



the challenge

Magazine of The Center for Gifted Studies

The Academy Gets the Green Light!

The Kentucky Academy of Mathematics and Science would provide the resources and opportunities that our gifted youth need and deserve. These students would finally be challenged and would have the chance to learn beyond that expected for the general student population. Although it is not a possibility for my son, who will complete his high school education out of state, I certainly hope that it will soon be a reality for those to follow.

MARILEE BENSON, Bardstown, KY
Mother of David Tao
SCATS 2000–2001; VAMPY 2001–2005

No longer will Kentucky's young people like David have to leave the Commonwealth for a challenging, accelerated school experience. Instead of out-of-state boarding schools or early admission to college in another part of the country, Kentucky's brightest young people will be able to stay in their home state and finish high school (while beginning college) in a nurturing environment. The Kentucky Academy of Mathematics and Science will become a reality!



Governor Ernie Fletcher signed a budget that included \$3.75 million in state bond money plus \$5 million in agency bond funds for the Academy. This is an incredible start in retrofitting Florence Schneider Hall! But considerably more funding is needed, and time is critical. Our goal is to accept students in the 2007-2008 school year. Currently President Ransdell and The

Center are seeking additional funds to complete the renovation of the building. If you can help us make that happen, please contact Julia Roberts.

The Kentucky Academy, patterned after the successful Texas Academy for Mathematics and Science, will be a statewide residential program at Western wherein students complete their last two years of high school while acquiring 60 hours of college credit. We will return to the Legislature to secure ongoing funds so that ideally tuition, fees, room, and board will be paid for by the Legislature. All Kentuckians should have the opportunity for a challenging and engaging learning opportunity regardless of their economic situation. Kentucky will be the 14th such Academy in the nation funded by their legislatures.

Be sure to thank your legislatures for making this possible for Kentucky and request ongoing funding for the Academy. It is vital to our future as a Commonwealth. See the website www.wku.edu/academy for more information.

Letter from Julia

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE CENTER,

What do business people, politicians, community members, educators, and parents of gifted children have in common? I believe it is an interest in having our young people thrive in school and become contributors to society at the highest levels possible.

As we are nearing a new school year, it is a great time to reflect on opportunities our students had or did not have to develop their talents and abilities. As parents, think about the following questions: (1) Is your child learning new things at school on an ongoing basis, especially in his/her area(s) of strength? (2) If your child brings home all A's or 100's, does he/she work hard to earn those marks? (3) Is your child provided with academic challenge at school; and, if so, does he/she take the challenge and work hard to meet it? (4) Does your child have intellectual peers who share his/her interests and have similar abilities? (5) Is your child going to be prepared for the next level whether that be rigorous high school curriculum or postsecondary educational opportunities?

If your answers to those questions are yes, that is terrific. Please communicate your appreciation to the teachers and principal. If your answer is no, then now is the time to do something.

Children become lazy when they aren't challenged. They begin to expect to



make the top grades with little effort. Then, when they are presented with an academic challenge, they don't have the work habits or experience to address the challenge, become frustrated, and often give up. Continuous progress is the goal for all students; that is, each student is learning new things every day. The need for continuous progress applies in each child's area of strength as well. It is certainly not acceptable to be reading at the fifth grade level for a fourth grader as the school year begins and still be doing so at the end of the year: that is no progress for the child although it is reading above grade level. Or, as a father reported to me, his son had a higher SAT score as a seventh grader than he did as he graduated from high school. That record of no progress is certainly unacceptable!

These questions for parents have implications for educators, politicians, and members of the community who want our economy to thrive. On March 28, 2005, *Business Week* published an article entitled "Meet the Best and Brightest: The Intel Award Winners." A quote from the article provides food for thought as you reflect on the children in your classroom, school, or community and what they are learning: "Ultimately, America's educational system needs to pay as much attention to bright students as it does to slow learners. That would give more U.S. kids a better chance to stand tall in international comparisons. And it just might help counteract the scientific illiteracy that threatens to drag down the performance of American business."

So as you reflect on the year's growth for your child or the young people in your classroom, school, or community, plan for next year. Speak out on behalf of children and young people whose needs are created by their strengths. Join your state advocacy group for gifted children (in Kentucky, that is KAGE at www.wku.edu/kage) and the national group (NAGC at www.nagc.org) as well. The more numerous the advocates, the more likely that policy makers will listen and respond with school, school district, state, and national policies that will encourage excellence for all children, including excellence for children who are capable of learning well beyond grade level. Speak out!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Link Roberts".

Julia Link Roberts

Mahurin Professor in Gifted Studies

NEW ADDRESS!

