

# CREW PROFILE



**DR. JOHN LOCKHART**

**SENIOR DIRECTOR  
OF CURRICULUM &  
INSTRUCTION,  
K-12 SCIENCE**

**23 YEARS IN  
EDUCATION**

University Prep Schools provides a culturally responsive educational experience for our scholars that builds that academic competence, habits of work and scholarship, and self-actualization empowering them to successfully accomplish their post-secondary plans, as well as socially and civically engaged as change agents for themselves and their community.

## *Please describe your academic journey to this point.*

I graduated with a physics degree from Washington University in St. Louis and began teaching high school physics and 9th grade physical science. During those four years, I created an inquiry-oriented science classroom that had students collecting and analyzing data to understand how the universe works. Lab work and academic discourse were the norm and I was motivated by students who did not like school telling me they liked my class because we actually did science, even though I made them work hard. I felt the call to do more to elevate the profession, and so I went to Michigan State for my doctorate where I studied ways of teaching and learning, political forces, and how to work with multiple stakeholders to improve classroom conditions. I worked as an education professor and earned tenure before deciding to return to schools, where I served as an instructional coach, vice principal, and school director before entering my current position.

## *What makes the C&I Team at U Prep unique?*

The C&I team is driven by the mission to provide students with engaging, worthwhile, authentic learning experiences. This dedication manifests, by working with U Prep instructional coaches, as support for teachers to get better at their teaching craft. We strive to balance research and theory with the practical conditions in classrooms, in order to promote and help teachers achieve high levels of student engagement and success.

## *What does student success look like in your content area/curriculum?*

A successful science student can look at a phenomenon, ask questions, and figure out a way to generate data that will either answer the question or suggest new questions and new methods for investigation. The scientist's mindset bleeds into engineering design where questions are focused on how to make a product, a dwelling, a community better for people while balancing functionality, choice of materials, and cost. While science does contain 'facts,' 'models,' and 'explanations' about how the world works, it is above all a way of thinking to collect and process information about the world in order to understand how it functions. A successful student of science will take this way of thinking into their lives.

## *How does CRE help to create a well-rounded student?*

Culturally responsive education recognizes that in the interaction of student and teacher, each comes with their unique cultural practices and beliefs that are seen in patterns of interaction. This is usually most pronounced in racial dynamics of white teachers with black students, but also shows up in socioeconomic differences, gender, religious backgrounds, etc. As the responsible adult in the room who is charged with maximizing student learning, it falls to the teacher to create conditions where, to begin, students' backgrounds are acknowledged and affirmed. But CRE extends well beyond that, requiring that teachers familiarize themselves with students' cultural practices and beliefs and learn how to better interact with students, including through varied teaching methods and using students' current knowledge and skills to connect to new learning and possibilities. At the same time, teachers are also providing students with mainstream educational knowledge and skills, which are often used as gates to keep certain students out of certain jobs and colleges. CRE is a balancing act of varied cultural modes in the one classroom space, focused on student well-being and learning. At U Prep schools, we strive to work with families to affirm and build Black student genius, which will lead our communities into a brighter future.

## *Please share your most memorable experience during your tenure at U Prep.*

UPSM HS graduation for the class of 2021 is one of my most memorable experiences at U Prep. We had some of our students attending part-time in the spring, but many students were studying from home, and graduation was one of the only in-person gatherings we had. The energy of students, parents, and teachers was high, and it was a reminder that the future is each and every day that we come to work and teach.

