



LAB SCHOOLS SPOTLIGHT

Kirsten Hany

Life in the Laboratory Schools

Kirsten Hany is entering her 15th year of teaching and 11th year in the laboratory schools in the Social Science department at University High School. While she has previously taught in the Freshman Program, her current teaching load includes US Studies, Psychology, and Sociology. Kirsten also has two children attending the laboratory schools - Grace is a sophomore at U-High and Phil is in 7th grade at Metcalf.



Outside of the Classroom

Hany is a doctoral student and is two semesters away from becoming a doctoral candidate, expecting to complete her doctorate in 2023, focusing on trauma informed practices in the secondary classroom. In addition to her teaching at University High School, she is also teaching TCH 219, Integrating Multiple Literacies and Technology across Secondary Education Curriculum, at Illinois State University.

Research, Connections and Student Support

Hany describes that, as an educator over the last decade, she has seen an increase in students who struggle with mental health and mental health-oriented diagnoses. She has also noticed that while there is a good amount of social emotional learning and strategies built into the elementary curriculum, secondary education tends to have more of a focus on content. Students enter the classroom with adverse experiences or trauma, but they are coming into classrooms that aren't always trauma sensitive. Hany explains that students who have experienced trauma often must tell someone they are struggling to receive support. Hany views this disconnect as an opportunity for growth and research.

In a doctoral class focused on technology, Hany was allowed time to create and explore, and she came up with the idea to create an app as a communication tool so that students can be supported in a more global manner. Building on the idea that most students can identify a component of emotion, this tool would take students through their emotions to first identify what they are feeling, and then the app will take them to tools that will help support them through that emotion. In addition, the app would allow students to directly communicate needs to teachers, counselors, or administrators. A prototype of Hany's app is expected to launch this year.

Hany's dream was allowed to become a reality through the Bon Accord endowment. This award was established by Maureen Brady, 1967 graduate of Illinois State University, and is awarded to students with a career goal to use emerging technology in educational development for teaching or research. Through this support, Hany was able to meet with app developers to bring this idea to life.

Hany's "why"

To quote Hany, "Our product and outcome goals are humans that need to be launched into the world. If they don't receive the tools, including social emotional, our students are going to struggle." Because of her desire to better support students and the need for more research and support in the area of trauma informed practices and social emotional learning, Hany's app has the potential to change the way students are supported.