Western Kentucky University and The Center have changed our addresses. You can now reach us at the following address:

**The Center for Gifted Studies
Western Kentucky University
1906 College Heights Blvd. #71031
Bowling Green, KY 42101-1031**

the challenge

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The opportunities are endless. When the ALIVE Center (A Local Information and Volunteer Exchange) for Warren County contacted The Center for Gifted Studies regarding a Youth Solutions Grant possibility, we knew our alumni would be up to the challenge. The ALIVE Center works specifically with Bowling Green-Warren County to help connect volunteers with organizations who need them. Youth Solutions are grants written by youth representing a community organization, wherein the students come up with an original idea for community involvement. Six students, Khotso Libe (Travel, Super Saturdays 1999-2000; SCATS 2000-2001; VAMPY 2002-2004), Ervin Puskar (SCATS 2000; VAMPY 2002-2004), Derrek Brown (SCATS 1999-2001; VAMPY 2002-



MAKING SUCCESS COME ALIVE

Center Alumni Write Grant

By Leigh Johnson

2003), Natalie Brown (SCATS 1999-2001; VAMPY 2002-2003), Linda Flynn (Super Saturdays 1998; SCATS 2003; VAMPY 2004), and Emily Peeler (Super Saturdays 2000-2001; SCATS 2003; VAMPY 2004-2005), gathered one Saturday to learn how to write a grant and then spent another Saturday actually writing it. They came up with "Steps to Success," a mentoring experience for fifth graders before they make the transition to junior high. But, you'll see more of the impact from this program from their own words.

Linda Flynn:

It is the perfect playground day; the swings are skyrocketing, the slides are being slid upon, and the basketball court is booming. Twittering birds harmonizing with children's chatter makes one of the happiest sounds I have ever heard. One of my hands is clasped by petite and beautiful bronze fingers, the other by a strong

ebony hand half the size of mine. Where in the world could I, a fifteen-year old high school freshman, be? No place other than Dishman McGinnis's playground, mingling with my elementary school friends. Yes, I call these kids, many whom have not even reached double-digits in age, my friends. Their innocent worlds know only of Crayola crayons and multiplication tables. Each child looks at me with uncondemning, unjudgmental eyes and accepts me as an equal. They come from almost every background and household imaginable. All they need is a playground friend.

Several months ago, several other high school students and I gathered on WKU's campus to create a grant proposal. Still undecided on a grant topic after the first meeting, we met about a month later to continue our brainstorming. The product was a scheme where we would go to an elementary school and "peer mediate" with elementary school kids. We would

be similar to an older brother or sister for these kids: someone to trust and talk to, to laugh and play with. The grant was put into motion, and soon after I was arriving at Dishman McGinnis Elementary School to meet my kids for the first time.

Nerves were beginning to get the better of me. Here I was, about to become some young, impressionable child's mentor. I'm the spazzy girl who can't go a day without dropping my books, losing something vital, or running into a head-on collision with the most menacing boy in school. I didn't think I would be able to make much, if any, of a difference in this girl's life. What happened when we ran out of things such as our favorite colors to talk about?

Then I met Breanna Glass, the girl I would be hanging out with. She is a beautiful, soft-spoken little fifth grader, happy to have me as a friend. We swing on the playground's swings as she tells me about her Destiny's Child CD. The next week I bring Breanna a copy of the Jessica Simpson CD, which she really appreciates. I frolic with Breanna on the playground like I am still ten years old. Sometimes we play Connect Four or Checkers; sometimes we even shoot baskets. My friendship with Breanna has made me look harder at life and put things in perspective. She was so happy about the outfit she received for her birthday. She also made me a paper cutout butterfly colored with gel pens. These miniscule things about life are great; thanks to Breanna I can now appreciate them.

Breanna isn't my only elementary school friend. I now know what it's like to

be the “cool kid” on the playground. All these cute little kids want me to play tag with them, do cartwheels, or watch them cross the monkey bars without falling. I have found that I have the ability to make these young ones happy. In turn, their happiness creates happiness for me. They have taught me that the happiness and love you give away is the happiness and love you receive.

Another one of the kids that I have developed a bond with, the shy and quiet Denisa, once said to me, “I wish you could stay here and hang out with me forever.” I could have cried, knowing that I was making such a large impression on her.

The program has been amazing! I wish everyone could experience the sheer simplicity in having two smiling little girls hold your hands while walking in the fresh green grass of the playground. It is one of the most wonderful things; reaching out one hand and having two hands reach back for you.

Emily Peeler:

The past month or so I have been going to Dishman McGinnis every Friday to visit a fifth grader by the name of Elvina. Doing this gives me such a good feeling. Happiness builds inside me as the little girl runs to give me a hug when I get out of my car to spend another Friday afternoon with her.

