NIU College of Education's Visual Disabilities Program

Perhaps what is most striking about Dr. Gaylen Kapperman, professor and coordinator of the Visual Disabilities Program, is not that he is blind, but that he approaches his loss of sight with no sense of regret. “Here’s the deal,” Kapperman says. “I’m blind. I don’t like being blind, but I made my mind up that I would turn a bad situation into something good.” And that he has – by devoting his career to improving the lives of children and adults who are visually impaired.

A nationally recognized leader in the field of mathematics and visual impairment, Kapperman has been a professor in the College of Education for 32 years. For 28 of those years, he has led the college’s visual disabilities program, turning it into one of the most rigorous and comprehensive programs of its kind in the nation. Distinctive in its use of technology for those who are blind, this program is consistently cited as one of the top three, if not THE BEST, such programs in the nation.

A Premier Program

Kapperman and his colleagues have developed the visual disabilities program to the point where it now garners national attention as an exceptional program.

“Our graduates routinely have jobs waiting for them at graduation,” Kapperman notes. “We have graduates in every state in the union – they are working at Hines Veterans Administration Hospital [Chicago], for The Seeing Eye [the nation’s oldest companion dog training program], for the Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired, and at all major rehabilitation centers, not to mention those who teach at schools and universities for the blind. Some of our graduates are executives in non-profit organizations, and others have started their own businesses.”

Technology is a key component of NIU’s program, providing rigorous experience in its use to support learning, communication and mobility for those who are visually impaired. “We spend an enormous amount of time staying on top of new developments and new technology in this dynamic field so that our students are exposed to the latest advances,” says Jodi Sticken, Director of the Orientation and Mobility Program. “We offer no shortcut programs of study; students are exposed to the latest advances,” says Jodi Sticken, Director of the Orientation and Mobility Program. “We offer no shortcut programs of study; students are exposed to the latest advances,” says Jodi Sticken, Director of the Orientation and Mobility Program. “We offer no shortcut programs of study; students are exposed to the latest advances.”

An assistive technology lab provides access to specialized equipment and programs and allows students to hone their skills on the latest technology. Combined with coursework, the lab provides a better understanding of how technology can enhance learning and independent living for persons with visual impairments.

A Three-Pronged Approach

NIU’s program has three distinct components:

1. Training for students to become certified teachers of blind and visually impaired students in the schools. With undergraduate and graduate options, this component prepares students to provide instruction and support services that enable children with visual impairments to participate in the least restrictive learning environment – often times a traditional classroom with sighted peers. Teachers will work not only with children, but also with their families, caregivers, and school personnel.

2. Training orientation and mobility specialists. This master’s level program prepares individuals to work in careers that ensure safe, independent travel for those with visual impairments. Orientation and mobility specialists help children and adults achieve the greatest level of independence in daily living (such as moving around one’s home, retrieving mail, navigating through shopping centers, etc.), as well as in fulfilling career aspirations and achieving financial independence.

3. Training for rehabilitation teachers of blind and visually impaired adults. Graduates of this master’s degree program work with blind and visually impaired adults, teaching techniques for safe, independent self-care and home management, as well as communication skills, such as using Braille. These teachers tailor techniques for specific needs, teaching life skills in home settings or rehabilitation centers.

Enrollment in the program is typically between 50 and 60 students, with about 10 to 15 graduating annually. Many students are sighted individuals who have chosen to work with people who are blind or visually impaired. All program components are approved by the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired.

Assistant Professor Dr. Kim Zebehazy, who just joined the program this year, says she was impressed with the energy level of the program. “The faculty... strive to make sure that course materials reflect the changing times and promote best practices,” she says. “They seek out grants for student support and research projects, and they engage in projects that make an impact on the field as a whole.”

Over the years, the program has received millions of dollars in grant funding, which allow faculty to stay on top of new technologies and explore their additional - and sometimes unintended - applications. Kapperman and Sticken just completed the Math Access project, developing specialized tutorials and techniques for teaching mathematics to students who are blind. Current research by Kapperman, Sticken and Zebehazy includes an interdisciplinary project with NIU’s geography department to map the campus, thereby enabling people who are visually impaired and using global positioning system devices to navigate it more easily.

