

## ONLINE EXCLUSIVE: Sleevar shares her experiences with children and travels in the classroom

Written by Carly Stinson, Daily Vidette Staff Writer  
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“I tell all my classes three things on the first day: I am here to help you succeed, I will never leave you flapping in the wind about any assignment, and I am here for you to talk about whatever you need.”

Michelle Sleevar is an instructional assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, which is the department for all education majors that focuses on literacy.

Sleevar describes herself as “boring,” but after gathering a refreshing look into her life, and her philosophy as a teacher, she is nothing short of inspiring.

Sleevar attended Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington for her undergraduate degree. She started out as an English major, but then had a friend who introduced her to elementary education and she decided to change her path. She taught in the public schools in the Bloomington–Normal area for 10 years, until she decided to get her master’s degree. After that, she was a reading specialist at Metcalf, and then got a job.

Sleevar hopes that each of her students can form a relationship with her to ensure a comfortable learning environment, as she believes in respecting the learner and providing choice.

“What I like about the college level is that I feel like it’s more collegial, where I’m working with, instead of teaching to young children. I’m learning with them, it’s more facilitating with college age [students]. I have a hard time pretending like I’m the smartest person in the room, because sometimes I’m not. My students are going to have brilliant ideas and I like for it to be social learning, where we are all learning together,” Sleevar said.

According to Johnny Bergman, junior special education major, her philosophy has been

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effective. She is a very personable. [With] some teachers I really have trouble feeling comfortable asking questions, but she makes it very easy to talk to her,” Bergman said.

For Sleevar, becoming a teacher was a decision that came with many rewards. Originally, she wanted to be exactly like her third grade teacher and only wanted to teach third grade — she wanted to be in the same classroom for her entire career.

As she began her career, she taught kindergarten and second grade and fell in love, but transitioning to the college level was initially difficult.

“When I came to [instruct at the] college, I was very scared, and the transition was hard, but I can’t imagine being anywhere else. I love it. I feel most comfortable being collegial with my students,” Sleevar said.

Sleevar has two children, a third grader and kindergartener, who both occasionally appear in her lesson plan. She will post videos for her students to watch and observe her children reading, or show them their writing samples. She explained that being a parent has helped her teaching because it gives a real life example to work with as opposed to just reading from a textbook.

An important aspect of Sleevar’s classroom is that she tries not to make grades the focus. Especially for education majors, where tests are rare, and the key to success is the experience to become comfortable in a classroom.

“You do need to give feedback and we do that by giving a letter grade, but I am going to work with you. To me, it’s more important that you understand what you’re doing. Is the grade important? Yes, but ultimately, doing the work is the most important. I would rather we come together as colleagues, and guide them so they can feel 100 percent confident going out into

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the field,” Sleevar said.

One of the best experiences of her life was when she studied abroad in England for the last classes of her master’s program. She highly encourages her students to do this, because it is the cheapest and most exciting way to travel. She got the chance to get a view of a part of the world that was unknown to her before. While she found that there is a general commonality, they also taught her how to include drama into reading, something that she incorporates in her teaching today.

Being enrolled in a class with Sleevar is guaranteed to be a great experience, and the given ability to walk away with satisfaction, knowing that you truly learned.

“She does more than just lecture, she really gets the students participating in class and I feel that as a whole, students take more out of her class than other classes because she makes sure we really understand the material,” Bergman added.