She talks about everything from her family life to the boys she likes. She’s the type of girl that you can’t help but be happy around. We jump rope, play basketball, play board games, play card games, play Twister, and just sit and talk. One of my favorite memories is when we sat on the swing for about a half hour and just sang, and then she showed me some dances she and her friends had made up. What I enjoy most about this is that I feel like a little kid again.

It is as if Elvina and I are best friends and are just being silly crazy together. I also get an inside look as to what is like to be the type of girl she is. She has been through a lot, and she has shared most with me. I have had so much fun doing this, and now I know how to write a grant! I have created memories that will stick with me for life.

Ultimately, Steps to Success created relationships between the elementary students and the high school students. They worked on homework, talked about careers, home life, and the possibility of living the dreams. Fifth graders in the after school program at Dishman McGinnis Elementary were selected by faculty at the school. Pam McIntyre, the after school coordinator at Dishman, said, “Their [The Center alumni] time here is so valuable.” The difference the students have made is immeasurable.

The Center alumni who participated in the program found that the hour they had committed weekly wasn’t enough. They decided to extend their time in the afternoons and spend part of their spring break mentoring the students. Ervin Puskar remarked, “I feel just like ‘one of the guys.’”

The students received a grant for \$300, which they used to have a picnic for the families of their mentees. They had the picnic at Dishman McGinnis Elementary, the very place where they created so many memories.

In August, the student mentors will present the results of their grant-writing and the Steps to Success program at the Youth Summit at the ALIVE Center, along with the other youth who received grants through the organization.



The Center’s Mission

We are committed to encouraging excellence by providing educational opportunities and resources to three populations: gifted and talented students, educators working with gifted students, and parents of gifted students.

The Center’s Vision

Becoming an internationally preeminent center is the vision of The Center for Gifted Studies. This vision includes expanding services in five areas: (1) offering educational programs for gifted children and youth, (2) providing professional development opportunities for educators, (3) enhancing communication and advocacy for gifted children, (4) conducting research and developing curriculum to remove the learning ceiling, and (5) building a testing and counseling component for gifted children and their families.

Alumni Update

If you would like to get in touch with one of these alumni, please send us your contact information, and we will pass it along to that person for you.

Margaret Crowder (Super Saturdays Instructor) traveled to Louisville in late spring to compete in the Kentucky Young Careerist competition. She won the title of Young Careerist of Simpson County for her four-minute speech that explained how her ideal career would be a professional intermediary to promote peace, which was judged along with a short interview and written essay questions. In March, she went on to the regional competition in Campbellsville, which she also won. A WKU alumna, Margaret is a geoscience instructor at Western Kentucky University.

Susan Lackey (Super Saturdays and SCATS Instructor) was named the Kentucky Art Educators Association Middle School Art Teacher of the Year for 2004. Susan, who has taught at Drakes Creek Middle School in Bowling Green, KY, since it opened in 1988, traveled to Boston in March to receive her honors. Dr. Miwon Choe, professor in art education at Western, nominated her for this award: "I think her program is very strong in terms of content and integrity, the level of work she puts into it and the energy she puts into the program. And it shows in test scores – her students are getting a very solid education in visual arts."

Brandon Gilvin (SCATS 1990) currently directs the communication and advocacy team at the All Africa Conference of Churches, the ecumenical hub for the African continent. Having graduated in 1998 from Hiram College where he earned a B. A. in Religious Studies with a minor in Creative Writing and membership in Phi Beta Kappa, Brandon continued his studies at the Vanderbilt Divinity School in Nashville, TN. There he received a Master of Divinity Degree, and was ordained as a minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

While attending Vanderbilt, he did an internship in Cape Town, South Africa, at the Quaker Peace Centre, where he worked as a Peace Educator in Township Schools. Brandon also published two books in 2004: *Solving the Da Vinci Code Mystery* and *Wisdom from The Five People You Meet in Heaven* (co-written with Rev. Heather Godsey), both of which examine issues of faith raised by the two best selling books.

"I remember my time at SCATS very well, though it seems like a long time ago. I made a lot of great friends that summer, and I enjoyed being able to explore subjects that were not part of the general public middle school curriculum. It was also a great experience to meet people not only from all over the state, but also from other regions as well."

Allison Elliott (VAMPY 1993, 1994, and 1995; counselor) works full time in the University of Kentucky Chandler Medical Center public relations office where she is the senior PR officer in charge of research and neurology. She is also working on her doctorate in communication. After traveling with The Center, Allison spent half a school year living in the west end of London during her junior year at Centre. She is member of the Junior League in Lexington and serves as the current president of the Lexington Kappa Kappa Gamma Alumnae Association.

