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Among this year's Noyce Scholars are HGSE students Michelle Cooper (from left), Sean Kussner, and Stacy Williams. The three will be working at Brighton High School.

Staff photo Kris Snibbe/Harvard News Office

Noyce Scholarships provide incentive for public school internships

By Elizabeth Gehrman

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Among the topics in the national conversation on education during the past few years have been teacher retention (particularly for high-needs schools) and the lack of math and science educators in primary and secondary settings. The National Science Foundation's Robert Noyce Scholarship — which was awarded this year to 10 master's students from the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) — aims to solve these difficult problems. This year's winners are Muhammad Al-Ahmar, Michelle Cooper, Samuel Garson, Elizabeth (Liza) Hansel, Katie Heim, Sean Kussner, Anne Lutz, Mike Nduaguba, Shelley Olsen, and Stacy Williams.

"There's a critical shortage of qualified teachers of math and science at all kinds of schools and at all levels," says Katherine K. Merseth, director of HGSE's teacher education programs. "We just don't have enough, in part because those individuals have so many options for other careers. A huge advantage of the Noyce program is that it helps us make entry into teaching more attractive for individuals who are so inclined but might have other options."

In exchange for a commitment to spend at least two of the next six years teaching math or science in a high-needs school — in Harvard's case, a school in the Boston Public School system — the program offers a \$10,000 stipend, job-placement assistance, and continued support in the form of seminars and content-specific instruction. "A good deal of our school internship placements are in the Boston Public School system anyway," says Orin Gutlerner, associate director of Harvard's Undergraduate Teacher Education Program and director of the Noyce Fellowship Program, "so this is like a signing bonus for them. They'll get to know the politics, the curriculum, where to look for support. They'll begin to build a network of mentor teachers and colleagues they can turn to, and start to better understand the needs that are specific to Boston. I think probably more than other professions, teaching is very sensitive to context."

Among the challenges new teachers face, Gutlerner adds, is a feeling of isolation — "in large part because of the pace of the job, how much there is to learn, how fast the day goes by, and how many responsibilities there are to juggle. And particularly in urban schools, one becomes involved with the lives of the students outside of school, so it's often hard to find time to step back and reflect or turn to a colleague for support."

Three Harvard students in particular feel the Noyce Scholarship will go a long way toward alleviating any isolation they might otherwise feel, as they will all be working together at Brighton High School beginning in September. "Basically," says Stacy Williams, a 2004 Cornell graduate who majored in biology and will be teaching the subject at Brighton, "if I had decided not to stay in Boston and had gone off to another city, I probably wouldn't know anyone at all, and would be very lonely and have to seek out new friends."

Singer Prize winners

Following the May 3 lecture by Howard Gardner, the Harvard Graduate School of Education announced the first-ever winners of its Singer Prize for Excellence in Secondary School Teaching. The awards will go annually to inspirational high school teachers nominated by Harvard College seniors. Funded by the Paul Singer Family Foundation, each prize comes with a \$3,000 stipend for recipients and a \$2,500 teacher development stipend for each school. "I'm happy to be the warm-up act for the Singer Prizes," said Gardner. "It's a wonderful idea — an inspired idea." On hand to receive the awards were:

- **Eric Kincaid**, a biology teacher at Morgantown (W.Va.) High School

PUBLIC SCHOOL.

(Nominated by Amy Xu '07 of Leverett House.)

- **Ila Lewis**, a Spanish teacher at Seneca High School, Tabernacle, N.J. (Nominated by Norman Ho '07 of Kirkland House.)
- **David Pearson**, a history teacher at Kents Hill School, Readfield, Maine. (Nominated by Rachel Ann Culley '07 of Leverett House.)
- **Peter Polley**, an English and film studies teacher at York Mills Collegiate Institute, North York, Ontario, Canada. (Nominated by Pamela C. Chan '07 of Pforzheimer House.)

In addition, of course, there's the financial incentive. "I got offered a lot more financial aid at other places, but Harvard has such a fantastic program that it was really my first choice. And the Noyce Scholarship made coming here possible."

For 28-year-old Sean Kussner, a Boston College math major who spent several years working as an actuarial analyst before returning to school for his master's degree in teaching, "The extra money was just like a gift, since I was planning to stay in Boston and teach in the inner city anyway." But he looks forward to having "another layer of support that not many new teachers are fortunate enough to have while making an impact on the lives of children who could really use some good teachers."

Michelle Cooper, 23, studied astrogeophysics at Colgate and was inspired to teach by her 11th-grade science teacher. "I've always wanted to teach in the inner city," she says, "but even more so since doing my prepracticum and practicum at Cambridge Rindge & Latin. They're a great group of kids, and I just think you get to know more about their lives than you would at, say, a private high school." On the other hand, no matter how great the kids, she says, "I like the idea of maintaining my connection with friends from Harvard — that we'll all know the same kids and be able to apply to real life what we learned at HGSE. We'll all be first-year teachers in the same boat."

And, says Cooper, "I definitely see teaching in the inner city as something I want to do for the long term."

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