Endeavors
Volume 8, 2009

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Message From the Dean

I have found that society has high hopes that the academy can fix all of the education-related problems. As the dean of a college of education, I have been in debates and discussions about the fate of education in the United States. I am convinced that we must accept that the problems in education are everyone’s responsibility before we can work together to solve them. In spite of the conflict and stress that we may encounter in the field, I still choose to believe in the infinite possibilities that await us behind every challenge. I say, “What a wonderful and awesome world!” “Wonderful” and “awesome” because every day we are presented with opportunities to engage with each other to address the complex issues in education.

Feedback from graduates is key to helping us gauge our effectiveness in preparing teachers, administrators, and professionals. As I traveled from coast to coast this year, I heard the resounding and unanimous voices of alumni saying that they were well-prepared for the field and practice. Inside you will find articles that bear this out, such as the story of Linda Smerge, 2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year, or Lee Shell’s tribute to a professor who changed her life.

Changing lives is really what education is all about, isn’t it? Our partnerships help us change lives every day, offering synergy and excitement and helping us move forward as a Premier College of Education. Within the university, we are partnering with other colleges to address the demand for greater emphasis on science and technology. In the community, our work in providing bilingual enrichment for teachers and in expanding our professional development school model offer tremendous opportunities for all. Read more about both of these areas in our feature articles.

This issue also features three faculty who are “Second to None” in teaching and research. NIU is so fortunate to have a College of Education with faculty, students, staff, and alumni who stand out in their fields and are regularly recognized for their teaching, service, and research. Future issues will feature more outstanding faculty, but please be sure to read “Points of Pride: An Intellectually Vigorous Faculty” in this issue to get an idea of the quality and productivity of our faculty.

The commitment to our international friends remains strong, as well. I know you will enjoy reading about student Dan Rosenberg’s work in Guatemala and about our Fulbright scholar from Kyrgyzstan, Dr. Baktybek Keldibekov.

I must say that as I continue to meet and visit with you – our alumni, retired faculty, friends, and corporate partners – I am so impressed. Your generosity in the face of financial challenges on all sides is greatly appreciated. We are especially grateful for your gifts this year; whether for programs, student scholarships, or faculty development, all gifts directly impact our students and are more important than ever.

Equally important is that our College of Education success stories be shared with others. Check out the back cover to learn how you can participate in a new project, “I Believe in Red, NIU Red: Stories from the College of Education.” With your shared insights and experiences, we will continue to evolve as a Premier College of Education.

Sincerely,

Lemuel W. Watson, Dean
Improving Teaching of English Language Learners

Barb Marler (top left) from the Illinois Resource Center leads a workshop.
In August 2007, the College of Education, along with five regional institutions of higher education and area school districts, was awarded a $1.5 million federal grant to help improve the instruction of English language learners in northern Illinois. Project Success marked its first year in December 2008, when two cohorts completed the intense series of six classes leading to the ESL/bilingual teacher approval from the Illinois State Board of Education. Of the 50 individuals who initially enrolled in either the online or in-class cohorts, 39 (78%) completed the six courses. Of the 25 enrollees in the face-to-face cohort, 22 (88%) completed all courses. In the online cohort, 17 of 25 enrollees (68%) completed all courses.

Those who dropped out of the face-to-face cohort indicated that they had been assigned additional teaching or administrative duties after they had enrolled, which impacted their ability to attend class and keep up with coursework.

**The Challenge of Technology Use**

Feedback from participants suggests that the attrition rate of the online cohort was directly related to technology use and access.

“Some participants in the online course indicated that they were not prepared for the level of technology use that was expected, resulting in the greater attrition rate,” says project director Dr. Richard Orem, a College of Education Presidential Teaching Professor. “We have since developed an early information session to prepare our online participants for the expectations and workload, which should reduce that early attrition rate.” Orem noted that offering the coursework online is especially important for reaching teachers in rural and outlying areas.

Project Success participants who completed the coursework provided highly positive feedback about the project. The majority indicated that that in spite of the demanding schedule and hard work, they learned a lot.

“All of the participants exhibited a high level of commitment to teaching,” noted Orem. “These were some of the busiest teachers in their schools, yet they chose to make time to participate in this project because they want to become better teachers to those with limited English ability.”

Recruitment of the second-year cohorts was much easier due to word-of-mouth and excellent cooperation from the Regional Offices of Education, several of which invited Orem to talk about the project. Initial classes for this cohort began in January, and Orem reports that another highly motivated group of teachers is participating.

**Future Direction**

Orem said some program adjustments have been made. The in-class cohort is meeting closer to the Elgin U-46 and Carpentersville 300 districts, both of which cover large geographic areas and have a tremendous need for teachers with expertise in
instructing non-English language learners. The assignment schedule has also been modified to spread work out over the semesters, alleviating the crunch of due dates. And, while two teachers from the first year will again be teaching, there will also be some new instructors involved in the project.

Project Success faculty are also busy planning the second annual Summer Academy for Teacher Educators on May 18-22. The Academy provides techniques for integrating effective practices for teaching English language learners into teacher training courses, supervision, and mentoring activities and is aimed at instructors, field supervisors and cooperating teachers. Topics will include bilingual education, linguistic diversity, bilingualism and literacy, and challenges associated with educating linguistically diverse students. Workshop sessions are conducted by NIU faculty and other experts in the field.

Project Success partners are developing a DVD or CD to help pre-service physical education teachers be more sensitive to second language learners. As a whole, physical education teachers encounter second language learners more often than other teachers, but they usually have the least amount of training in language diversity. The same is often true of music and art teachers. Orem says that teachers in all three areas – as well as teachers in general – could benefit from programs such as Project Success.

Emerging Issues

Orem says the program has underscored two areas in which the college must examine and enhance its instruction: online courses and preparing pre-service teachers to work with bilingual students. “Project Success is helping the college further develop its capacity in both areas. We are seeing more faculty with significant technology experience, as well as more students who are inquiring about online courses. This tells us that we need to place more emphasis on technology in our own classes. In addition, we recognize that there are many communities in the northern Illinois area in which bilingualism is commonplace. We need to think about how we prepare our teacher education candidates to work in those communities.”
“I am getting more and more inquiries from teachers who are looking to get this additional certification. We’ve got to be incorporating more of this type of instruction into our undergraduate teacher certification program. This is extremely difficult to do because there are currently so few electives and the teacher training schedule is so tight. However, we need to find ways to integrate bilingual aspects into the curriculum so we can better prepare teachers for what they will likely encounter in the classroom.”

Orem said the project has also reinforced the need for more teacher professional development opportunities, particularly in outlying areas. He hopes to explore ways in which the college might be able to meet this need, possibly through online and distance education offerings. A workshop for administrators is also in development.

The first-year project results are encouraging. Orem shared preliminary observations with colleagues at a conference in Oxford last spring, and other faculty have presented at state meetings. Project results will be further disseminated in the coming months and years, through presentations at state and national conferences, as well as through reports, articles, and publications. Project updates are also posted periodically on the Project Success website.

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**Project Success**

**Project Director:** Dr. Richard Orem

**Funding:** $1.5 million, five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education

**Project Description:** The project focuses on increasing the number of highly qualified teachers and administrators in northern Illinois who serve English language learners.

**Goals:**

1. To enable mainstream teachers who have English language learners (ELL) in their classrooms to complete the graduate coursework leading to either the ESL or bilingual approval from Illinois State Board of Education.
2. To service the rural districts of northern Illinois by offering a second cohort of classes in an online/hybrid format.
3. To provide training for administrators in school districts serving increasing numbers of ELL.
4. To increase the effectiveness of teacher training programs.

**More information:**

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*Audrey Edwards (left) of Eastern Illinois University talks with Diane Zelesky, Title III Coordinator, District 300.*

*Barb Mackey (left) of Lewis University reviews materials with Audrey Edwards.*
CoE Professors Lead the Way in Teaching and Research

L-R: Don Richgels, Jen Schmidt, and Kim Zebehazy discuss trends in education.
One is examining how children acquire written language competence. Another focuses on social and developmental aspects of adolescents, and a third is exploring a number of issues related to students who have visual impairments. The three faculty featured here have different research interests, but share many qualities, including tremendous scholarly productivity, commitment to teaching, and a deep dedication to exploring the way we think, learn, and develop. Here are their inspiring stories.