# CREW PROFILE



**KRISTIN VENIER**

**SENIOR DIRECTOR  
OF CURRICULUM &  
INSTRUCTION,  
K-5 ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ARTS**

**17 YEARS IN  
EDUCATION**

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## *Please describe your academic journey to this point.*

At U Prep Schools one of our core values is “Learning is exciting,” and I would say that I’ve loved education from the very beginning. At four years old, I sprinted into kindergarten without looking back. In the afternoons, I would come home and teach my little brother his letters and sounds (he wasn’t quite two yet, but he is a great high school teacher today, so I guess something stuck!). I earned a bachelors’ degrees in journalism and Spanish from Michigan State University. (GO GREEN!) As an undergrad, I read a series in the Detroit Free Press about Teach for America (TFA) and their mission to work toward more equitable outcomes in our nation’s schools. I began researching TFA and their impact on achievement in communities across the US, including Detroit. During that time I also worked as a reporter for Capital News Service, a wire subscription that provided stories for newspapers throughout Michigan. My passion and interest led me to focus on the education beat; I attended proceedings in the capital chambers and interviewed lawmakers and education officials from across the state. I wrote and published stories about K-12 legislation, focusing on the ways the policies and decisions impacted students and their achievements. Seeing the systemic impact of policy work and the inequities that it caused for communities within our state drew me strongly back to my interest in TFA. As my time at MSU drew to a close, I was accepted as a TFA corps member. Two weeks after graduation, I moved to Philadelphia and began my training and graduate studies to become a teacher. I taught for five years in West Philly and North Philly and earned my master’s degree in education from the University of Pennsylvania before moving back to the Detroit area in 2011. As I was applying for jobs “back home” I was introduced to U Prep and interviewed with Kim Llorens to teach at Mark Murray. I have to confess that at the end of my first week as a teacher at Mark Murray, I cried. Right there in the gym, with more than four hundred kids gathered for All-School Morning Meeting. I promise, it wasn’t loud or awkward; just genuine, happy tears, the kind that flow too freely and too easily when you know you’ve found your place in the world. Mark Murray was “my place.” I was a fourth and fifth-grade teacher at MM for four years before I transitioned to the role of Instructional Coach within the building. During that time I focused deeply on literacy data and research around the science of reading while also earning my School Administrator Certificate. In the summer of 2018, I was invited to apply to become a member of the Curriculum and Instruction Team. I have served in this role since that time, working to improve teaching and learning in elementary literacy through the use of research-based best practices.

## *What makes the C&I Team at U Prep unique?*

The C&I team at U Prep is highly specialized with each member focused on one core content area. At many school districts there may be one or two people in charge of K-12 curricula. When this team came together, it was a reimagining of what C&I can be. Our niche focus allows us to lean heavily into research and best practices for our content areas and our close working relationships with School Directors, Instructional Coaches and teachers allow us to make strategic pivots that improve our students’ understandings and outcomes. Being able to focus solely on the intricacies of early literacy and make precise, calculated decisions is such a gift and a true investment in our youngest students’ reading and writing development.



UNIVERSITY PREP SCHOOLS

# CREW PROFILE

## ***What does student success look like in your content area/curriculum?***

Part of our network vision at U Prep Schools is to empower students “to successfully accomplish their post-secondary plans, as well as socially and civically engage as change agents for themselves and their community.” A strong literacy foundation is built in elementary school; it is the bedrock for each student to accomplish the goals they set for themselves at every stage of their lives. Broadly, student success in literacy looks like the ability to read, write, speak and listen in service of their passions and their personal bests. From an elementary perspective, literacy success means meeting grade-level phonics expectations (accurately using their knowledge of the alphabet to read and spell), as well as reading at an appropriate rate and with proper expression (fluency) because these both lead to strong reading comprehension. In elementary writing, success looks like students being able to write for a sustained period of time, clearly expressing their ideas to convey the things that are important to them, including telling stories about their own lives, sharing information on research they had conducted or presenting a compelling argument for something that matters to them. Of course, this all looks different depending on the age of a child; elementary writing is astounding because our young authors go from orally explaining the details of their drawings (and doing their best to write some letter strings) to writing full-blown persuasive essays. The growth and development in our students’ writing over their elementary career is truly wonderful to witness!

