

IT DOESN'T FEEL LIKE A JOB



HOWARD GRANOK'S HANDS-ON APPROACH TO EDUCATION

"I'M NOT AFRAID TO BE TAUGHT NEW THINGS," says Crossroads College Prep science teacher Howard Granok. "There's a lot I don't know how to do."

That might sound like an odd statement from the head of Crossroads' Science Department who holds a PhD in molecular genetics from Washington University in St. Louis. However, Granok has always believed in learning by doing.

After a year of post-doctoral work in a yeast lab at Yale, Granok volunteered to teach science in underserved public schools in New Haven, Connecticut.

"Teaching was more interesting and more fun than working in a lab, but my lab background prompted me to give the students a hands-on experience beyond standard science curriculum," Granok says. When an opportunity opened in 2000, Granok moved to Crossroads.

"Teaching at Crossroads doesn't feel like a job," he says. "I love working with the kids. It's exciting to see how they change over the year and what they can do in the lab and the classroom."

Soon after arriving, Granok followed another passion to coach the Crossroads Chess Team. His first year, he assisted the team's founder, Harlan Hodge and took over as coach in 2001.

Since Granok became involved with the team, it has had remarkable success. More than 10 percent of the school is on the Chess Team, and it has been ranked in the top eight in Missouri every year since 2000, winning two state championships in the 9th Grade and Under Division, placing as high as third at nationals,

20 Gateway Tournament wins, four Gateway Chess League Conference Championships, and one Gateway Chess League Championship.

"As a colleague, Howard is the epitome of teamwork and excellence," says English Department Chair and New Colleague Mentor Sarah Pierson Wolff.

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"He is undyingly humble, never seeing himself as bringing any level of expertise more than others can do, but always having something smart to add. A testament to his excellence is that his students love him and his classes, even when they are hard. They see him as smart and caring, a perfect combination."

Granok's influence on his students is so great that many of them have gone on to pursue STEM-related fields of study in college, and when they come back to Crossroads to visit, he is often the first teacher they come to see.

"There is no greater satisfaction for a science teacher than to have students inspired enough to want to study science at the college level, and then to see them again as they are discovering new things," Granok says. "While it's humbling, it's also something I'm very proud of."

However, Granok's diverse interests go beyond the sciences to include art (favorite artist: Edward Hopper, for "the level of detail, realism, mood, and story within his paintings"), rock music (favorite band: Rush, from their classic albums 2112 and Fly by Night to the just-released Clockwork Angels—"I love their musicality, musicianship, and complicated rhythms"), and even fly tying and fly fishing.

"Crossroads is great at providing hands-on learning opportunities," he says. "Even the artwork that greets people when they walk into the building is a strong statement of what we value—hands-on education and the belief that every kid can be an artist, a scientist, or whatever he or she wants to be."

