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### Teacher earns master's degree by visiting the zoo

By Chris Henry

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BREMERTON — Tessie Goheen's pursuit of a master's degree took her to the zoo.

Goheen in December completed a two-year program through Miami University that included classes at Seattle's Woodland Park Zoo, along with online coursework. Last summer, as part of her studies, Goheen traveled to Belize, to study conservation efforts there.

Miami University, in Oxford, Ohio, has joined with eight zoos in major metropolitan areas around the United States, including Woodland Park, to offer master's degrees for teachers and people working in public arenas. The goal is to promote teaching of environmental preservation, habitat restoration and sustainable living.

The university's Project Dragonfly offers tracks for in-the-field coursework at zoos and around the world. Goheen, who earned a master's in teaching biology, said the unusual nature of the classes attracted her to Project Dragonfly's Advanced Inquiry Program, which is "based on the principle that education should extend beyond the classroom, and that students should make a difference."

In one of Goheen's classes, for example, students studied carnivores, going "behind the scenes" to talk to zookeepers who care for these animals. Students then were asked to research conservation efforts that supported different carnivorous species.

Coursework in Belize took Goheen around the country to meet people heading up zoos and wildlife refuges that have helped improve the relationship between humans and wildlife in that country.

The "inquiry based" approach of classes requires students to learn through asking questions. "Really, it's seeking your own answers," Goheen said.

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Woodland Park Zoo's partnership with the university dovetails with the zoo's mission, which is getting people to "learn, care and act" to save animals around the world, said Katie Remine, of the zoo's education department.

Remine had a role in helping launch the partnership with Miami University. Since 2011, about 30 people who took classes through Woodland Park Zoo have graduated, with 40 people currently enrolled.

Back in her own classroom, Goheen didn't wait for graduation to apply her knowledge. Last year, as she was teaching Montessori students at West Hills STEM Academy, Goheen had her students make a compost bin and take part in a water conservation project.

Kids formed teams and developed their own projects. Some picked up trash around the school; some took up a campaign for a one-day lights out experiment, in which teachers agreed to turn off half the lights in their classroom. Another group collected recyclable classroom and lunchbox materials.

By the end of the year, students were spontaneously doing things like pouring leftover water in their cups on classroom plants.

"I saw a big change just in everyday habits," Goheen said of her kids. "It just brings more awareness of their own actions."

This year, Goheen is teaching Montessori students at Kitsap Lake Elementary, as the district has moved the Montessori program.

The cost of the AIP program is approximately \$3,671 per year for basic courses and fees, according to Woodland Park Zoo. The program is accepting applicants for summer enrollment. The deadline is Feb. 28.

For information, go to Miami University's Project Dragonfly, [aip.projectdragonfly.org](http://aip.projectdragonfly.org), or the Woodland Park Zoo, [www.zoo.org/education/teachers/aip#](http://www.zoo.org/education/teachers/aip#). VqLezfFzC1k; 206-548-2581; email [aip@zoo.org](mailto:aip@zoo.org).

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