## ***How does CRE help to create a well-rounded student?***

In my experience “well-rounded” often refers to exposure and the opportunity to experience many different ideas, concepts, content areas, and perspectives. Culturally-responsive education (CRE) is distinctive (but adjacent!) as it refers to an approach to teaching and learning that prioritizes learning partnerships, honors students’ funds of knowledge, promotes restorative practices and builds intellectual capacity through cognitive routines. As a network, we rely heavily on the text “Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain” by Zaretta Hammond. There is a line in this seminal text that I have returned to time and again; Hammond explains: “Our ultimate goal as culturally responsive teachers is to help dependent learners learn how to learn. We want them to have the ability to size up any task, map out a strategy for completing it, and then execute the plan. That’s what independent learners do.” Planning for students to be well-rounded is important because being exposed to a variety of experiences builds strong vocabulary and background knowledge that students can leverage throughout their lives (these things are actually really key in reading comprehension). Planning for CRE goes beyond that exposure and ensures students can build strong relationships and have the cognitive tools to take in the new learning and apply it in a way that is effective and advantageous.

## ***Please share your most memorable experience during your tenure at U Prep.***

There are so many memorable moments-- I mean, I cried my first week! I spent three years as a fifth-grade teacher and had the privilege of being part of countless incredible experiences as students wrote the last chapter of their elementary school career. One amazing tradition that my team and I started was taking our fifth graders on a day trip to Michigan State, always in June, just a few weeks before they graduated. We toured lecture halls, learned about different majors and organizations, and of course, sampled all of the delicacies of the dorm cafeterias. I got to be there as they excitedly explored the campus and took it all in. This past June, I was in attendance as my last class of students graduated from our U Prep high schools-- I was delighted to hug them again, catch up on their accomplishments and learn about their next steps. Each of the students that I taught is realizing U Prep’s vision in their own way and they are each on a pathway that includes post-secondary education at institutions throughout Michigan and Ohio. Two of my students from that class are even off to MSU! Graduation day was a full-circle moment, an incredible culmination of my student’s growth, and a very poignant final verse in their U Prep story.

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# CREW PROFILE



**MISCHA BASHIR**

**SENIOR DIRECTOR  
OF CURRICULUM &  
INSTRUCTION,  
6-12 ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE ARTS**

**28 YEARS IN  
EDUCATION**

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## *Please describe your academic journey to this point.*

My academic journey into education was not straightforward but more of a winding road as I initially attended Wayne State University as an engineering major. It was during my junior year that I attended a teacher recruitment fair for a large urban school district in Detroit that I felt compelled to change my major to Secondary Education in English. Thereafter, all signs appeared to guide me in the direction of teaching as I received the Bertha and Berry Gordy Scholar Award and landed a job offer straight away. Along my journey, I continued my academic pursuits blending the mix of institutional and professional learning experiences from C.O.R.E. Teacher's of Literacy, D.C., Harvard Aspiring Principals' Program, MA., Marva Collins Classical Teaching approach, Ill., Lorraine Monroe Leadership Institute, NYC., UnboundEd Standards Institute, CA., ASCD Curriculum & Instruction certification to acquiring an M.Ed., Ed.S and my current status as a candidate for Doctorate degree in Educational Leadership.

## *What makes the C&I Team at U Prep unique?*

The C & I team at U Prep is unique, indeed - consisting of a dynamic and magical combination of highly qualified and experienced educators. To be more concise, and in the words of our originator, Danielle Jackson, CEO of U Prep, "We exist to disrupt the belief and practice that this (education) is as good as we can do for kids!" This is evermore at the forefront of her heart and mind.

## *What does student success look like in your content area/curriculum?*

First off, along with racial and social justice, literacy is a fundamental human right and the cornerstone for which all learning occurs. As a moral imperative, student success in secondary literacy looks like scholars critically reading, thinking, writing, and engaging in spirited social and political discourse while supporting their views and those of others from a diverse range of perspectives. It also looks like as citizens of the world, our scholars can leverage their voices, values, knowledge, and skills to accomplish their post-secondary plans and make positive contributions to their community and the world.