**Donald J. Richgels**

For over a quarter-century, Don Richgels, Presidential Research Professor in the Department of Literacy Education, has studied how spoken language abilities provide a foundation for learning to read and write. Richgels's research is among the most influential in the field, and he still speaks animatedly about his work.

“One especially intriguing manifestation of spoken-to-written language connections is invented spelling – young children’s untutored, non-conventional, but systematic matching of spoken phonemes with letters of the alphabet,” he says. “For example, they might write the word chair as ‘h-a-r’ because they hear the ‘ch’ sound in the name of the letter h, the ‘aye’ sound that is the name of the letter a, and the ‘rrr’ sound in the name of the letter r.”

Richgels traces his research interest to the eight years he taught first and second grades in Janesville, Wis. “A big part of that first grade year for students was learning to read. It was very gratifying to be part of that momentous achievement and very frustrating when my students were unsuccessful. I wanted to learn more about what was involved in learning to read and write.”

So, he took courses in reading education at UW-Madison, where he received his Ph.D. in 1982. He taught at Louisiana State until 1986, when he came to NIU and found a “home” that would support both his teaching and scholarly interests.

“NIU offered the kind of university experience I wanted and a job where I could pursue my research interests while teaching language-related courses,” he says. Today, Richgels teaches courses in the reading, elementary education, early childhood, and ESL-bilingual programs.

Richgels’s field of inquiry centers on invented spelling. “Much of my research has focused on the role of invented spelling in early writing and its relation to early reading development,” he notes. “Phonemic awareness [recognizing that a spoken word consists of a sequence of individual sounds] is a big contributor to children’s beginning reading and writing. It involves paying conscious attention to the phonemes that we use unconsciously in speaking and understanding speech. Invented spelling provides a way of assessing children’s phonemic awareness and promoting it.”

In conducting research to explore invented spelling, Richgels met Karla Poremba, an “amazing” kindergarten teacher in the St. Charles School District. She invited Richgels to observe her classroom. Over the next two years, he was a regular visitor, resulting in reams of data, numerous conference presentations and his book, “Going to Kindergarten: A Year with an Outstanding Teacher.”
His goal is to provide teachers of preschoolers and elementary school students with basic knowledge of language processes to answer such questions as:

- How does spoken language develop?
- How does written language develop?
- How are the two related?

Along with unraveling the process, Richgels will also provide strategies for teachers to use in supporting language development. His extensive research and writings, which include books and articles for pre-service and in-service teachers, are helping to solve the challenges of classroom teaching.

“Many of those challenges are the same as I experienced when I taught first and second grade thirty years ago. And, many of them are different, as I’ve learned from observing in classrooms and from interacting with my students.”

At NIU, Richgels says he has found a highly supportive community for his teaching, scholarly, and educational pursuits.

“I enjoy being a member of a learning community,” he says. “Being a professor at a university such as NIU gives you tremendous freedom to define and pursue your interests. As an example, in the last two years, I have been taking foreign language courses – something that has always interested me. Many of my students in the ESL-Bilingual program not only teach English language learners, but themselves learned English as a second language, as well. Their example and the challenges their students face have motivated me to learn a new language. So now I’m in my fourth semester of Italian language classes at NIU.”

In addition to his students, Richgels cites Professor Wayne Otto at the University of Wisconsin as someone who inspired and motivated him.

“Wayne Otto showed an interest in me and encouraged and supported my doctoral studies, even though his particular sub-area of reading research was not the same as mine. He was a model of how to be a professor – how to combine research and teaching and how to enjoy the opportunities and challenges offered in a university setting.”

Richgels says he has especially enjoyed learning from interaction with students who share his curiosity about language.

“A university provides so many resources and opportunities for enrichment. Being a perpetually student turned out not to be practical for me, but being involved in my own and others’ learning as a university professor is almost as good a deal!”
Jennifer A. Schmidt

Jen Schmidt, Associate Professor in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations, “caught the research bug” in graduate school.

“While at the University of Chicago, I was involved in several large, multidisciplinary projects, and I became very passionate about the systematic study of adolescent development and learning. As I thought about where I’d like to end up, I wanted to find a place where good teaching was important and valued, but where I would also have the opportunity to engage in research.”

It turns out that place was NIU.

“NIU offered me the opportunity to be at a place where teaching matters and where I could do research,” says Schmidt, whose research focuses on social and developmental aspects of adolescence. She is particularly interested in adolescents’ subjective experiences in school and community opportunities and in examining the links between these experiences and academic, psychosocial, and civic outcomes.

What is unique about Schmidt’s research is that it focuses on the positive aspects of adolescence – a time that people often associate with emotional roller coasters and rebellion. The Positive Psychology Movement is a developing field that holds tremendous interest for Schmidt.

“I’m interested in how teens thrive, what they enjoy, how they become truly engaged. I’ve also studied resilience – the conditions that enable adolescents to thrive even though they are at risk of failure. I am fascinated by adolescence as a developmental period because it is the time when children start making their own decisions about how they spend their time.”

Schmidt’s recent work includes studies of adolescent engagement in community service, homework experiences, and experiences with the media. She is currently involved in a three-year study, along with NIU colleagues M Cecil Smith and Lee Shumow, examining the subjective experiences of male and female students in high school science classrooms. Funded by the National Science Foundation, the project could have significant implications for recruitment and retention of females in the sciences. Schmidt, Smith, and Shumow are currently analyzing and coding data, with articles, conference presentations, a website and a book planned for 2010 and beyond.

Schmidt says two people most influenced her career – both of them professors. She conducted research
under Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (“chick-sent-me-high-yee”), a world-renowned psychologist who is a leader in the field of Positive Psychology and perhaps best known for his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Schmidt says when she first approached Csikszentmihalyi after reading some of his articles, she did not realize how highly regarded he was in psychology circles.

“Fortunately for me, I had no idea that he was famous, so I wasn’t nervous at all when I first called him and asked for an appointment to discuss his work. We had a very interesting discussion, and I volunteered to help on any projects he had going on at the time. Luckily for me, he was just beginning a multi-disciplinary, longitudinal study of adolescents. I secured a paid position as a full-time research assistant, and two years later entered the doctoral program and continued my work on the project.” Schmidt says Csikszentmihalyi “was an inspiring mentor” who provided many opportunities for her to grow as a researcher.

A second mentor teacher was Barbara Schneider, now a professor at Michigan State University.

“I worked very closely with Barbara, who was co-principal investigator with Csikszentmihalyi in the study on which I worked as a graduate student. More than anyone, she showed me how to do research – from writing the grant to designing the study to collecting and analyzing the data to managing the entire project. By her example, Barbara taught me how to involve graduate students in research in meaningful ways – ways that will enable and empower them to conduct their own research in the future.”

Schmidt aims to extend the kind of support and encouragement she received to the students who work with her.

“I’d like to conduct large research projects with the goal of promoting optimal development among adolescents. I’d like the results of my work to have an impact on the lives of youth. I want to involve my graduate students in this research and to train them well for careers as educational psychologists, and I’d also like to make this work accessible to those studying to be teachers.”

**Kim T. Zebehazy**

It was a process of elimination that put Kim Zebehazy, Assistant Professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning, on the path to a career in research and teaching in the field of visual impairments.

“I always knew I wanted to work in a human services field,” she says. “And, I was determined to make a decision in my first semester as to whether my major would be special education, occupational therapy, or speech pathology. I visited the speech pathology department and was allowed to observe a therapy session, which happened to be an articulation session.”

Witnessing a therapist working with a child on one particular vocal sound over and over made an impression on Zebehazy. “Not realizing at the time that speech pathology involved so much more,” she says, “I decided, based on that single observation, that it was not for me!”

So, she attempted to sign up for the special education specialty of physical or health impairments, but found out that this area of study had been eliminated, which left her to choose among mental, emotional/behavioral, or visual impairments.

