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Education grad goes above and beyond, secures dream teaching job

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There was a time when Laurie Dutton thought she wanted a career in medicine. Then, in one serendipitous moment, she found her calling as a teacher. Now, the December graduate is preparing for her first professional job teaching seventh-grade science at Fremont Junior High School in Mesa, Arizona, beginning in January.

I'm nervous and excited, but I feel prepared," said Dutton, an elementary education major at [Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College](#). "I know what I need to do to be successful."

Named one of the college's 2014 Outstanding Teacher Candidates, Dutton credits her experience in Arizona



Laurie Dutton (right) celebrated being named a 2014 Outstanding Teacher Candidate in Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College on Nov. 25 with iTeachAZ site coordinator Jessica DeBiase.

Photo by: Veronica Griffin / Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College

State University's nationally-recognized [iTeachAZ](#) teacher preparation program as boosting her confidence in the classroom.

During the program, Dutton co-taught in both seventh- and eighth-grade classrooms at Shepherd Junior High School in Mesa, under the guidance of mentor teachers. The rigorous, yearlong student teaching experience allowed her to create and implement engaging lessons and activities, and observe her mentors' teaching styles as she refined her own.

"Laurie is passionate, reflective and always trying to improve," said Jessica DeBiase, a clinical instructor and iTeachAZ site coordinator in Teachers College who nominated Dutton for her award. "She goes above and beyond, moving student achievement and serving as their model. She really cares about her students' success."

Dutton realized her niche was in teaching during an introductory education course at Mesa Community College, where she received an associate degree in elementary education.

"There was a quote about a career that builds and shapes all other careers," Dutton recalled. "It was a teacher. I read that and said this is exactly where I was meant to be."

After transferring to ASU in January 2013 and taking a science methods course from Molina Walters, a clinical associate professor in Teachers College, Dutton decided a STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) emphasis was the right fit . and melded her original interest in

medicine with her newfound passion for teaching.

"I focus a lot on inquiry and engaging students in their learning," said Dutton, whose primary interest is teaching science. "It's fun to see creativity happening while they're learning different concepts."

Pursuing science education also helped Dutton secure financial assistance through the [Supporting Effective Educator Development](#) (SEED) grant, a funding source for students preparing to teach math or science in a middle or high school classroom.

"I worked my way through college, and I was nervous about the yearlong student teaching and how I would provide for myself," Dutton said. "Because of the SEED grant, I was able to focus on student teaching and my classes at ASU."

Dutton added that the grant allowed her to participate in STEM-related professional development opportunities, including ASU's environmental education program of distinction. The program, which requires 15 or more credits in environmental education-based course work, boosts teacher candidates' qualifications to teach about the environment and environmental issues.

Beyond furthering her studies, the grant gave Dutton the freedom to expand her involvement in Teachers College. She was the AmeriCorps ambassador for her cohort, volunteered at Teachers College events and conferences, and served as a teaching assistant for Walters in a science education course.

Laurie welcomes all of these opportunities and then applies what she has learned, Walters said. She wants to learn and experience as much as possible, and be the best educator she can.

And although she's graduating, Dutton is not quite ready to shed her status as an ASU student. In January, in addition to starting her full-time teaching position, she will begin a graduate program in gifted education.

I love school . all of it, Dutton said. I think for people coming into education, the best thing to do is to work hard, enjoy the moment and take every opportunity that comes to you.

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