

In the Western Kentucky University Strategic Plan, *Challenging the Spirit*, the following statement is included as part of the University's Mission Parameters: "The University places a premium on teaching and learning. Its faculty engage in creative activity and diverse scholarship, including basic and applied research, designed to expand knowledge, improve instruction, and to provide optimum service to the state and nation."

The current edition of *The Western Scholar* again provides evidence that the faculty of the University continue to make the above statement a reality. In the stories to follow we see the impact that lively and inquiring minds can have on a wide array of subject areas. And virtually without exception, the connections between the scholarship of faculty members and the enrichment of the teaching/learning process for students are clear. That impact may come directly through involvement of students in these faculty research projects or more indirectly through the enrichment, enthusiasm, and role modeling that these faculty members bring to the classroom.

Sharon Mutter is on the faculty in the Department of Psychology. In the work reported here, Dr. Mutter is engaged in basic research on the effects of aging on human cognitive processes. She has been conducting experimental research to seek a better understanding of our ability to learn from positive and negative contingencies in our environment as we age. As our population ages and a larger percentage of us fall into the older age categories, it will become even more important to understand how learning and memory processes change over the individual's life cycle. Dr. Mutter's work on this project is supported by a generous grant from the National Institute on Aging.

Field research in a distant part of the world is the venue for some fascinating work being done by Dr. Jeffrey Samuels of the Department of Philosophy and Religion. Dr. Samuels is interested in gaining a better understanding of the process through which boys and young men decide to make the lifetime commitment of becoming a Buddhist monk. He is conducting his research in the South Asian country of Sri Lanka where he has visited several times to observe, do interviews, and collect other data. So far, he has discovered the important role played by aesthetics in these life-transforming decisions. The connection between his research and his teaching of courses on Asian religions is clear.

The research of Dr. Kunlei Liu from the Department of Architectural and Manufacturing Sciences falls very much in the applied category. He has a long-standing interest in the study of coal and has been focusing recently on finding ways to reduce the emissions of mercury and other pollutants when coal is burned. Since Kentucky is a major coal-producing state and since the marketability of coal depends, in part, on improved methods of reducing unwanted pollution when coal is burned, Dr. Liu's research is of great interest to both industry and government in the state and nation. His applied research is a good example of the partnerships that can be formed between industry and the university to solve real-world problems.

Anthony Harkins is a relatively new faculty member in the Department of History, but he is already beginning to make an impression with his interesting research on the concept and history

of the "hillbilly" in American culture. Oxford University Press recently published his book on this subject. Dr. Harkins' work, which falls at the intersection of traditional history and cultural anthropology, seeks to explain the origin and evolution of the hillbilly concept through its treatment in books, articles, cartoons, television, movies, and music. His efforts will undoubtedly enrich his teaching and will contribute to our understanding of how cultural icons of this type emerge in our society.

Western mathematician Dr. Bruce Kessler is engaged in basic research linking mathematic-numeric processes to the filtering and compressing of images. In other words, he works with learning ways in which images can be stored, manipulated and compressed through the use of the tools of mathematics, specifically through the application of fractal functions. Although this research appears to be quite abstract, it has the potential for many applications both in industry and related science fields. Dr. Kessler has received grants from the National Science Foundation and the Kentucky Science and Engineering Foundation and makes it a priority to include undergraduate students in his research.

Dr. Laura McGee from the Department of Modern Languages and Intercultural Studies took advantage of a Fulbright award to advance her research on the role of film and filmmakers in Germany. Her specific objective with this project is to study the lives and work of the last generation of East German filmmakers who worked before and then after the fall of the "wall" and the reunification of the German nation. She selected twelve representatives of this generation and has carefully studied their films, conducted library research on them at the Academy for Film and Television, and personally interviewed many of them. Her study, which has already resulted in publications, represents a significant look at the intersections of art, politics, and culture.

The impact of idealized female body images on young girls and female adolescents has been widely noted and studied. Much less studied is the impact of idealized male body images on young boys and male adolescents. Dr. Rick Grieve of the Department of Psychology is working on research focused on the latter group to help build our knowledge base in that area. One finding is that "muscle dysmorphia," a condition that can develop when males become preoccupied with muscular body shape, can cause physical impairment and distress.

Dr. Johnny Chan is the new holder of the Leon and Ruby Mai Page Chair in Finance. He came to Western as a prolific author in the fields of finance and finance education and has added significantly to his research output since his arrival here in 2003. Dr. Chan is an excellent example of the teacher/scholar who is able to bridge the often-perceived gap between effective classroom teaching and active research. He is particularly interested in research on the role derivatives play in the field of finance and he continues to work on testing effective pedagogies for teaching/learning in finance education.

I am sure that you will find the articles in this edition of *The Western Scholar* interesting and informing. I commend them to your attention.

*John H. Petersen*

*Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs*

