BrightStars; Shining Students

The University of Rhode Island’s Feinstein Providence Campus is a leader in urban research, service opportunities, community and professional development, and scholarship. The College of Continuing Education, located on the Providence Campus, not only serves adult students beginning or renewing their college education, but also offers undergraduate students the option of completing their degree in an urban environment. Students may also complete one of several graduate programs, as well as credit and non-credit professional development programs in Providence.

A glowing example of the urban mission is the Dr. Pat Feinstein Child Development Center, an early learning program located at the Feinstein Providence Campus in the heart of downtown.

The Dr. Pat Feinstein Child Development Center is now in its 18th year of service. The Center is a high quality education program that offers URI students opportunities to apply knowledge and improve practice. The teachers at the CDC educate the children, who are primarily from Providence and the surrounding communities, while challenging URI practicum students to be reflective, utilize feedback, and set individual goals appropriate for an urban setting.

Two of the URI students who are presently completing their practicum at the Child Development Center are Valeria Melendez and Lauren Bager. Valeria Melendez is a senior studying Child Development and Lauren Bager is an Early Childhood Education junior. Both students admit exposure to the CDC launched their desire to pursue education and know it will help to pave the way for their careers after graduation. Melendez says, “Learning from hands on experience, in addition to studying the philosophy of education needed in the classroom, helped confirm my decision to become a teacher. I learn so much from what the teachers and staff of the CDC model on a day-to-day basis, as well as from the constant feedback they provide about my performance.” Bager agrees: “Working at the CDC has taught me so much about teaching and it helps me to better understand the things I learn in class. It gives me the hands-on experience I wouldn’t receive otherwise.” Both Bager and Melendez know that the experience not only looks great on their resumes, but the opportunity to work with the Center gives them a leg up on the competition when applying for jobs and graduate school after completing their undergraduate degree.
The location of the Center, downtown Providence, is another enlightening and energizing experience. Being in downtown Providence adds to the experience and appreciation for the two students who hope to work in the public school system. “The Providence Center is completely diverse,” says Bager, “which as an educator is extremely beneficial.” Melendez agrees, “There is so much diversity and culture, not just at the Center but in the city. The city is our playground! It isn’t just a great experience for me, but for the children’s education as well.”

The Center’s reputation and accreditation exceeds other early learning organizations around the country. The Center is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)— the nation’s largest organization of early childhood professionals. The Rhode Island Department of Education (RIDE) has issued full preschool approval, and the CDC has earned the maximum, five-star BrightStars rating from the Rhode Island Association for the Education of Young Children, the state’s quality rating and improvement system. The CDC is also licensed by the RI Department for Children, Youth and Families.

Although The Child Development Center serves families from all over the state, it gives back to URI students. Through an endowment provided by Alan Shawn Feinstein (for whom the Campus is named, and whose wife is Dr. Pat Feinstein) The University provides scholarships to the young children (3-5 years old) of matriculating students who attend the College of Continuing Education.

The University of Rhode Island and the Dr. Pat Feinstein Child Development Center offer more than a valuable experience for college students by working directly with children in a diverse and highly accredited environment. They offer the value of a professional partnership between these students and the Center’s educators. Having the Center’s full and part time staff to provide insight and feedback is a resource that goes beyond a classroom education. Melendez and Bager acknowledge how fortunate they are to have made these connections. “Working at the CDC has taught me the majority of what I know about children and teaching. The staff at the CDC is amazing and I am really lucky to work with such great people and mentors.”