“Visual impairments sounded interesting, so I decided to try it, and it stuck,” she says simply.

Zebehazy graduated from Western Michigan University with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and special education for visual impairments and a master’s degree in orientation and mobility. She took a position in Vermont as an itinerant teacher of the visually impaired and an orientation and mobility specialist for children from birth through high school. When her former professors kept asking, “When are you going to do that doctorate?” she decided to apply to the University of Pittsburgh, completing her Ph.D. in 2006.

With several positions to choose from, Zebehazy decided to teach at NIU. She says the atmosphere here seemed friendly and supportive of new faculty, and the visual disabilities program has a strong reputation, particularly in the use of assistive technology. She cites her colleagues, Gaylen Kapperman and Jodi Sticken, as “an added bonus” to her decision and has appreciated their support and collegiality.

Zebehazy’s research interests are wide ranging and include effective teacher preparation, educational
issues affecting children with low vision, accessibility issues related to the assessment of students with visual impairments, and effective orientation and mobility instruction, including the use of technology. She is analyzing data from her survey of teachers of the visually impaired in 32 states regarding functional literacy practices for students with visual impairments and additional disabilities while also working on a project that uses GPS systems for campus navigation. But there is one area that holds special interest for her.

“The research area of most interest to me is promoting higher order thinking and problem solving skills in students with visual impairments. My interest stems from observations of student teachers and my own students when I was teaching in Vermont. I noticed a tendency for teachers to be directive, providing step-by-step directions throughout a lesson. I observed very few instances where students were being asked to compare, contrast, analyze or evaluate. Self-determination, self-advocacy skills, and the efficient use of technology depend on these capabilities.”

Zebehazy has recently begun work in this area and plans to build on this line of inquiry by examining how children with visual impairments approach different assessment items. Over the long term, Zebehazy hopes her research will impact her own approach to teaching as well as that of her students.

“I hope to inspire teacher candidates to be very reflective practitioners,” she says. “Teachers of the visually impaired, as well as orientation and mobility specialists, need to be dynamic, flexible, and able to modify instruction in the moment while still being conscientious in their practice. I hope to develop a work book that helps teacher candidates fine-tune their questioning techniques as well as their goal-writing abilities in disability specific instructional areas.”

Zebehazy also plans to become more involved in international volunteer work. She has previously volunteered through the Volunteer Optometric Services for Humanity (VOSH) organization, participating in four VOSH vision clinics, most recently in Grenada, Nicaragua, in February 2008. She says it was an amazing and inspirational experience and helped develop her long-term goal of assisting with teacher development internationally to improve the education of and services for children with visual impairments.◆
NIU and District 428 Celebrate Partnership Expansion

(Back Row, L-R: District 428 Superintendent James Briscoe, Chesebro Principal Sharon Giless, School Board President Mike Verbic, NIU President John Peters, and CoE Partnership Office Director/ Morgridge Chair Sharon Smaldino)
Spanish is the first language for about half of the 298 children at Chesebro Elementary School in DeKalb, Ill. It is the language they are most familiar with, the language they hear and speak at home and bring with them into the classroom. These unique students require dual-language instruction, something that is not always a part of the teacher preparation program for elementary education majors at most universities.

Chesebro teachers have proven quite successful in that challenge. The school makes adequate yearly progress as prescribed by the No Child Left Behind legislation as students consistently meet or exceed federally mandated standards. Yet as the gap between the children’s test scores and those standards started to narrow, the school leadership team began to consider becoming a professional development school (PDS) in partnership with Northern Illinois University.

Putting the Pieces in Place

According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, professional development schools may be compared to teaching hospitals, which were designed to provide direct experience and clinical preparation for medical students and interns. Professional development schools serve the same function for teacher candidates and in-service faculty, supporting teaching, learning, and professional development in real-world settings.

Now teachers, professors and college students are working to make Chesebro a PDS that not only transcends such barriers as multiple languages and differing cultures, but also celebrates differences as opportunities for incredible learning. “Our teachers are really excited. This allows more collaboration and more professional development for everyone,” Chesebro Principal Sharon Giles said. “In addition, it’s exciting for Northern. Chesebro is an urban, diverse school. More and more for teacher certification, those types of building experiences are not only required, but really help to build the repertoire of new teachers.”

The PDS model is dedicated to raising student achievement, improving teacher preparation and enhancing performance of teachers. Wright Elementary School, which opened in 2004, was the first NIU-DeKalb Community Unit District 428 professional development school. It has received local, regional, and national attention as an exemplary model of a successful professional development school. A third PDS will open in the fall of 2011 at the new DeKalb High School on Dresser Road.

“Late last spring, we met with the school leadership team. They were curious about whether this was something they’d want to do,” said Sharon Smaldino, who holds the LD and Ruth G. Morgridge Chair in Teacher Education and Preparation and heads the college’s School-University Partnerships Office. “Their
call had come out of the blue. We were surprised but had no doubt in our minds that this was something they saw as a benefit.”

“When I came to Chesebro, I realized that we needed community resources,” Giless said. “I had previous experience with a PDS in my last school district, and I had visited Wright, talked to the principal and had a chance to review what they had done.”

Meetings were scheduled every third Tuesday morning. A mission statement and goals were drafted. An all-day retreat was held with NIU faculty and teachers from Wright Elementary School.

Last May, the group presented its proposal to the school board, and when school began last fall, Chesebro launched its rebirth. “Our community is changing,” said Becky McCabe, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction in the DeKalb Public Schools, “and the demands from the community as well as the world are that children need to have more than one language, and they need to be academically secure in that language.”

**A Learning Community**

Framers of the Chesebro partnership have high expectations for students, families, teachers, and the larger learning community participating in the project. They envision Chesebro students developing language, literacy and mathematical fluency, becoming positive contributors to the learning community and playing active roles in their own learning and assessment.

Families will be honored for their diversity and connection to learning. Teachers and NIU interns will become more knowledgeable in teaching diverse students and better prepared to provide instruction to students with different learning needs.

All of the Chesebro learning community – students, parents, staff and NIU – will participate in Spanish thematic reading activities in mixed groups of Spanish and English speakers.

Planners have created a three-year implementation schedule. Year One, which began last August, focuses on language and literacy in English and Spanish, including an after-school program that offers Spanish as a foreign language. In Year Two (2009-10), the project focus will branch into math, bilingualism and best practices for English language learners.

Year Three (2010-11) will add a dual-language component, with one class combining English and Spanish speakers who will journey from kindergarten through fifth-grade together, receiving instruction in both languages. It is expected that all of those students will become bilingual, and parents who want their English-speaking children to learn Spanish can volunteer to place them in the dual-language class.

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**The Impact of a PDS: Paul T. Wright Elementary School**

- 274 students in grades K-5
- Provides NIU students and faculty with living classroom to model, study, and master innovative teaching techniques
- Offers District 428 a way to “fast-track” new ideas to benefit all schools
- Gives its students a place to learn, play, and succeed: Wright students in 2007-2008 outperformed district and state peers on state tests by 12.7 percentage points and 14.3 percentage points respectively

Websites: www.niu.edu/dist428partnership/wright or www.dist428.04g/wright
Michael Morris, a professor in the NIU Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, is playing an integral role in working with the NIU pre-service teachers on their Spanish while also teaching the language to English-speaking Chesebro students after school.

**A Dream Comes True**

As NIU faculty begin to conduct practical research at Chesebro and pre-service teachers seek out clinical experience there, McCabe said she believes her dream will come true: Eager students will flock to NIU to become well-prepared teachers in bilingual education. Meanwhile, she said, the community will grow to value dual-language learning.

“Chesebro is becoming a lab where pre-service teachers as well as faculty work directly with people on the front line with kids, and we will all benefit from this collaboration. We will become better instructors. The children will become better learners,” McCabe said.

Smaldino agrees. “Everyone comes out a winner,” she says. “The collaborative nature of a professional development school is about mutual benefits with a focus on children. The PDS model addresses what’s important to Chesebro, and we want to do what’s right for Chesebro. That’s the key.”

