

Two cohorts share their experiences with the MUST Program.



ALISON SUKYS

MUST Graduate Begins Teaching Career at Beaumont School

Despite a weak economy and job insecurity caused by Ohio's COVID-19 quarantine, Cleveland State University grads like Alison Sukys are seeing their career goals fulfilled. Upon graduation from the Master's in Urban Secondary Teaching (MUST) program, Sukys had a job waiting for her at Beaumont School, an all-girls Catholic high school in Cleveland Heights. She started in August as a social studies teacher.

The job allows Sukys — pronounced Sue-keys — to combine her desire to work with youth with her love of political science and history. Sukys initially planned to become a pediatric nurse when she enrolled as a freshman at The Ohio State University. She realized nursing wasn't for her, so she changed her major to public policy.

Sukys said she had some good internships that included working in the offices of U.S. Sen. Robert Portman, the communications department at OSU and Dwellworks, a downtown Cleveland corporation that relocates businesses.

"I liked them all, but I realized what was missing is that I always wanted to work with kids," she said.

Some MUST students come to the program years after being in the workforce. Not Sukys, who enrolled in the program after receiving a bachelor's degree in public policy from OSU in 2019.

She knew she didn't want to change her undergrad degree. She also knew that earning a master's degree was in her future. MUST allowed her to achieve that and get her teaching license.

Sukys said she was already acclimated as a full-time student, but faced some challenges

with MUST's fast-paced schedule.

"In the MUST program, most of us are coming from non-educational backgrounds. We're coming straight out of college, others are coming from different careers. So trying to learn everything to be a successful teacher in 14 months can be overwhelming and challenging, but it also is super rewarding, and I wouldn't change it."

"You are in grad school 100%. That is your life," Sukys explained.

MUST's emphasis on preparing teachers to work in underserved communities is another reason why she chose the program.

"I'm learning that everyone doesn't get the same start in life, which is important for everyone to know even if you aren't a teacher," she said.

Her role as a teacher is not just to deliver subject content, she stressed. "I'm learning that teachers are so much more than teachers. They can be mentors, advocates for students — just the ally that they need."

She remembered how two of her favorite teachers served in those capacities. One was her third-grade science teacher Kathy Gentile at Our Lady of the Lake School in Euclid. "She advocated for all students as a whole and wanted us to learn in a positive way," Sukys recalled. She added that Gentile not only worked to teach science but to "teach the whole student to form a well-rounded citizen who is educated and knowledgeable."

She expressed admiration about her math teacher Gary Minadeo at Villa Angela-St. Joseph (VASJ) High School, where she graduated in 2015.

"He really pushed me, encouraged me and challenged me to grow as a person, not just as a student," she recounted.

Sukys' high school prepped her to work in a diverse setting along with her MUST work.

"I went to Villa Angela-St. Joseph, and I had a really diverse educational experience. I wanted to keep that for my teaching experience as well and my teaching preparatory experience," she said.

Sukys did her practicum at New Tech West in Cleveland. "I formed a great relationship with my kids," she said.

She and her fellow "MUSTies," as she

referred to the cohort, began working in their respective schools at the beginning of the school year. "I started teaching two or three weeks into the school year. We all threw ourselves in. That's the best way to do it," Sukys said.

Sukys taught American history with mentor-teacher Zachary Zlocki, whom she describes as "fantastic." She recounted a particularly interesting lesson about the Bill of Rights, in which stations were positioned around the classroom. A set of circumstances were proposed at each station that ranged from the protest of a law to the search of lockers on school property. Students had to tell which of the first 10 amendments to the Constitution addressed each issue.

Executed in a creative way, this exercise helped students see how laws written in the 1700s are still being used today. "Being able to cater lessons to your students' interest is the biggest thing I learned," Sukys explained.

She will be conducting lessons of this type at Beaumont, which is not considered by many to be an urban school. Sukys applied for work in underserved communities, but to no avail.

"The demand for social studies teachers in the Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Cleveland Heights, Euclid — any of those is so low," she explained.

In Ohio and other states, there is more of an emphasis on STEM — science, technology, engineering and math — studies. Students are not required to take as much in social studies. As a result, teaching positions for social studies are harder to come by, according to Sukys. She reached out to Beaumont and was hired.

"I wanted to get my career going because I had been in school for five years. So I took that opportunity," she explained.

It also should be noted that Beaumont's tuition is \$16,500 a year, but 48% of its students receive financial aid, according to school's website. Sukys added that the student body is diverse.

Sukys' teaching style at Beaumont will focus on project-based learning. "I like class discussions. I like students taking an active role in their learning. Direct instruction, lecturing is important and needs to be done, but making sure students have that active, engaging role in their learning is really important to me."