"I'm so happy to see that things are still going strong at VAMPY. I've run into fellow VAMPY alumni everywhere from my college dorm to Washington, DC. The program really provides teenagers with support during that crazy, icky 'help I'm 15 and feel like a huge geek' period of life. These days I for one am happily at peace with my geeki-

ness. Indeed, I think you have to be to be a doctoral candidate. I just find it terrifying my first year at WKU was over eleven years ago! Can I really be 25 already?"

Court Sullivan (VAMPY 1995, 1996, and 1997) graduated from Emory in 2003 earning degrees in economics and history. At Emory, he wrote a humor column that eventually evolved into the comedy website www.pointsincase.com. He recently returned to Atlanta to run the website and engage in Internet marketing.

"Besides my parents, when I look back at my years growing up, I'll always be most glad for the difference VAMPY made in who I turned out to be. So for that, I'm very thankful to you and all the people I met there."

Julie Hansbrough (Super Saturdays 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003) was honored with a "Wall of Fame" medalion by the Warren County Board of Education. This Drakes Creek Middle School student won the Written Composition category at the State Governor's Cup academic competition for the second straight year.

Corey Alderdice (Counselor) recently won the Western Kentucky University Women's Studies Writing Contest with his essay "Cutting the Cord." Corey is pursuing a Master of Arts in English at Western and is a graduate assistant for the Western Forensics team.

Laura Benton Elliott (SCATS 1983) recently completed her Masters in English at Western Kentucky University. She received a Pass with Distinction on the oral exam and was named the Gladly Award winner in 2004. She currently teaches Communication and Drama at Franklin-Simpson Middle School and coaches the speech team.



Center Connections in Paris

By Julia Roberts

Twenty-eight students and adults spent ten days in France, and the experience was enhanced by connections The Center has in Paris. Our connections include Morton and Kristen Holbrook, Gail Moody, Tommy and Joan Webb, and Jenny Cundiff.

Morton Holbrook met us at the Marmottan Museum which is around the corner from where Morton is a senior diplomat. To The Center he is known as the father of Allen (VAMPY 1996 and 1997), Stephen (VAMPY 1999, 2000, and 2001), and Kristen (SCATS 2002 and 2003; VAMPY 2004 and 2005). Morton had invited our group for a visit to the United States Mission for Economic Cooperation and Development, and we gladly accepted. When one of our group asked what one would do to prepare to become a diplomat, Morton answered that speaking and writing English well was essential as was a demonstrated interest in international affairs. Ambassador Morella welcomed us in the boardroom where the Office of Economic Cooperation and Development member countries meet. Previously she served eight terms as Congresswoman from Maryland. She talked about the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) that had been released recently by the Office of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). (The report ranked the mathematics skills of eighth graders in the twenty-nine OECD countries. Finland ranks first, and the United States ranks twenty-fourth, falling from eighteenth three years ago.) We had the opportunity to visit the

Ambassador's office. Morton and Ambassador Morella were a gracious host and hostess.

Gail Moody joined our group for the outing by bus to Chartres to see the lovely Cathedral of Chartres and to the chateau at Chenonceaux. Her first contact with The Center was traveling on Spring Break to Paris and Spring Break to London with her daughter Erin. Little did she suspect then that Lexmark would offer her husband the opportunity to work in Paris for two or three years.

Gail remarked: "I took this same Spring Break trip in April 1999 with my daughter. The Roberts were so excited and thrilled to be going back! I imagined this to be my first and only visit to Paris. Now six years later, a country girl born in Tennessee, living in Kentucky for 26 years, is living in Paris! Only now do I understand the Roberts' excitement every time they return."

Friends from Lexington were in Paris visiting Gail. Tommy Webb (VAMPY 2003) and his mother, Joan, joined us for our visit to the Cathedral of Notre Dame. Another day Tommy, Joan, and Gail went with us to Versailles, which was an outing we did by train.



Jenny Cundiff (SCATS 1997; VAMPY 1998; Counselor) met us for lunch at the Louvre on Saturday. Jenny has spent the semester in Paris on a study/internship program. She is a student at Vanderbilt University. Jenny walked with us from the Louvre up the Champs Elysees to the Arc de Triomphe. Kristen Holbrook met the group there.

What wonderful friends The Center has! Sometimes our friends are located in especially interesting places. We were happy to make connections with several of them while we were in Paris. Next year we will travel to London for spring break. I wonder what friends of The Center will be there.



Super Saturdays Counts Down (and Up!)