Looking to the Future

According to the American Foundation for the Blind, there are about 10 million blind and visually impaired individuals in the U.S., half of those are over age 65. Every seven minutes, someone in the U.S. loses his sight as part of the aging process and, as the baby boomer generation ages, the frequency will only increase.

“Vision is such an important sense,” Kapperman says. "People are scared stiff of blindness; no one is really prepared to deal with it. Parents don’t naturally know how to raise a blind child; their first instinct is to protect him or her. Young adults who lose their sight through sudden injury need considerable training to learn to live without it. Older folks who lose their sight due to injury, stroke, or other health problems face huge challenges. And, of course, returning war veterans with loss of vision and other disabilities will need tremendous help. In each case, well-prepared teachers can make an unbelievable impact, helping blind persons live, learn, and work independently.

“Everyone can point to a teacher who had a tremendous impact on their life,” he continues. “There is a desperate need for teachers for blind people of all ages, and I can say confidently that it is one of the most rewarding careers in the country.”

For more information about the visual disabilities program and/or admission requirements, please contact Dr. Kapperman at (815) 753-8453 or via e-mail at gkapperman@niu.edu.
Alumna Lands United Nations Internship

Imagine Nalika Diyadawagamage’s panic when she learned of “her dream job” - an internship opening at the United Nations part two hours before the application deadline! Scanning the guidelines, Nalika felt that it fit well with her background as an international student and a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education (CAHE). She submitted the online application and hoped for the best.

This hope of working at the U.N. was Nalika’s “lifelong dream.” She had seen firsthand the impact of U.N. and World Bank projects while growing up in Sri Lanka and had a deep interest in the U.N.’s mission. That interest paid off when she was selected for the nine-week internship, from May 14 – July 13, 2007. Though Nalika was leaving her Illinois and Central Mexico, a National Science Foundation-funded experience for middle and high school teachers serving large Hispanic populations ($540,000).

Richard Orem (CAHE) is the principal investigator for Project Success, a five-year project to increase the number of educators teaching ESL and/or bilingual students ($1,500,000 over 5 years).

Brent WHOleben and his colleagues in the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Policy Studies are serving as evaluators for grants projects in the West Chicago, Rockford, Aurora, and Escanaba [Mich.] school districts, with a combined value of more than $10,000,000.

CoE faculty members Carla Shaw, Sharon Smaldino, and M Cecil Smith are involved in an interdisciplinary project funded by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) to help teachers in the Harlem and West Aurora school districts earn endorsements in interdisciplinary engineering and industrial technology ($1 million).

CoE faculty members Carla Shaw and M Cecil Smith are part of an interdisciplinary, multi-year teacher professional development project to develop “highly qualified” middle school math teachers, which is funded by the ISBE ($1 million).

CoE faculty members Francine Falk-Ross and M Cecil Smith are part of an interdisciplinary project funded by the ISBE to expand biology and science teaching at the middle school level ($1 million).

Making the Grade: Scholarship Awards

This year, over 80 students are pursuing education degrees with the support of over $113,000 in scholarships and awards made possible by the charitable gifts of alumni and friends. Highlighted below are a few of the funders and scholarship recipients this year. For more information about establishing a scholarship, contact Deborah Fransen at (815) 753-1137 or via email at dfransen@niu.edu.

Mary F. English Technology Award

Thank you for donating such a wonderful gift to so many students...The Mary F. English Award has made it possible for me to learn new things about technology that I will one day teach my students...I never would have been able to afford a laptop...This award is something I will always remember...These are just a few comments from the 2007 English Scholars, supported by a fund that Dr. Robert J. English (Ed.D. ’74) established in 1999 as a birthday present for his wife, Mary. They wanted the award to have a “WOW” factor, and, after years of technology consulting, understood the tremendous potential and challenges of computer use for teachers. From their experiences came the idea of providing a computer system and training to undergraduate students who have physical or financial challenges. There are now 33 students in the program, with an additional 15 to 20 students selected each year.