*Adapted from Northern Today, October 2008*

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**Cheesebro School Professional Development School (PDS) Partnership**

**Partners:** NIU College of Education and DeKalb Community School District 428

**Project Description:** The PDS model aims to raise student achievement, improve teacher preparation and enhance teaching performance through extensive collaboration between the district and the university. On-site faculty liaisons, dedicated classrooms for NIU courses, and ongoing advice and support from the university are hallmarks of this successful PDS project.

**More Information:**
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Website: www.niu.edu/dist428partnership/chesebro/index.shtml

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**DeKalb High School PDS: A Unique National Model in the Making**

**Projected to open August 2011**

Involves four NIU Colleges (Education, Health and Human Sciences, Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Visual and Performing Arts)

**Goals:**
- World-class student achievement in academics, activities, and citizenship
- A rigorous curriculum to match expectations of higher education and the workplace
- Superior preparation of pre-service teachers
- Excellence in professional learning that supports globally competitive student achievement
- A culture of practice that supports and encourages joint research and co-teaching by DeKalb High School and NIU faculty

Websites: www.niu.edu/dist428partnership/dekalbhs and www.dist428.org/dhs
Books:

Professor Rebecca Butler in the Department of Educational Technology, Research and Assessment is author of *Smart Copyright Compliance for Schools: A How-To-Do-It Manual* (Neal-Schuman). The guide is essential for superintendents, school administrators, teachers, school boards and technology/media specialists in establishing or updating a fully compliant copyright policy.

Associate Professor Chris Carger in the Department of Literacy Education has a new book coming out, *Dreams Deferred: Dropping Out and Struggling Forward* (Information Age Publishing). The book further explores Carger’s examination of the Mexican-American experience in education.

Associate Professor Greg Conderman in the Department of Teaching and Learning is co-author of *Purposeful Co-teaching: Real Cases and Effective Practices* (Corwin Press). Designed for both general and special education classrooms, the book provides research-based, field-tested instructional strategies for effective co-teaching.

Assistant Professor Donald Hunt in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations is author of *Social Capital and Teacher Perceptions of Professional Control: An Analysis Using SASS*. The book examines aspects of social capital that strongly influence teachers’ perceptions of curricular and instructional control and will be of particular interest to administrators, educational policy makers and researchers who use large scale datasets.

Professor Emeritus Jerry Johns of the Department of Literacy Education has completed a new edition of his *Basic Reading Inventory: Pre-primer Through Grade Twelve and Early Literacy Assessments* (Kendall Hunt). This informal reading assessment for teachers, reading specialists, tutors, learning disability teachers, school psychologists and classroom aides provides all of the tools to administer, score, and interpret the reading inventory, then develop responsive reading instruction for students.

Professor Paul Kelter in the Department of Teaching and Learning is co-author of *Chemistry: The Practical Science-Media Enhanced Edition* (Brooks-Cole). This new edition presents core chemical concepts in the context of everyday life with a wealth of online support seamlessly integrated into the text.

Assistant Professor David Shernoff of the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations has co-authored *Good Mentoring: Fostering Excellent Practice in Higher Education* (Jossey-Bass). Stemming from the GoodWork Project, a large-scale effort to identify individuals and institutions that exemplify good work, the book offers an in-depth analysis of the way mentors transmit knowledge and skills along with the guiding values that support good work and social responsibility.
Professor M Cecil Smith in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations edited the Handbook of Research on Adult Learning and Development (Routledge) with Nancy DeFrates-Densch. The book examines, integrates, and reviews recent advances and research findings in the disciplines of adult development and learning.

Associate Professor Laurice Zittel in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education is co-author of Principles and Methods of Adapted Physical Education and Recreation (McGraw-Hill). The book is the only text in the adapted physical education market to provide both task-specific and developmental teaching approaches, enabling teachers to address the needs of all students in physical education classes.

Book Chapters:

Associate Professor Lisa Baumgartner of the Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education has contributed chapters to two books. She wrote “Andragogy: An Introduction and Implications for Curriculum and Instruction” for Strategic Approaches Towards Curriculum Development for Adult Learners in the Global Community (Victor C. Wang, Ed.; Krieger Publishing) and contributed “Fostering Awareness of Diversity and Multiculturalism in Adult and Higher Education” for New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education (J. M. Dirkx, Ed.; Jossey-Bass).

Professor Lynette Chandler in the Department of Teaching and Learning co-authored “Inclusion and Natural Environments,” for Practical Approaches to Early Childhood Professional Development: Evidence, Strategies and Resources (P. Winton, J. McCollum & C. Catlett, Eds.; Zero to Three).

Associate Professor Maylan Dunn-Kenney, Assistant Professor Moses Mutuku, and Assistant Professor C. Sheldon Woods of the Department of Teaching and Learning co-authored a chapter, “Decolonizing Schooling: Toward a Culturally Relevant Curriculum in Rural Kenya,” for Undertaking Educational Challenges in the 21st Century: Research from the Field (C.S. Sunal & K. Mutua, Eds.; Information Age Publishing).

Professor Laurie Elish-Piper of the Department of Literacy Education has written chapters for two books. She contributed “Keeping Parents Involved in their Children’s Education During the Middle and High School Years,” to Reading Success for Struggling Adolescent Learners (S. Lenski & J. Lewis, Eds.; Guilford). Elish-Piper also co-authored “Writing Summaries of Expository Text Using the Magnet Summary Strategy” for Teaching the Texts Children Need to Succeed on High Stakes Tests and in the Classroom (B. Moss & D. Lapp, Eds.; Guilford).


Assistant Professor Jane Rheineck in the Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education wrote chapters for three books. She contributed “Counseling in Mental Health and Private Practice Settings” to the 5th edition of Introduction to the Counseling Profession (D. Capuzzi & D.R. Gross, Eds.; Allyn and Bacon), co-authored “Stress and Trauma: Coping in Today’s Society” for the 5th edition of Youth at Risk: A Prevention Resource for Counselors, Teachers and Parents (D. Capuzzi & D.R. Gross, Eds.; American Counseling Association) and co-authored “People of Color and Addiction” for Foundations of Addiction Counseling (D. Capuzzi & M.D. Stauffer, Eds.; Allyn and Bacon).
Professor and Department Chair Norman Stahl of the Department of Literacy Education co-authored the chapter, “A History of College Reading,” in the upcoming *Handbook of College Reading and Study Strategy Research* (R.F. Flippo & D.C. Caverly, Eds.; Routledge).


Assistant Professor Carolyn Vander Schee in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations wrote, “Consuming Health and Youth: Health Curricula and the Production of a Healthy Student,” for *The Corporate Assault on America’s Youth: Commercialism, Exploitation and the End of Innocence* (D. Boyles, Ed.; Peter Lang).

Associate Professor David Walker in the Department of Educational Technology, Research and Assessment co-authored a chapter, “Predicting Group Membership Using National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Mathematics Data,” in *Quality Research in Literacy and Science Education: International Perspectives and Gold Standards* (M. Shelly, B. Hand, & L. Yore, Eds.; Springer).


Assistant Professor Corrine Wickens in the Department of Literacy Education will provide a chapter tentatively titled, “Childhoods, the Denial of Sexuality and the Power of Censorship,” for *Childhoods: A Handbook* (G. Cannella & L. Diaz Soto, Eds.)

Associate Professor Laurierce Zittel in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education provided the chapter, “Early Childhood Adapted Physical Education” for the 5th edition of *Adapted Physical Education and Sport* (J. Winnick, Ed.; Human Kinetics Publishers).

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**Points of Pride: An Intellectually Vigorous Faculty**

As a student, having the opportunity to study under or conduct research with faculty who are highly regarded in their fields is priceless. The NIU College of Education boasts some of the best and brightest faculty in education today – individuals who are distinguished in their fields, sought after for editorial and review boards, and hold key positions in state, regional and national organizations. Through service, scholarship and research, today’s College of Education faculty are providing intellectual leadership for the field.