## *How does CRE help to create a well-rounded student?*

Culturally responsive education helps to disrupt inequitable practices by creating student-centered learning environments that establish relationships between staff and students that affirm students' individual genius, cultural uniqueness, and diverse ways of knowing. Grounded in the neuroscience of learning, there is a range of social and cognitive benefits afforded to students from culturally responsive teaching to include strengthening cultural identity and intellectual capacity, academic confidence, and engagement. Research shows that learning is transmitted through culture thereby connecting academic concepts to the lived experiences and interests of our students, we foster achievement.

## *Please share your most memorable experience during your tenure at U Prep.*

There are several memorable experiences that I have had within my tenure at U Prep. To date, I recall a time when I was unexpectedly invited to chaperone for the U Prep Study Abroad program traveling to South Africa. The proposition, although exciting, came with the added challenge of teaching a 6-8 week course that included a book study of Trevor Noah's, Born A Crime, customs, and many other pertinent aspects associated with traveling abroad. Interestingly, I enjoyed building relationships with the students, researching, and planning the weekly lessons leading up to the trip. It was from this experience that I not only established a strong bond with a colleague and the students, but I also refreshed my teaching skills and techniques. Often, I revisit the Blogs and pictures we sent to parents daily describing our excursions, hilarious travel mishaps, the native cuisine and accommodations.

# CREW PROFILE



**SHARON HOPKINS**

**SENIOR DIRECTOR  
OF CURRICULUM &  
INSTRUCTION, K-12  
SOCIAL STUDIES**

**15 YEARS IN  
EDUCATION**

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## ***Please describe your academic journey to this point.***

I was educated in the City of Detroit K-8, and graduated from Southfield-Lathrup High School. I have degrees from Oakland University, Marygrove College, Central Michigan University, and am currently a Doctoral Candidate at Eastern Michigan University where I will be graduating with a Ph.D. in Urban Education in 2023. It was in middle school that I fell in love with history which brought me to my life's work of making Social Studies relevant and transformative for students.

## ***What makes the C&I Team at U Prep unique?***

When our CEO, Danielle Jackson, formed the C&I Team in 2018 she explained to us that "The C&I Team exists to disrupt the belief and practice that this is as good as we can do for our kids." I wholeheartedly align with that mission statement and continue to work to improve the learning experiences for our students.

## ***What does student success look like in your content area/curriculum?***

Success in social studies means that a student is able to think critically about historical and social phenomena. They are equipped with the historical literacy skills to independently analyze documents, both primary and secondary, to determine the validity of those sources and draw their own conclusions. They are able to produce grade-level work that demonstrates mastery of those skills that are both creative and content-rich. Lastly, students develop empathy and a critical consciousness through their studies and are inspired to become change agents in whatever communities they occupy.

## ***How does CRE help to create a well-rounded student?***

For students at U Prep Schools, Culturally Responsive Education helps to create well-rounded students because it gives them pride in who they are, and the academic competence and confidence to self-actualize. CRE exposes students to a curriculum that is culturally relevant by providing perspectives from people that have been traditionally marginalized but also providing perspectives from multiple groups. It allows them to critique the dominant worldview which should spark the desire to change the ills of society. Ultimately, CRE leverages students' assets to increase their academic ability and cultivates empathy and agency in them.

## ***Please share your most memorable experience during your tenure at U Prep.***

My most memorable experience during my tenure at U Prep was serving as the founding Director of Debate at UPA High school and working to make history by coaching the first Black students to win the University of California-Berkeley Policy Debate Tournament, the National Association of Urban Debates League Tournament, and to be the top seed at the Tournament of Champions. We proved that Black students can excel in an interscholastic rigorous academic activity despite the history and narrative that said otherwise. It is my goal to continue to push back against dominant pathologizing narratives about what Black students are capable of by cultivating their genius.