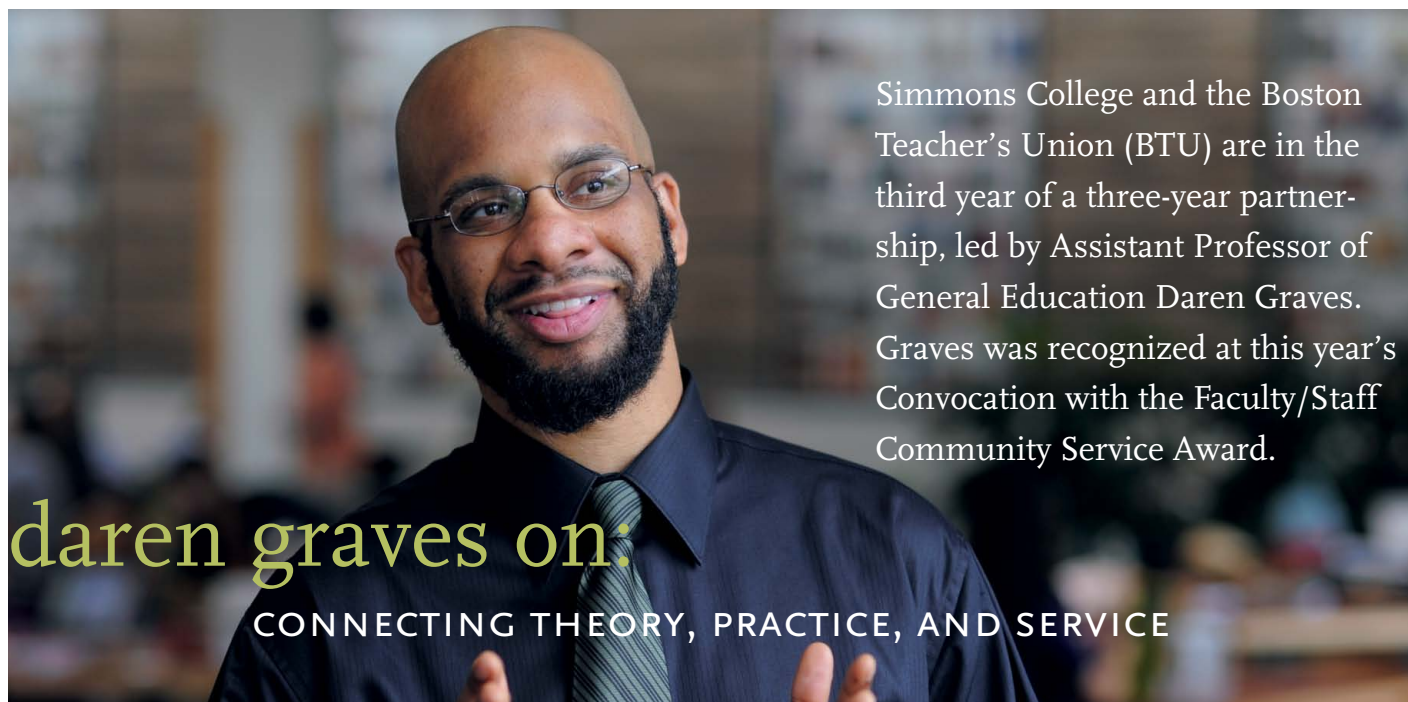




daren graves on:

CONNECTING THEORY, PRACTICE, AND SERVICE

Simmons College and the Boston Teacher's Union (BTU) are in the third year of a three-year partnership, led by Assistant Professor of General Education Daren Graves. Graves was recognized at this year's Convocation with the Faculty/Staff Community Service Award.

WHY DID SIMMONS ENGAGE IN THIS PARTNERSHIP?

The partnership was initiated after a series of meetings in the Simmons Department of Education, where faculty expressed an interest in deepening our partnerships with schools that serve our neighbors. We chose to partner with the BTU School because we knew it would be an opportunity to help build a school from its inception. We were also particularly drawn to working with the Union School because of its unique teacher-leader ethos.

HOW ARE STUDENTS AND PROFESSORS ACROSS THE COLLEGE INVOLVED?

We currently have students, staff, and faculty from the College of Arts and Sciences, School of Social Work, Graduate School of Library and Information Science, the Simmons Library, and the Scott/Ross Center for Community Service who are engaged with the Union School. We have education and social work student-teachers/interns working in the school; and we have student volunteers from GSLIS and the Simmons Library who have helped us build the Union School library. Faculty from the Department of Education, GSLIS, and social work have helped with various professional development efforts. The Scott/Ross Center has also coordinated various student community service efforts at the Union School.

Roberta Kelly, director of the Educational Leadership program, has been vital in helping the Union School develop, monitor, and reiterate its shared governance model. Roberta has also led the Union School's efforts to develop a rigorous peer evaluation program for its teachers and has successfully encouraged Union School staff to take courses in the Educational Leadership program. We have Paul Abraham, chair of the Department of Education, Gary Bailey, associate professor of social work, and myself, who serve on the Union School Governing Board and help the Union School navigate larger strategic decisions around issues of hiring, budgets, and development.

HOW IS THIS PARTNERSHIP HELPING SIMMONS STUDENTS USE THEIR LEADERSHIP SKILLS?

This partnership puts students in situations where they are prepared to engage with their colleagues and mentors and to be accountable for the individuals and families they are serving. I have been proud to see Simmons students leading classes of eager Union School scholars, coordinating efforts to provide after-school tutoring, and even showing up to help run activities at the yearly Field Day, for example.

AS YOU HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH THE SCHOOL, WHAT HAVE BEEN YOUR PROUDEST MOMENTS?

The school is only in its third year, so there is still much work to be done. The school has grown from a K-2 and 6th grade, to a K-4 and 6-8th grade, and will eventually be a full K-8 school next year. With this in mind, I know we in the Department of Education are particularly proud to see the school grow each year so that we have more teachers, children, and their families.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF SIMMONS'S INVOLVEMENT IN THIS PARTNERSHIP?

I see the growth of our students through the improvements that we as faculty have made in response to our experiences at the Union School. Having had the opportunity to work with the staff, students, and families of the Union School has helped us as individual and collective faculty members build on our strengths, while transforming and re-imagining our own teaching and curriculum. This is the true beauty of this type of partnership. Everybody benefits.

The Union School and its community benefit from Simmons's resources and expertise. The Simmons faculty and staff benefit from embodying our ethos around connecting theory, practice, and service. The Simmons students benefit from the opportunities to serve and learn with our neighbors in Boston, as well as to reap the rewards of learning from faculty who are teaching from the experiences of working on the cutting edge of school reform and teacher education.