**Collectively, our current faculty:**

- Serve on 89 Editorial or Review Boards
- Hold 23 offices in state, regional, or national organizations
- Have authored or co-authored 30 books
- Have created 71 computer programs and 13 Internet-based computer software programs
- Have authored or co-authored 500 articles published in scholarly journals
- Are nationally recognized scholars in the fields of adult literacy, autism, women’s issues in leadership, national trends in diversity and demographics, the sociology of health, and school health policy
- Are participating in the Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (by invitation of Carnegie Foundation)
- Have presented at the European Commission in Malta and the International Conference on Learning
All good stories start with “Once upon a time,” right?

Well, once upon a time, in a far away land (DeKalb, Ill., 1962), a young, newly married elementary education major found herself pregnant. The department’s reaction was typical of the times:

“I’m worried about the impact you will have on your classmates and students.”

“No district will accept you as a student teacher. You’re a liability.”

Things looked bleak. I was encouraged to drop out and return the following fall. Enter Dr. Kenneth Cleland, Professor of Education, and my hero. “Of course you can be in my section,” he said. “I’m sure I can arrange for you to student teach at the Lab School. We’ll figure out Lorado Taft week (outdoor education) when the time comes.”

My son was born April 29, 1963, and I returned to class one week later. As I entered the classroom, I heard, “Well, hello there little momma. What are you doing here so soon?”

Dr. Kenneth Cleland was my hero and my angel, a most loving and humane person at a time of great rigidity and indifference. When I read in Northern Now that he had passed away, I cried. After graduation and as the years passed, I was busy with family, teaching, and further coursework and had lost contact with him. How I wish I had written to him about my later achievements and once again thanked him! I would like his family to know what an impact he had on my life and career path.

If there is a heaven, Dr. Kenneth Cleland holds a place of honor for being the educator and the man he was. Thank you, Dr. Cleland.

Editor’s Note: Dr. Shell retired in May 2006, after 25 years of teaching in the nursing and psychology departments at Joliet Junior College.

Is there a College of Education professor who influenced your life or career choice? Email your story to dfransen@niu.edu or mail it to Deborah Fransen, Dean’s Office, College of Education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115.
CoE Alumna Linda Smerge – 2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year
Who leaves a lucrative, thirteen-year career as an attorney to teach special needs and at-risk students? And, who then sticks with teaching for 15 years (and counting), in districts riddled with gang activity, in schools where skyrocketing bilingual enrollment presents unique challenges, and in programs for at-risk and special needs students?

Who in the world does that?

**Linda Smerge** – that’s who. The 2009 Illinois Teacher of the Year.

Smerge was selected by the Illinois State Board of Education, from among 175 nominees, to receive this award, which represents the pinnacle of success among Illinois teachers and reflects the high esteem in which state school administrators and her colleagues regard her. In 2009, she will travel the state as an educational ambassador, talking with educators and future teachers about her experiences. She will also represent Illinois at the NASA Space Camp in Huntsville, Ala.

So, what is happening inside her classroom – Room 205 at Wilson School in Cicero – that resulted in her being selected for this award?

**Called to Teach**

“Teaching is not a job or career for Linda,” says assistant district superintendent and her former principal, Michael Dziallo, who nominated her. “Rather, it is a vocation which she has struggled to enter. She continues to wrestle with forces pushing for mediocrity, whether they be from students who do not believe in themselves or parents who may feel that she is asking too much of their children. Students leave her class believing that they can do whatever academic challenge is laid before them. They leave as lifelong learners.”

Smerge earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education from Northern Illinois University. She says she chose NIU because her brother, Ray, had gone there. “I enjoyed following in his footsteps,” she says. “I recall many wonderful things about NIU – the bucolic beauty, long walks and bike rides always brought me peace. Also, I recall how large the campus seemed to me; a new world to navigate.”

Smerge says that choosing education as her major led to many meaningful relationships at NIU. “Many professors had a positive impact on me. In the field of education, Dr. Genevieve Syverson influenced me a great deal. She was very generous with her time and knowledge.”

After graduation, her first teaching job was in a Chicago second-grade classroom. Realizing that many of her students came to school hungry, she made sandwiches to help them concentrate. But, concerns about her pupils’ safety – and that of her own – eventually prompted her to take a position in Arizona, where she lived with a friend and taught kindergarten.

“It was wonderful,” Smerge said. “But then this executive called me from Chicago. He wanted me to work for his company, which developed condos.” She accepted his offer.
Smerge excelled in her work, which meant spending a lot of time interacting with attorneys. Her father and grandfather were lawyers, and her brother was an attorney. So, it would seem natural that she would have an aptitude and an affinity for the profession. She returned to NIU and earned her law degree in 1980.

Smerge spent thirteen years as a transactional attorney, navigating the complexities of buying and selling buildings and companies and handling retail tenant agreements. Intellectually, she says, it was challenging work. “And, the money was fantastic.” But her days as an elementary school teacher kept tugging at her heart.

“Linda did quite well as an attorney,” says her brother and fellow barrister (and NIU alumnus), Raymond Smerge. “But I think she had reached a point where she needed to decide between the financial rewards of practicing law and the emotional rewards of teaching.”

Smerge acknowledges this. “At some point when you feel it is not worth it, you have to make a decision,” she says.

**Following Her Heart**

While someone else might have ignored a calling to education in favor of the more affluent lifestyle of a high-powered attorney, Smerge followed her heart, putting her energy and passion into teaching. Her overwhelming desire to make a real difference in children’s lives became – and has remained – her vocation.

“Seeing happy children who love to learn and love to read when they have never had a book in the house is more rewarding to me than having a Porsche,” she says.

And so, in 1993, she returned to teaching, working mornings as a teacher’s aide in an early childhood special education program in Berwyn and afternoons as an early childhood educator in Cicero. In 1995, she took a job as a dean at Josephinum Academy in Chicago, where she oversaw 200 young girls, teaching them peer mediation techniques so that they could settle disputes without fighting. She worried about

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**Years in Teaching:** 15

**Current Position:** Third grade, Woodrow Wilson Elementary School, Cicero SD 99

**Education:** B.S. Elementary Education, M.S. Early Childhood Education, Juris Doctorate

**What’s Next:** Smerge will speak at teacher workshops, educational conferences and civic/community meetings to share her knowledge and expertise outside the classroom. She will also represent Illinois at the NASA Space Camp in Alabama.

**About the Award:** The Illinois State Board of Education selects finalists from all Illinois teachers who receive its highest honor, the Award of Excellence. This year, Smerge was selected from 43 finalists. Nominations for the next round of awards are due by May 18, 2009.

**Website:** www.isbe.net/those_who_excel.htm.
the challenges her students faced at home and on the streets, where gangs and drugs robbed many of bright futures. After four years, Smerge transferred to a sister school, Sacred Heart Academy, where she taught kindergarten for two years.

**Something From Nothing**

Then, in 2001, Smerge took on one of the most challenging teaching posts of her career. Cicero School District 99 needed a Grade 1 and Grade 2 Cross-Categorical Special Education Teacher. The classroom was a new concept to the district, combining students with a wide array of disabilities, and materials were literally nonexistent for this type of teaching. But, according to then-principal Mike Dziallo, “Linda created something out of nothing and provided her students with engaging activities that were truly differentiated to maximize each student’s potential.”

She put in extra hours to help her students and persuaded parents to allow their children to stay after school for tutoring. Smerge approached her teaching duties with an energy and determination firmly rooted in the belief that all children can learn. And, learn they did! In fact, several of the second grade special needs children in Smerge’s classroom that first year outperformed their non-disabled peers on national assessment tests.

To further augment her teaching abilities, Smerge attended intensive training in Kagan Cooperative Structures, which are techniques designed to guide the interaction of students with each other, the curriculum, and the teacher. She was subsequently assigned to another building in the district that was emphasizing such techniques.

“It took two years before I finally persuaded district administrators to allow Linda to come back to Wilson School,” says Dziallo. “But that was a ‘battle’ that was well worth the fight.”

She returned to Wilson to teach general education second grade students. Once again, Smerge took students who were reading below grade level at the start of the year and turned nearly all of them into high level readers and “gifted” students.

