

Samantha Kirby, Wins 2015-2016 Outstanding EXL Student Award

The Outstanding EXL Student Award is given annually to a student who holds a distinguished record of service in the EXL Scholars Program. Samantha Kirby, an aspiring teacher and MTSU student, received invaluable knowledge and childcare practice through the Experiential Learning Program. In her courses, Kirby observed a mother and her child, planned and implemented a parent-teacher conference, and practiced communication skills through regular interactions with parents. Most instrumental in Kirby's education, however, was the opportunity to plan and implement lesson plans in a Kindergarten classroom. These EXL courses allowed the Early Childhood and Education student to actually work with children in their own schools. Reflecting on this, Kirby states, "As a pre-service teacher, I cannot imagine completing my education without the experience of being in a classroom and around children all the time. The infant/toddler and preschool practicum allow the opportunity for the pre-service teacher to have interactions with parents, really dig deep into student and early childhood learning, and, for the first time, plan and implement real lesson plans." Her high involvement in Kindergarten classrooms helped Kirby build relationships with both children and parents. This, in turn, helped her secure a job as a childcare provider for one of the families. Through the Experiential Learning Program, Samantha Kirby gained the skills necessary to become successful in her future career. Referring to the courses that provided her with the most professional experience in her academic career, Kirby states, "I do not think that MTSU creates such great teachers by sending them into the field without practice. MTSU creates great, sought-after, teachers because it recognizes that through EXL courses, not only do the student/teachers benefit, but the community benefits as well," also stating, "These courses set us up as professionals and give us real world experience. It truly builds the bridge between the university and the professional life afterward."