Here at The Center we're all about meeting peoples' needs. So when some Super Saturdays' participants lamented the fact that they were too old for the program, we decided to change that. For the first time since Super Saturdays began in 1992, seventh graders were among the 567 young people taking hands-on, minds-on enrichment classes on Saturday afternoons. These middle schoolers could select from several options from the 39 classes: "Game Creators: Dark Basic Programming," "Improvisation: Theatre Without A Net," "Painting With A Passion," "The Sky Above," and "Rocket Science." Thirty-seven seventh graders took classes – and it was the first Center experience for one-fourth of them!

One particular student, Meredith Clouse of Glasgow, was especially pleased we'd opened up classes for seventh grad-

ers. She had taken "Rocket Science" twice before, and each time the rocket did not launch. (Failure can be the best learning experience!) She really wanted to see that rocket disappear into the atmosphere! Here's her response:

February 26th, 3:00 p.m. at a park in Bowling Green. The last day of Super Saturdays was here, and it was time for the rocket launch. The last two years problems had occurred with the rocket, and it was my last chance to see it while I was a Super Saturdays student. Students, parents, and educators were chatting under the February sun waiting for the rocket to take off. The rocket was sitting in the middle of the field waiting for its chance to soar through the skies. Finally, it was time. Countdown began, and the rocket took off like a bullet through the air. After only a few seconds it had gone too far to be able to easily see it. Each individual

Why Take Challenging Classes? **UPDATE**

Last winter, The Challenge featured reasons why taking challenging classes is important to a student's overall preparation for college. A month later, we discovered something new. According to the Berkeley report by Saul Geiser and Veronica Santelices, not only should students take challenging classes, but also doing well on the AP tests can indicate how well a student will perform in college. The report notes that the tests "have a greater predictive weight [on future college academic performance] than any other factor except high school grades" (p. 18). So the AP class isn't enough. Taking the test—and doing well—proves critical! Here's to working hard, now!

View the full report: <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1036&context=cshe>

was filled with wonder at the sight of this amazing launch!

Meredith (Super Saturdays 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005; SCATS 2004; VAMPY 2005) finally experienced the awe of launching a rocket, and thanks to the flexible scheduling with the launch, she also learned how to create her own video games in her class "Game Creators: Dark Basic Programming."

Meredith and her family joined others who traveled from as far away as Covington, KY, and south of Nashville, TN, to participate in Winter Super Saturdays 2005. A new group of classes will begin in October 2005 in Bowling Green with Fall Super Saturdays and in Owensboro with Owensboro Super Saturdays. For more information, please contact The Center for Gifted Studies.

There is absolutely no way to estimate how many lives you have touched or how many young people you have inspired throughout your career. You have a gift, Dr. Julia; and I am so grateful that you reside at Western and share it through your work on "The Hill." Your light and the fruits of your labor shine near and far.

– PAT RICHARDSON



Sheryl Hagan-Booth

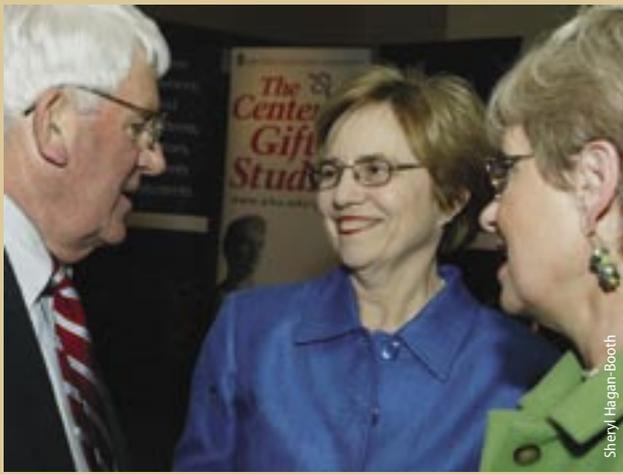
Joe Imel

SO MUCH TO CELEBRATE!



Sheryl Hagan-Booth

It began with a simple charge from The Center's Board of Advisors: let's do something to let our friends know that Julia Roberts was honored as one of the fifty-five most influential people in the history of gifted education. She, along with such notables as Benjamin Bloom and Howard Gardner, were listed in *Profiles of Influence in Gifted Education: Historical Perspectives and Future Directions*. It progressed as Western, the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences, and The Center joined forces in planning. It culminated in a wonderful reception that overflowed with people and laughter, a Proclamation from the Governor, speeches from important dignitaries and dear friends, and, most importantly, more people learning about the needs of gifted and talented children.



Your contributions to the field of gifted education are both remarkable and enduring through the many children's lives you've touched. We stand in awe of your achievement and are so glad that we know you and have the opportunity to work with you.

– GAYLE & DEBBIE ECTON

What a compliment to you that a room of people view your accomplishments as highly as they do – outstanding!