Dziallo then approached her with a new challenge – move to third grade to infuse energy and higher achievement standards into the first of the testing grades. She agreed to do so on one condition – that she would be allowed to loop, or move on to the next grade level, each year with the students.

**High Expectations**

Dziallo agreed, and the results have been off the charts—literally. Smerge’s 2007 third grade posted the highest ISAT scores the school has ever seen. When disaggregated, 90% of her students met or exceeded standards in reading and 95% met or exceeded standards in math. Because of these successes, the entire second and third grade teams of teachers at Wilson have begun a looping cycle, hoping to replicate Smerge’s success.

Dziallo says that Smerge is more than willing to share her knowledge and experiences with colleagues. She has served on Wilson’s School Improvement Leadership Team, where she assisted in student achievement data analysis and the formulation of a School Improvement Action Plan, as well as the school’s Professional Development Team.

Inside her classroom – Room 205 at Wilson School – Smerge says, “No two days are the same no matter how well developed my plan may be. However, all my days in the classroom are filled with consciously making and improving relationships with each of my students and all those around me. Listening to what my students say – and do not say. Caring for them as whole children. Accepting them and moving them forward.”

So, what’s the secret to Smerge’s success? Dziallo has a theory: “She concerns herself with students as individuals – as people. I believe that her interest in and her love for her students while maintaining and communicating high expectations are the secrets to her success.”

Does she have any regrets about leaving a lucrative law practice to teach? Not on your life.

“Teaching is fantastic,” she says. “The more you can bring to it, the more you will gain from it. It is a very powerful position, as you have children’s lives in your hands. You can have a great impact on them and help make the world a better place.”

*Photos graciously provided by Chicago Public Radio and Eilee Heikenen-Weiss (photographer).*
"Be kind and compassionate to every living creature."

That’s the philosophy that guides Dr. Robert Wallace’s life. This College of Education alum and author of the nationally syndicated advice column for teenagers, “Tween 12 and 20,” is a firm believer that morality and truth are always in vogue. And, his answers to questions on topics ranging from bullying to stuttering reflect that belief.

As a veteran of the Korean Conflict, Wallace attended Knox College on the GI Bill, then pursued his master’s degree in physical education from NIU. “I chose NIU,” he says, “because after working a year in the business world, I decided that I wanted to become an educator, and NIU had a marvelous reputation. I decided to take education classes and physical education classes with an additional goal of coaching.”

Wallace cites his thesis advisor, the late Dr. Mark Dean in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education, as his most influential professor. Wallace’s thesis focused on the three second lane violation rule in high school basketball, arguing that it was inconsistently applied and should be extended to five seconds. Dean forwarded the study to the executive secretary of the National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations, who presented it to the National Basketball Rules Committee. Although the rule was never changed, Wallace’s study received high praise from the executive secretary (see inset).

After receiving his master’s degree, Wallace taught English and coached varsity basketball in Kirkland, Ill. “That’s where I found my niche in life,” he says. “The challenge to inspire teens to learn was exciting, and after my first week of teaching, I knew I had found my vocation.”

Wallace says that teaching, coaching and writing his column have been the most satisfying experiences of his professional life. He was first approached about writing the column in 1976, after delivering a speech. What began over 30 years ago as a modest advice column in the Orange County (CA) Register is now a nationally syndicated column carried by more than 300 newspapers.

Today, he spends about two hours each day reading letters and email and developing his columns. Wallace may call or reply directly to a teen if he feels an answer is urgently needed, providing a contact number or an address where the teen can seek help. He stays in touch with issues that are important to teenagers by reading reference books and magazines, and for answers he cannot provide, consults other authoritative sources, such as the Mayo Clinic. He is a former trustee of Knox College and serves on the board of directors of the Galesburg Youth Athletic Association.

Marriage to his college sweetheart, Mona, tops Wallace’s list of the important successes in his life. When asked what he would tell young people about the most important things for living a good life, he says, “Be honest, be creative, love and be loved, and be sure to receive a quality education. Had it not been for the education I received from NIU, I never would have achieved what I have.”
Homecoming
Honors and Awards
Alumni, Faculty, and Staff Achievements

Recruitment Services Coordinator LaMetta H. Curry, along with her husband Anthony Chatman, Sr., received the Mandy Derrington Friend of the Child Award from the Children’s Learning Center of DeKalb. The couple were recognized for their “vision, leadership, and tireless effort” in improving the lives of young people in the community, including establishing local chapters of Safe in My Brother’s Arms (SIMBA), a national youth organization to empower young black men, and Safe in My Sister’s Arms (SIMSA) for young black women.

Laurie Elish-Piper, professor in the Department of Literacy Education, is a 2009 NIU Presidential Teaching Professor. This award honors individuals who have had a profound impact on students, colleagues and the university through exceptional teaching. Following the four-year award period, Elish-Piper will be designated as a Distinguished Teaching Professor.

Ann Harman is one of 10 students to receive a University Fellowship from the NIU Graduate School. These highly sought-after awards help to recruit and retain superior graduate students. Harman will begin work toward her master’s degree in special education with specialization in visual disabilities next fall in the Department of Teaching and Learning.

Laura Hedin, assistant professor in the Department of Teaching and Learning, was recognized for Faculty Excellence at the NIU Foundation’s Red and Black gala in February. Hedin was nominated by student Dana Higgins, a student in the special education program, who cited Hedin’s hard work, dedication, and inherent teaching ability in nominating her for the honor.

Pi-Sui Hsu, assistant professor in the Department of Educational Technology, Research and Assessment, received the 2009 David Raymond Grant for the Use of Technology in Teaching. Hsu’s project, which incorporates Microteaching and technology into an integrative course, proposed several ways to use technology to support preservice teachers in recording their teaching, reflecting on their practices, and collaborating with their peers in the learning process.

Alumna Stacy Kelly received the Virginia M. Sowell Student of the Year Award and the Outstanding Dissertation of the Year Award from the Division on Visual Impairments of the Council for Exceptional Children. Kelly received her doctorate in educational psychology with an emphasis in blindness and visual impairment from the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations in 2008.

Li Jen Kuo, assistant professor in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations, is a 2008-09 National Academy of Education/Spencer Postdoctoral Fellow. The $55,000 award will assist with salary replacement and research expenses for the fellowship period. Kuo came to NIU in 2006, and her research interests include biliteracy development, developmental psycholinguistics, metalinguistic awareness development, bilingual cognition, literacy development in culturally diverse contexts, collaborative reasoning, and development of critical thinking and argumentation skills.

Elementary education major Kaitlin Kubasiak received a highly competitive Undergraduate Special Opportunities in Artistry and Research grant from NIU. The award will support Kubasiak’s project, “Researching the Holocaust in Europe for Teaching Purposes.” She is the daughter of Cathy Kubasiak in the Department of Educational Technology, Research and Assessment.

Alumna Jessica M. Lindvall-Powell received a 2009 Golden Apple Award for Teaching Excellence from the Golden Apple Foundation of Rockford (Ill.). Lindvall-Powell teaches math at Roscoe Middle School and received her master’s degree in educational administration from the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations.

Nancy Oldenburg, who recently completed her doctoral degree in educational technology, received a Nurse Educator Fellowship Award from the Illinois Board of Higher Education in December. Oldenburg, an assistant professor in the NIU College of Health and Human Sciences, is one of only fifteen nursing faculty selected for a fellowship, which supports teaching, research, and advocacy work of nursing educators.

Retired professors Sharon A. Plowman and M. Joan Popp were inducted into the Hall of P.R.I.D.E. (Professionals Remembered in Deep Esteem) in the Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education. This prestigious award is presented to faculty members who have been concerned, dedicated teachers while providing outstanding service to the department. The award honors faculty who have given the majority of their service to the KNPE department and have completed their professional careers at NIU.

Alumna Karen Solomon has been named a vice president of the Higher Learning Commission of North Central Association of Colleges and School. Solomon received her Ed.D. in Adult and Continuing Education from the Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education before joining the Commission in 2003.