Penelope (Penny) Fike Cameron Scholarship

Penelope (Penny) Fike Cameron (B.A. ’59) says that the education she received at NIU gave her the background and knowledge to meet many challenges in her life. She taught third grade, then served as an elected official on the Kane County Board for many years before retiring to continue her leadership roles with a variety of organizations in her home community of Aurora, Ill. She established this fund in 1998, to support upper-level undergraduate students majoring in elementary education.

Jerry Johns Literacy Presentation Award

A Distinguished Teacher Professor Emeritus and influential writer, Dr. Johns taught in the College for over 30 years. During that time, he received numerous accolades, including induction into the Illinois Reading Council’s Reading Hall of Fame. In establishing this fund, Dr. Johns hopes to encourage graduate students’ research in literacy by supporting research presentations at conferences. Since 2003, twenty recipients have benefited from this award.

The James and Moke Chee Wolter Endowments

Dr. James (B.S. ’60, CAS ’76, Ed.D. ’80) and Mrs. Moke Wolter reestablished their commitment to education and to the College by setting up a second endowment, which will help low-income children access services at the Reading Clinic.

College Celebrates $15 Million in Grant Awards

Great research informs great teaching, and the College’s faculty members contribute significantly to NIU’s reputation as a teaching and research university. Following are some of the larger grant awards that were recently announced.

Maylan Dunn-Kenney and Nina Dorsch (TURN) are principal investigators for EC2, a partnership to provide early childhood teaching certification in the Rockford area ($261,585 over 2 years).

Toni Van Laarhoven, Sarah Johnson-Rodriguez, and Traci Van Laarhoven-Myers (TURN) are project directors for MY VOICE (Multimedia for Youth to Voice Outcome University), which will train Indian Prairie School District staff, pre-service educators, and parents/guardians to promote and support self-determination and self-advocacy among youth with developmental disabilities ($337,590 over 3 years).

Gaylen Kapperman (TURN) is the principal investigator for three awards: 1. A U.S. Dept. of Education grant for the training of four cohorts of on-campus students, one cohort of distance learning students, and one cohort of practicing teachers to become orientation and mobility instructors for those who are visually impaired ($800,000 over 4 years); 2. A U.S. Dept. of Education grant for the training of five graduate student cohorts to become rehabilitation teachers or orientation and mobility specialists ($500,000 over 5 years); and 3. An Illinois Board of Higher Education grant that developed a distance learning course focusing on issues for persons who are visually impaired ($90,575 over 3 years).

David Shernoff (LEPF) is co-principal investigator on a project funded by the National Science Foundation, to assess the impact of a video game for teaching engineering concepts ($150,000 over 3 years).

Lisa Yamagato-Lynch (ETRA), Francine Falk-Ross (LEPF), and M Cecil Smith (LEPF) are involved in the multidisciplinary project, Enhancing Diversity Track 2: Intensive Field Experience in Northern Illinois and Central Mexico, a National Science Foundation-funded experience for middle and high school teachers serving large Hispanic populations ($540,000)

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NIU College of Education: Producing Influential Leaders

The College has a long tradition of producing exceptional leaders in education. Here we feature a few of our graduates who have excelled as community college administrators.

Dr. Ted Raspiller, CoE alumnus and Director of the Community College Leadership Program at Old Dominion University, says that community colleges are facing “a shortage of faculty and administrators like never before. Graduates with a strong grasp of adult and higher education theory and practice are a highly sought commodity for key positions.” Check out what our alums have to say about this career track.