– BETSY HARNED



Thank you for providing leadership to instructors, parents, and students throughout the years. We deeply appreciate all that you have done for the many students who have attended the VAMPY program at Western Kentucky University as well as the SCATS program. Both of our children, David and Katie, benefited from your VAMPY program. Both met other bright students and enjoyed the challenging courses they took.

– RICHARD & MARY JO BAUER



JULIA ROBERT



Joe Imel

To touch the lives of children across this nation is a real contribution – a lasting one, one that affects eternity. To be affirmed for that contribution in this life is a blessing.

– EULA MONROE

Western Kentucky University and the entire Commonwealth have gained immeasurably from your unstinting efforts on behalf of gifted students and from your contributions to mathematics and science education.

– DIANNE BAZELL



Joe Imel



Sheryl Hagan-Booth

TS HONORED



Joe Imel

It was fitting that so many came to recognize and honor your achievements. You have indeed been significant in the lives of promising young people. Certainly many accomplishments of future generations will be traced to the encouragement and opportunities you afforded these students.

– CAROLE HARNED



Joe Imel



Joe Imel

Why Offer Challenging Classes?

By Leigh Johnson

The response to my previous article “Why Take Challenging Classes?” suggested to me that perhaps a follow-up article from a different perspective would be beneficial. We already know that students who take challenging classes in high school have a better chance of doing well in and graduating from college. Across the U.S., almost half of the students in their first year of college must take remedial classes in writing, reading, or mathematics, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Think of the wasted tuition and fees as students pay for classes that don’t count toward graduation. Think of the wasted time and brain cells! Challenging classes not only prepare students for the future, but they also save money.

But in order for students to stretch their minds, challenging classes must be offered. Read on to discover how challenging classes can also change the climate of a school.

What is the difference between a challenging class and an honors or AP class?

By “challenging class” I mean one in which each student must work to the highest level of her ability. Remember, though, that just because a class is titled Honors or AP doesn’t mean it is a challenging class for every student involved in the class. The teachers must have high expectations for each student. Since all students have different needs, interests,

and abilities, these expectations may differ for each person. Similarly, classes that are not labeled Honors or AP can also be challenging when they encourage students to think in new ways and stretch beyond their comfort zones. So a quick answer to the question can be nothing or everything!

Challenge differs according to individual kids. It is much more rewarding for students to work hard and be challenged in a class than to do well without being challenged. Different subject matter may be more challenging for some students, and individual units may be differentiated to increase the level of challenge for students who have already mastered the material.

How do challenging classes impact the school as a whole?

We talk about a geographical area’s climate. Schools have climates as well—and these climates should be purposefully established. When challenging classes are the norm, students grow to welcome and expect that their teachers will ask them to work hard. The process of succeeding at a challenging task by working hard raises students’ self-esteem and intrinsic motivation.

Other benefits appear in schools with challenging classes, such as improvement in testing. Statistics that measure schools’ success show that scores rise as more students are learning. This seems so simple, but individual schools, such as San Jose Downtown College Prep, that have created an atmosphere in which students consistently choose to work at high levels even have fewer discipline problems. Graduates may include more National Merit Finalists, Intel Talent Search winners, and Governor’s Scholars.

According to the *Detroit Free Press* (September 21, 2001) more than “eighty percent of the jobs of the future are going to need some kind of post-secondary training;” this means that schools that prepare their students for the future will have more graduates with more options. Challenging classes are important in every state. Carolyn Witt Jones, executive director of the Partnership for Kentucky Schools, notes that without more rigorous course work in high schools, “We face major, major difficulties for the economy, the workforce and education” (www.cipl.org/releases/july_14.htm).



Sheryl Hagan-Booth

(Continued on Page 12)

Turning 25

The year 2006 marks the twenty-fifth year that The Center has offered services to young people who are gifted and talented, their educators, and their parents. Plans are underway for a celebration on July 1, 2006. This will also be the first meeting of the Alumni Association Board of Advisors. Save the date now!

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION CREATES BOARD OF ADVISORS

By Sarah Jo Mahurin

The Center for Gifted Studies would like to announce the newest way to link up with alumni and friends: the Alumni Association Board. Launched this summer, the Board will spearhead a large-scale effort to collect and connect past participants in VAMPY, SCATS, and Super Saturdays.

"The launch of the Alumni Association Board – representing over 12,000 past program participants – is a tremendous milestone in the history of The Center," said Wake Norris, acting chair of the Board. "It is a testament to the work of Dr. Roberts and her colleagues over the past twenty-five years."

Board members will meet quarterly, either by teleconference or in an annual meeting in Kentucky. Their first projects will include a membership drive, a fundraising drive, and a comprehensive alumni website.