Thomas Startz was selected as the first recipient of the Julianna Gehant Memorial Scholarship. A native of Romeoville, Ill., Startz is a military veteran who is majoring in elementary education.

Anna Marie Schmidt Weselak, CEO of Weselak and Associates, received the NIU Alumni Association’s 2009 Outstanding Alumni Award for the College of Education. Weselak received her bachelor’s and master’s degree in education from NIU and was recognized for her outstanding professional accomplishments and civic, cultural and charitable involvement.
**Dean’s Appreciation Award**

Newly established in 2009, this award recognizes alumni and friends who have made exceptional contributions to the mission and development of the NIU College of Education and its students.

**Robert and Mary English**

Throughout their lives, Bob and Mary English have worked behind the scenes to support education. Upon receiving his doctoral degree from the NIU College of Education in 1974, Bob accepted the position of dean at Morton Junior College and later became treasurer and vice president at Joliet Junior College.

During his tenure at Joliet, Bob recognized the need for skilled advisors to assist school districts and municipalities in financial analysis and planning. Together, he and Mary launched PMA Financial in 1980, which provided a bank credit report called the “Prudent Man Analysis.” Over the next decade, their knowledge of finance and public funds moved PMA forward to become a full-service investment and advisory firm.

Now retired from the company, which is guided by a second generation of the English family, Bob and Mary are active volunteers and philanthropists, supporting literacy projects and schools in several states. In 2000, Bob honored his wife by establishing the Mary F. English Technology Award in the College of Education.

The award equips students of need who intend to be teachers with computers and related supplies and helps develop skills in using the computer as a teaching, learning, and informational tool. Upon successful completion of the two-year program, awardees may keep their computers and related materials. Since inception, 127 students have benefited from the generous support of Bob and Mary English.

With immense gratitude for their long-standing commitment to the College of Education, we recognize Bob and Mary English with this inaugural Dean’s Appreciation Award.

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**Friend of the College Award**

This award recognizes individuals and corporations for outstanding service to the NIU College of Education.

**Hal and Sue Brand**

Who says blind dates never work out? This couple met on a blind date, married six months later, raised three children, and just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. Sue is a former May Queen, NIU Homecoming Court attendant, and swim team member; she received her physical education degree from NIU and met Hal while teaching in California. In the past six years, this couple has generously played host and tour guide for many College of Education faculty and staff visiting their area. Whether attending an NIU reception in California, a Huskie football game in DeKalb, or an NIU event in Chicago, Hal and Sue have reached across the miles with grace and friendship to show their support for the College. When the call came asking them to sponsor physical education students to study abroad, they responded quickly and generously. With gratitude for their willing spirit, their generous nature, and their unbounded hospitality, the College recognizes Hal and Sue Brand as Friends of the College.

**George and Nancy Mitchell**

If you’ve attended the College’s annual dinner in the last several years, chances are you’ve admired George and Nancy’s artistic talent without even realizing it. As the owners of Mitchell’s Flowers (Orland Park), they have very generously provided the floral arrangements for several College of Education events. This “Double Huskie” couple – her degree is in education, and his is in geography – have been in the floral business for over 36 years. Their arrangements have graced the inaugurations of four presidents as well as numerous Rose Bowl floats. George serves on the NIU Alumni Association Board, and the Mitchells are also huge Huskie Athletics fans. Nancy extends their charitable work beyond the NIU campus to a number of local organizations and communities. With appreciation for their unceasing support and dedication to the College and the University, the College recognizes George and Nancy Mitchell as Friends of the College.◆
To prepare faculty and staff for the arrival of visiting Fulbright scholar Dr. Baktybek Keldibekov last fall, Dean Lemuel W. Watson distributed a sheet of paper to help in pronouncing the scholar’s name: Bak’-ty-bek Kel’-di-be-kov.

“This is Dr. Keldibekov’s first visit to the United States,” says Watson, who is Keldibekov’s Fulbright faculty associate at NIU. “I wanted to make sure that he felt welcome, and the first step in that process was for all of us to be able to pronounce his name correctly.”

Watson’s idea worked. “I feel support from my colleagues at the College of Education both academically and personally,” says Keldibekov, a native of Kyrgyzstan. “I am apart from home and family. However, this warm welcome at NIU does not allow me to feel homesick. I am surrounded by nice professors as well as students at NIU and consider this university as my second home.”

On January 28th, Keldibekov delivered the 2009 John A. Niemi International Lecture on the “Current Situation of the Education System of Kyrgyz Republic and Some Pages from the History of Kyrgyzstan.” He discussed the rules of admission to institutions of higher education and vocational institutes along with his goals in learning more about the United States’ system of higher education. The lecture concluded with a video documentary about his country’s history and customs.

**Studying the American Education System**

Keldibekov holds a Ph.D. in Linguistics and is vice rector of the Kyrgyz State Academy of Law, which enrolls 8,000 students. From Monday through Saturday each week, he schedules classes, meets with students, holds office hours, and teaches a class in German. He visits classrooms to observe and critique the curriculum and instructional approach. At NIU, he hopes to gain some insights and experiences that can be incorporated into the higher education system back in Kyrgyzstan.

“The main goal of my Fulbright project is to study the American education system in general and specifically to learn more about admissions, grading systems, test and exams at American universities,” says Keldibekov. “I believe that the United States is one of the leading centers in the world in the field of higher and adult education. I’m going to learn as much as possible about this field and gain experience. I am confident I will make a valuable contribution to the development of the education system in my country with my American experience.”

He says the American educational system is much different than that of his homeland.

“I was surprised by the open communication between students and teachers. American students have freedom to discuss their ideas, they also have good skills to think critically and stand [up] for the decisions they make.”

Keldibekov has a wife, who is a doctor, two sons (ages 20 and 7) and one daughter (age 15). His older son is studying to be a lawyer in Moscow, and his daughter arrived in the U.S. in March for a three-month visit with him. Keldibekov will conclude his Fulbright research at NIU in June.

**An Invitation**

Previously a part of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan is an independent, mountainous country bordering China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. Bishkek, where Keldibekov works, is the cultural and educational center of the country and home to the only American University in Central Asia. The country is rich in minerals (gold, silver, bronze, marble, and coal), and its mineral spas attract thousands of tourists from around the world each year.
In April, Keldibekov is making a presentation about legal education and the legal system in Kyrgyzstan to students, faculty and staff in NIU’s College of Law. He has also been selected to present at the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Conference in Washington, D.C., from April 19-21.

Keldibekov recently hosted a small, informal luncheon on campus to mark the Kyrgyzstan holiday of Nooruz (New Year) on March 21. At the event, he expressed appreciation to Dean Lemuel W. Watson, the College of Education, and the University for the support and encouragement he has received. Along with pictures of his family and landmarks in his country, Keldibekov shared insights about Kyrgyzstan’s educational system. He also shared the news that his daughter, Altynai, hopes to attend NIU in the future.

Keldibekov has extended an invitation for American educators to visit Kyrgyzstan to share their knowledge and experiences with more of his countrymen. “Kyrgyzstan is a young, mountainous country and needs changes in the system of education,” he says. “I believe it would be a great opportunity for American educators to come and explore this country, to exchange experiences as well as learn about the traditions and customs of Kyrgyz people.” ◆

John A. Niemi
International Lecture Series

John A. Niemi taught courses in adult literacy, adult learning, and human resource development in the Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education from 1975 until his death in 2004. He published over 150 articles and four books and led student study tours to Canada, Estonia, Finland, the Netherlands, and Russia. He was a Fulbright Scholar, an NIU Distinguished Teaching Professor, and an Honorary Professor at Shanghai Second Institute, and received Finland’s highest civilian honor, Commander of the Order of the Lion of Finland.

Named for this beloved professor, this series is presented in collaboration with the Office of International Initiatives and aims to enhance awareness of global issues affecting education.