Kudos

Paul Carpenter, chair, Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education, won the 2007 Tejas 500 bike race in 30 hours, 57 minutes and is now training for the 2009 2007 Tejas 500 bike race in 30 hours, 57 minutes and is now training for the 2009 2007 Tejas 500 bike race in 30 hours, 57 minutes and is now training for the 2009 2007 Tejas 500 bike race in 30 hours, 57 minutes and is now training for the 2009 2007 Tejas 500 bike race in 30 hours, 57 minutes and is now training for the 2009 2007 Tejas 500 bike race in 30 hours, 57 minutes and is now training for the 2009 2007 Tejas 500 bike race in 30 hours, 57 minutes and is now training for the 2009 Race Across America event.

Wilma Miranda, former chair and professor emerita, Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations, was honored with the 2007 James and Helen Merritt Award for Outstanding Contributions to Philosophy of Education. Crossover Dribble, a middle-grade-level novel by Pamela Harris, professor emerita, Department of Literacy Education, will be out in mid-November (www.pjfarris.com). Artwork by Meryl Domino, assistant professor, Department of Teaching and Learning, and her mother was featured in a mother/daughter show this fall at the DeKalb Area Women’s Center.

College of Education students Jenna Arceaneaux, Lihn-Han Nguyen, Melissa Reece, and Rey Ty are featured on the “NIYou” website (www.niu.edu/NIYou/).

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Dean’s Message

Welcome to the first edition of the College of Education’s Newsletter! This new publication gives us an opportunity to share news and showcase the outstanding work being done in the College of Education. I hope you will be energized and excited after reading about the marvelous talents, exceptional programs, and invaluable financial support that enrich and extend the College’s impact.

Teacher training is the purpose for which NIU was founded over 100 years ago, and the College of Education remains the heart of this great institution yet today. As one of the nation’s premier colleges of education, we have a distinguished record of providing positive educational opportunities, and we are proud of the quality of our programs, our faculty and staff, and, most of all, our graduates.

The new academic year brings the opportunity to examine who we are and who we choose to be in the future. In that vein, we are beginning a strategic planning process that will help identify opportunities, define priorities and develop a “road map” for fulfilling the College’s mission. We’ll keep you updated during this exciting journey.

We are also pleased to announce that our newly re-designed website is “live.” In planning the site, we carefully considered the information and resources that would be most useful to our alumni and friends. Please visit us at www.cedu.niu.edu and let us know what you think.

All of these efforts are only possible because of the dedication and hard work of our faculty and staff, combined with your continued financial support. If you have ever wondered what we do with the gifts you send us, I hope this newsletter will help answer those questions and confirm that your support is making a significant and positive impact.

Lemuel W. Watson, Dean

Credits: Writer/Editor: Deborah Fransen (dfransen@niu.edu) Design: Deborah Holderness www.cedu.niu.edu

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Upcoming Events

Last Home Football Game — GO HUSKIES!!
Saturday, November 24
NIU vs. Ball State; 3:00 p.m.

College of Education Holiday Party
Wednesday, December 12; 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.
Anderson Hall 100

Fall Commencement
Sunday, December 16; Convocation Center

January All College
Wednesday, January 9; O’Connell Theatre, Stevens Building

Los Angeles, CA Alumni Event
Friday, February 15, 2008; Location: TBD

Children’s Literature Conference
March 14-15, 2008; NIU DeKalb campus

CoE Retirees and Friends Meeting
Thursday, March 20, 2008; Location: TBD

Arizona Alumni and Friends Receptions
April 1-7, 2008; Phoenix and Tucson

Spring Commencement
Saturday, May 10, 2008; Convocation Center

CoE Retirees and Friends Meeting
Thursday, May 15, 2008; Location TBD

Alumni Ice Cream Social and Jazz Afternoon
June 2008; Location TBD

Alumni Fall Picnic
June 2008; Ellwood House, DeKalb

For more information about these events, please call Gail Hayenga at (815) 753-8370 or via e-mail at ghayenga@niu.edu.

Our annual Spring Event will be on Friday, April 25, 2008, at NIU Naperville. This invitation-only event celebrates the generosity of our friends and alumni who contribute $500 or more to the College during the calendar year. In addition, the event’s silent auction raises money for programs and scholarships in the College. For more information about this event, please contact Deborah Fransen at (815) 753-1137. We hope to see you there!