage Department Grant to research secondary educators immersed in classrooms with students with disabilities. The project provided a context to enhance field experiences for preservice teachers enrolled in an *Instructional Strategies* course to observe, practice and work with students with disabilities in both self-contained and inclusive classrooms.

Currently, as director of the Jacksonville Teacher Residency Program (JTR), Lastrapes works in conjunction with Duval County Public Schools to recruit, prepare and retain a diverse population of preservice teachers to serve in high-needs schools within Duval County. The 18-month residency blends a yearlong classroom apprenticeship with Master’s-level course work in education, leading to an M.Ed., and post-residency job placement support. The program is now preparing to receive Cohort 5 in Summer 2018.

“I’ve been able to sustain this type of work by looking for grant opportunities,” Lastrapes stated. In understanding the benefits of sponsored research opportunities, Lastrapes believes the best advice she can offer to new faculty is to establish relationships early in their career because there is strong emphasis on collaboration when qualifying for funding opportunities. “Identify a vision for innovative work with a research base that involves collaboration and don’t be afraid to ask questions. We continue to be encouraged and inspired when we bring people together to solve problems and the answers are with the people we brought together,” she stated.

Lastrapes believes one of the benefits to receiving funding from Research and Sponsored Programs is the opportunity to deepen her research by preparing teachers who are culturally competent and understand the issues of equity and social justice in schools for students of color in Jacksonville. “As a teacher educator I have always been committed to exploring ways to increase teachers of color. So, when the national average in the country is 18% for teachers of color and JTR has an average of 48%, I can’t tell you how professionally rewarding that makes me feel,” Lastrapes explained.

The Office of Research and Sponsored Programs is proud to have Dr. Lastrapes on campus and working diligently to conduct beneficial research. We look forward to seeing her grow at the University and the impact her research will make on preservice teacher development and multicultural education. ORSP is proud to support her work.