Third grade teacher Heather Hemeyer, class of 2008, isn’t just teaching math, reading and spelling at St. Joseph’s Indian School in Chamberlain, S.D. She’s teaching children the skills they need to build a better tomorrow.
According to an analysis by the National Center for Children in Poverty, nearly one in six children in South Dakota – a staggering 34,000 kids across the state – are impacted by poverty. The poverty label, by definition, is attached to households reporting an annual income at or below $22,050 for a family of four.

Of those, a large number are Native Americans who live in areas categorized as among the poorest in the U.S. – counties like Shannon and Ziebach in rural South Dakota.

For these children, the financial strains their families face all-too-often leave their mark – from malnourishment to cognitive delays, behavioral disorders, abuse and neglect.

By the time they enter school, many have already endured a lifetime’s worth of heartache and struggle. Many find the structure and expectations of classroom work difficult. Teaching children in need can be challenging, too.

A colleague of mine mentioned that she was pursuing her master’s and was planning to implement a number of different techniques in her classroom. After talking with her, I really started to feel an hunger to learn more about my trade.”

"I started researching graduate programs. But I live in Chamberlain. The location is tough. Then I heard about Augie’s program. If it wasn’t for the program being online, there would be no way I could do it.”

"For today’s teachers, the decision to obtain a master’s degree is an important investment in their future. In addition to enhancing their ability to create positive learning environments for students, in most cases a master’s degree correlates to increased compensation,” said Dr. Sheryl Feinstein, professor of Education at Augustana. “By offering our program online, we’re able to accommodate the busy lives of adult learners while making the dream of a master’s degree a reality for teachers in rural areas.”

Augustana is currently accepting applications for its second Master of Arts in Education Online Degree Program, for which classes will begin in June 2012. Applications are due by Wednesday, Feb. 15, 2012. To learn more, visit www.augie.edu/graduate.

For Hemeyer, she’s looking forward to implementing what she’s learning through the program in her classroom. "This program has given me the chance to further my education and not have to worry about traveling somewhere else to do it. I couldn’t ask for more."

"There are a lot of late nights … if a child is having problems, you stay late to try to provide comfort. It’s important to build those relationships.”

— Heather Hemeyer, Class of 2008