The Board is made up of alumni from all over the country (and even the world!), of varying years of participation and all sorts of different experiences with the Center.

How can you help? If you aren't certain whether your contact information is up-to-date in our database, contact The Center – and share the news with your fellow Center alumni! Be on the lookout for calls or emails from Board members about participating in the launch effort and about the unveiling of the Alumni Association website.

"Through the Association, alumni can stay in touch with old friends, make connections with other alumni, help secure The Center's future, and ensure that tomorrow's gifted students will have outstanding outlets and opportunities for development as we did in our youth," Wake said.

ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD

MATT BEASLEY of Toyko, Japan
(VAMPY 1991, 1992, 1993, and 1994)

MATT FISCHESSE of New York, NY
(VAMPY 1984, 1985, 1986, and 1987)

JUSTIN JONES of Washington, DC
(VAMPY 1990 and 1991)

RAYMOND KIM of New York, NY
(VAMPY 1991 and 1992; Counselor)

SARAH JO MAHURIN of New Haven, CT
(SCATS 1990, 1991, 1992, and 1993; VAMPY 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996; TA; Counselor)

JOE NAPIER of Bowling Green, KY
(SCATS 1983; Super Saturdays Instructor)

WAKE NORRIS of Columbus, OH
(VAMPY 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992; Counselor)

AMBER DALE SAPP of LeGrange, KY
(SCATS 1988, 1989, and 1990; Counselor)

HANK ZIMMERMAN of Aurora, IL
(VAMPY 1990, 1991, and 1992; Counselor)



Who would take challenging classes?

Every person should be challenged. Challenging the brain is like keeping the heart healthy: pumping hard, exercising, eating the right food—all contribute to a lifetime of heart-healthiness. Brain research shows that the brain, too, benefits from working hard, getting new “food for thought,” and regular exercise. When the brain is not challenged or exercised, the brain slows down when it sends messages. Challenging classes allow students access to more parts of their brains. Each new challenge positively affects the brain’s ability to make connections now and in the future.

When do challenging classes make sense for students?

Challenging classes are important for students at all grade levels, but please don’t equate the level of challenge with the amount of paperwork involved in the class. An article in *The Oregonian* (January 12, 2004) quotes a student who found her International Baccalaureate English class challenging as being “so abstract that it is taking my mind in places I never thought about going.” Challenging classes open our minds to new thoughts; they don’t put our brains to sleep with endless repetition of a simple concept.

Aim for rigorous thinking not paper pushing.

For example, offer two choices for homework—five tough problems for those who are ready to be challenged, or twenty drill practice for those who are challenged by additional drill. *Teaching with Love and Logic* suggests giving students the option to work until they’ve got it (Fay & Funk, 1995). Some may need four repetitions; others may need thirty or fifty. Providing more guidance in creating an engaging learning experience allows students to connect to a challenging class without being overwhelmed with work.

How do I learn how to make a class challenging?

Some resources include:

Smutny, J. F., Walker, S. Y., & Meckstroth, E. A. (1997). *Teaching young gifted children in the regular classroom: Identifying, nurturing, and challenging ages 4-9*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit.

Tomlinson, C. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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Higgins, L. (21 September, 2001). “Students’ blowoff classes a target in new program.”

The *Detroit Free Press*. Retrieved May 2, 2005 from www.freep.com/news/education/schol21_20020921.htm

The Oregonian. (12 January, 2004). “Challenging classes change student’s life.” Retrieved May 2, 2005 from www.oregonlive.com/special/oregonian/index.ssf?/special/oregonian/series/fix2_classes.html

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The Berta Fund for Excellence in Education Seminar Series

September 15, 2005
6:30 - 8:30 pm (CDT)

Carroll Knicely Conference Center, Rm 151

Sylvia Rimm's Evening Seminar: Underachievement in Gifted Children

Sylvia Rimm, noted psychologist and educational consultant for the Today Show, will help parents and educators understand underachievement and the steps needed to reverse it.

Thanks to the generosity of the Berta Fund for Excellence in Education these events are free and open to the public. Please let us know if you will be attending by contacting The Center at:

Email - gifted@wku.edu

Phone - 270.745.6323

Web - www.wku.edu/gifted

September 16, 2005
8:30 - 3:30 (CDT)

Holiday Inn University Plaza, Salon B

Sylvia Rimm's Workshop: Growing Up Too Fast: The Rimm Report on the Secret Lives of America's Middle Schoolers

Designed for educators, counselors, and administrators, this six-hour workshop will focus on Sylvia Rimm's findings on middle school children as presented in her latest book. The workshop will include a discussion of gifted children in the middle school. EILA credit available.



