In August, 30 teachers from the Nashua, Hudson, Milford, Bedford and Hollis-Brookline public school districts participated in a three-day Summer Physical Science Institute. Part of the Teacher Inquiry and Student Learning in Science program, the Institute is designed to support quality learning and teaching in science for grades K-12 and increase the pool and diversity of students interested in pursuing science.

Teachers conducted inquiries in physical science phenomena and used their own investigations to develop inquiry-based science experiences around concepts identified in the New Hampshire Science Frameworks for students in grades 3 through 8. This year, for the first time, students in those grades will be tested in science as part of the annual New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) state tests.

Rivier College Professor of Chemistry Dr. David Burgess and Associate Professor of Education Dr. Fiona McDonnell facilitated the Institute. The multi-district project will continue throughout the 2007-2008 school year. “Teachers will meet monthly to look at the work their students have done in science,” says McDonnell. Meetings will be held at Rivier College; they are open to all teachers in participating districts, not just those who attended the Summer Institute.
“We’re forming a science teacher network for southern New Hampshire,” McDonnell says. In addition to monthly meetings offering collaborative assessment of student understanding and learning in science, teachers will also have access to online content support and discussion boards.

The Institute is funded by a New Hampshire Department of Education Mathematics and Science Partnership Program grant, written together by science and education faculty at the Nashua School District and Rivier College. Future projects will involve three additional school districts and develop a cadre of teacher leaders in elementary and middle school science.

McDonnell says that the State Department of Education has asked her and Burgess to run the program again next year. For additional information, contact Fiona McDonnell at fmcdonnell@rivier.edu or visit www.studentworldteacher.net.

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