More information:
Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education
815-753-1448
www.cedu.niu.edu/cahe
Email: cahe@niu.edu

Fulbright Scholar Program

The Fulbright Program is a partnership of government agencies, private organizations, academic institutions, grantees, alumni and volunteers to promote exchanges between U.S. citizens and institutions and their counterparts abroad. It aims to promote international cooperation, expand understanding of U.S. views and values, and encourage cooperation in addressing common concerns. The Fulbright program with Kyrgyzstan was established in 1992, and grants are available to support English language study for Kyrgyzstani students and research for post-doctoral scholars in the United States. Conversely, the Fulbright program also offers grants to U.S. citizens to fulfill lecture, research, and professional roles in academic or regional fields.

More information: www.fulbright.state.gov
CoE Students Make a Difference

Yes, We Can Make a Difference with Technology!

Over 100 high school and college students and faculty participated in the college’s first Technology Conference at the Holmes Student Center on April 4th. Developed by students under the guidance of LaMetra Curry, Coordinator of the Office of Recruitment Services, and sponsored by Robert and Mary English, the conference allowed students to showcase innovation in technology use in teaching and learning. This initial conference was so successful that plans are underway for a repeat performance in spring 2010.

Penny Wars

College of Education Advising Dean Margaret Myles accepts proceeds of the ‘Penny Wars’ fund raiser from Special Education majors. The students designated the $612.28 contribution for the Julianna Gehant Memorial Scholarship.
Globally Minded
Students Build Foundation for Learning in Guatemala

“Now, when I see someone put down a dollar for an order of fries at McDonald’s, I think, ‘Wow, if everyone skipped just one month’s worth of fries and gave that money to a young girl in Guatemala, it would send her to school for a whole year.’ My experience there has definitely changed me, made me a lot more charitable.”

Dan Rosenberg speaks with a wisdom far beyond his 21 years, a wisdom gained from witnessing first hand the extreme poverty and the amazing kindness of the Guatemalan people.

Rosenberg, a special education major from Palatine, spent 10 days in Guatemala in May 2008. He was one of a group of 18 young men and women who are members of the Eta Chapter of Alpha Phi Omega, a service fraternity – and the oldest continuing fraternity – at NIU. Pastor Diane Dardon of Lutheran Campus Ministries, whose husband is from Guatemala, coordinated the volunteers as they worked to help build an elementary school in Retalhuleu, one of the poorest regions in the world, where more than 16% of the people live on less than $1.00 per day.

After arriving in Guatemala City, Dardon took the group on a brief tour, which included a stop at the city dump, where Rosenberg saw people living in unimaginable poverty.

“People actually live there and earn a living from reclaiming and reusing items,” said Rosenberg. “It was an experience I’ll never forget.”

After this sobering experience, Rosenberg’s group boarded a bus for the five-hour ride to their hotel, just a short drive from the elementary school building site.

“A typical day began with 6 AM breakfast, then the short ride through the countryside to the school, where the volunteers worked about 4 hours, then took an extended lunch break in the heat of the day, before returning to work another 4 hours. They dug flood prevention troughs, painted, hammered, and were “jacks of all trades” for the next 10 days. They also visited another school built by volunteers, where they were greeted by smiling children shouting, “Gringo!” Rosenberg said the teachers at the school were only about 18 years old, and the walls were bare, but everyone was enthusiastic about education.

“This was one of the best experiences I’ve ever had. It gave me an entirely different outlook and makes me appreciate what I have,” said Rosenberg. “I benefited so much more from this than the people of Guatemala did. I have been incredibly fortunate to receive such strong support from my family and my professors. I want to be a reflection of that.”

Rosenberg has two brothers; his older brother, Brian, a graduate of George Washington University, is traveling through Central America on a full immersion program and his younger brother will start college in Iowa this fall. His parents met at NIU, where they were advisors in their residence halls. After graduating in December, Rosenberg hopes to begin teaching and would like to live abroad, perhaps as a Peace Corps volunteer, at some point during his career.
Caring From the Heart:
Dr. Wesley I. Schmidt

Inez Schmidt’s blue eyes still sparkle when she talks about him.

“Oh, he was a wonderful man,” she says, smiling. “He loved helping people – students, friends, family. If anyone – anyone at all – opened up the door that they needed help, he would follow through.”

She is describing her husband of over 40 years, Dr. Wesley I. Schmidt. Dr. Schmidt was a professor of counseling for 24 years, from 1961-1985, in the College’s Department of Counseling, Adult and Higher Education. When Dr. Schmidt passed away in 1989, family, friends, and colleagues established the Wesley I. Schmidt Scholarship to honor his commitment to students and their education.

“We grew up in Riceville, Iowa, and were high school sweethearts,” Mrs. Schmidt says. “It was a small town of about 3,000 people, and we were in the same grade. Wes’s father was a minister, and his family did not have the means to send him to college. He was awarded several scholarships, and that was the only reason he could go.”

Dr. Schmidt received his undergraduate degree from Greenville College in Greenville, Ill., and his master’s and doctoral degrees from Michigan State University. Mrs. Schmidt also graduated from Greenville with a degree in business education. They married, and over the years had four children, Carol, Kay, Colleen and Kevin.

“The entire focus of Dad’s life was to serve others, through teaching, counseling, or encouraging,” says Kevin. “It was the entire focus of his existence. To a great extent, he was more my ‘big brother’ than my dad. I could share most anything with him. He was very handy. We would work on projects together – what he called ‘piddling’ – and whether it was showing me how to change oil in a car or fix a bike, I learned so much from him. He was just a wonderful guy who truly cared from the heart about everyone he met.”

Faith in God and basic biblical teachings, such as service to others, guided Dr. Schmidt’s life. In fact, service to others was a hallmark of the entire Schmidt family. Mrs. Schmidt, who had learned sign language, taught students who were hearing impaired and often hosted them in their home. Soon, the entire Schmidt family learned to sign so that everyone could communicate.

For one entire semester, the Schmidt family lived in the UK, as Wesley traveled the region, studying the schools and culture. They visited eight different countries, and Mrs. Schmidt kept up the children’s education. She says Wes enjoyed the challenge of being in different countries and immersing their children in different cultures.

When he started at NIU in 1961, Dr. Schmidt quickly realized that people needed help with career and employment decisions. He spent many hours helping students and colleagues make decisions about career moves and educational tracks. Students were welcome to visit the Schmidt home after class for additional help in reviewing thesis materials, to discuss problems they were encountering, or to just visit with the family. All were welcomed equally.

Over time, Dr. Schmidt became a highly sought after consultant in the corporate and nonprofit sectors. His counseling, communication, and business management skills, along with his willingness to help wherever needed, resulted in a variety of interesting projects. He served on the board of directors of Servicemaster Corporation, which was headquartered in Downers Grove, for several years.

What many outside of the family may not know is that Wesley was also a poet. He often wrote verses to his wife to mark special occasions, such as the birth of their children, birthdays, and anniversaries. She treasures the collection of verses he wrote for her over the years.

“What I liked most about him was his sweetness and how he always put our family first,” says Mrs. Schmidt. “It has been my prayer that this scholarship would honor Wes’s desire to help others in their education. His was an unconditional type of help; nothing was too small or too big for him to be involved in. It seems fitting that a scholarship to help students along their educational path would be his legacy at NIU.”
From Sue (Miller) Brand: “The four years that I was a student at NIU were some of the best of my life. I made many friends with whom I still keep in touch. The physical education department was my ‘home’ for those four years, and I received a great education from top educators. I was involved in many activities and, as you can see, my social life was not neglected! The 52 years since graduating have been spent with my husband, Hal, and our children Leslie, Craig and Laurie. My NIU degree prepared me very well for the 25 years I spent teaching physical education in Garden Grove, California.”

Do you have a photo and comments to share about your time at NIU and after? Send them to Deborah Fransen, Dean’s Office, College of Education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115.
I Believe in Red, NIU RED

We’re looking for your tips on best practices, stories about your experiences in the field, and/or brief observations about what it means to be a graduate of the NIU College of Education. Plans are to compile an edited volume of collective stories from seasoned professionals across generations which will help novice teachers and administrators understand the challenges, gifts, and life experiences of a career spent in teaching.

Please send your submissions to: Carrie Williams, Dean’s Office, College of Education, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115. Email: cblackwood@niu.edu.