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The Center for Gifted Studies - Where Gifted Kids Fulfill Their Potential

Plank, crocodile, cobra, downward dog. This is the flow series (or the sun salutations), but I didn't know that a year ago. If you had said these words to me I would have thought you had quite the menagerie. Now, of course, I realize that this series is part of yoga practice. I am not a yoga expert (nor even very good), but in the dark room, with soothing music, and gradually shifting poses, it doesn't matter.

Learning to stretch. Gifted kids often feel that they need to be the best at everything they do, and often they can easily achieve this goal. I'll argue that sometimes the best option is to NOT be the best. To stretch means "to lengthen, widen, or distend; to cause to extend from one place to another or across a given space; to reach



making the mental stretch

By Leigh Johnson

or put forth; extend; to extend (oneself or one's limbs, for example) to full length" (dictionary.com). I am most intrigued by the last definition. "To extend to full length" would mean stepping out of one's comfort zone and into the fullest lengths of the imagination. A year ago, my full length was about my shins when trying to touch my toes; now my full length is putting my fingertips on the floor.

According to *You Know Your Child is Gifted When...* by Judy Galbraith, "Perfectionism is never a good thing. What's good is the pursuit of excellence...[which] means taking risks, trying new things, growing, changing...and sometimes failing." The pursuit of excellence necessitates the stretch!

Mentally stretching builds flexible thinking. Allowing and encouraging your children to stretch gives them the confidence to reach the fullest length—wherever that may be. My yoga instructor reminded us "Stretch to where you feel it;

do not compare with others. Remember to celebrate what your body can do." There's power in this thought. I say the same to parents of gifted kids, even though I know adapting to this thought will require mental stretching of their own.

What does mental stretching mean? The three aspects to mental stretching include letting go of the mirror, knowing when to take the next challenge, and celebrating the accomplishments of the stretch.

One of the hardest things for humans to do is to stop comparing with others and to ease up on self-criticism. In order to create a place safe for your kids to mentally stretch, it is important to realize that the ability to attempt the challenge is more important than how good at an activity your child is. Whether it is challenging classes, horseback riding, or inventing something, kids need a chance to learn from mistakes and strategize about how to get better. In yoga, the instructor offers

modifications for beginners to use until they build their strength. For instance, if you cannot balance on one leg for tree, you may move toward a wall to steady yourself until your balance improves. Part of encouraging a safe place to stretch is allowing a child to make progress on her own, and in her own time.

However, modifications can become a crutch, allowing us to rest and wait before moving forward. Knowing when to push for the next level in stretching is important to developing mental flexibility. In working with high school Future Problem Solving team, I, too, often catch myself putting parameters on creativity until all the innovation is sucked out of the project. Focusing on how the questions should be written takes away from the development of their ideas. Knowing when to step back and allow the students to take over the creative reins is vitally important. This process involves a level of trust in the students to know that they can do it on their own.



NAGC Comes to Kentucky

Mark your calendars for November 9–13, 2005, and make travel plans for the 52nd Annual Convention of the National Association for Gifted Children in Louisville. Over three hundred sessions will be available, so you can learn from myriad experts on topics most important to you. You're invited to a reception hosted by The Center on the evening of the 11th for all Kentuckians and friends of The Center. There is a special Parent's Day on Saturday the 13th. See www.nagc.org for conference information.

Parents, too, must learn to have enough courage to allow children to take the step to the next level.

The last aspect to mental stretching is remembering to celebrate the accomplishments your children do make. Developing a new skill, observing incremental change, and marking progress when it happens all are worthy of notice. The process of celebrating the body or the mind—in the case of mental stretching—involves realizing that the stretch means using parts of the brain that had not been used before. These regions, stimulated by the stretching, become more easily accessible over time. Just as an athlete runs the risk of injury without stretching, children are in danger of never learning what is possible for them without the stretch.

The end of a yoga practice usually involves relaxation and reflection. As I reflect on the process of stretching my body, I feel confident that the rest of the day will bring success. Providing a place for your children to feel safe and positive while taking risks that develop their potential, even if they are not the best at an activity, can provide an unparalleled sense of accomplishment. Working hard at something difficult can be more rewarding than halfway working in an area that's "easy."

For more information see *Freeing Our Families from Perfectionism* by Thomas Greenspon, Free Spirit Publishing, Minneapolis, MN. www.freespirit.com

Perfectionism: What's Bad About Being Too Good? By Miriam Adderholdt and Jan Goldberg, also from Free Spirit Publishing.

You Know Your Child Is Gifted When...A Beginners Guide to Life on the Bright Side, by Judy Galbraith, again from Free Spirit Publishing.

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September 16, 2005

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October 29, November 5, 12, and 19, 2005

Fall Super Saturdays

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