The COE Office of Graduate Studies

Welcome to our Summer/Fall 2009 OGS newsletter which highlights a few of our graduate students and recent COE accomplishments and projects. The last 6 months have been eventful. In Fall 2009, a new Interim Dean, Dr. Marie McDemmond, joined our College. Dr. McDemmond is President Emeritus of Norfolk State University, where she served as president from 1997 to 2006. She has South Florida roots, having served as Vice President for Finance, CFO and Chief Operating Officer of Florida Atlantic University from 1988 to 1997. Other COE organizational changes have been made. The College has been reorganized into two departments, the Department of Teaching and Learning, and the Department of Leadership and Professional Studies. Go to the COE homepage (http://education.fiu.edu) to get details about the two departments’ leadership, contact information, and programs.

At the Summer/Fall 2009 graduation, we had a substantial number of graduates, including 10 doctoral students. Their doctoral dissertation titles (See page 9) reveal the diversity of our doctoral students’ research. For example, in addition to other relevant topics, they conducted studies on literacy, mathematics, computer-assisted instruction, family impact, and stereotypes and standardized testing.

I wish everyone the best for 2010. If you would like to learn more about COE Graduate Studies, feel free to contact us (Contact information on last page of newsletter.)

– Dr. Patty Barbetta
The Community Literacy Club: A Successful Partnership

For over 18 years, Drs. Lynne Miller and Joyce Fine (COE Literacy Faculty) have engaged college and local elementary students in a rigorous summer reading experience, the Community Literacy Club (CLC). The CLC experience addresses two critical community issues: the preparation of literacy professionals who have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to expertly nurture and accelerate the literacy growth of every student; and, the need to support the literacy development of students who are performing far below grade-level expectations.

Planning for the summer CLC begins each spring term with a host Miami-Dade County Public Schools (MDCPS) school site being identified. The host school provides classroom space, some materials and library books, janitorial services, and access to technology. The host school also actively recruits elementary students most in need of this free, quality, one-on-one, literacy tutoring. FIU provides the tutors, who are students from the MS in Reading Education Program, and COE literacy faculty who teach the masters students and clinically supervise their tutoring sessions. Further, the COE tutors provide a variety of instructional materials to enhance student learning.

The CLC reflects an ongoing, successful partnership between the COE and MDCPS, and the consistently positive impact of the CLC experience for all involved encourages Drs. Miller and Fine to continue this community-outreach effort. Each summer, the participating students show substantive gains in their decoding, fluency and comprehension abilities. Further, they grow in their view of themselves as competent readers and as members of the literate world. The COE students who serve as tutors show substantial, meaningful development in their abilities to assess students’ literacy strengths and areas for growth, and they develop additional skills in identifying and implementing effective, data-driven instruction. To learn more about the Community Literacy Club, please see Drs. Fine and Miller’s chapter in the book referenced below.

My Graduation Day

On December 14, I attended the graduation ceremony at FIU and was officially “hooded.” I defended my dissertation last May and graduated in the summer semester. I suppose that since I had already been “Dr. Landa” for a few months prior to walking in the ceremony, I initially underestimated how special it would be. The music, the lights, and seeing my fellow Doctoral candidates all robed around me was truly more powerful than I had expected. As I sat in the first row (First Row!), I thought about the events that had led up to this culminating experience.

I started my coursework in the spring of 2004, wanting to gain more expertise in the area of Special Education. Gaining this knowledge at FIU was an active experience. In my 5 years of study, I participated in research projects, lead teacher trainings, presented at and attended conferences, conducted a pilot study abroad, and collaborated with other students at the College of Education as a Graduate Assistant. My dissertation study, “Effects of Repeated Readings on English Language Learners with Specific Learning Disabilities,” gave me the opportunity to work with students at a local elementary school. Watching the students grow in their reading abilities was rewarding, and reviewing the data with my major professor Dr. Barbetta was a priceless exercise in sharpening my skills as a researcher. I honestly can’t wait to do a project like that again!

I left Miami at the end of Summer 2009 to move to Jacksonville with my husband for his medical residency and became an "Exceptional Student Education Specialist" with the role of assisting teachers with federal and state compliance and developing lesson plans. On the day I returned to Jacksonville after graduation, I attended an orientation at Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ). In January, I began teaching a course called Student Life Skills to college freshmen and dual enrollment students. At the training, they congratulated the participants on becoming part of the FSCJ faculty, and I quietly thanked FIU for getting me there. FIU has prepared me to share my love of learning, research, and collegiality with my new students. –Dr. Katrina Landa, Ed.D. Exceptional Student Education, 2009 Graduate

President Rosenberg and Katrina Landa (ESE Doctoral Graduate)
Project CLAVE (Creating Latino Access to a Valuable Education)

Recently, Dr. Delia Garcia was awarded a US Department of Education Title V grant in the amount of $2,812,350 during the period of 2009-2014. The project will provide tuition scholarships for 85 Hispanic-American students in the completion of graduate degrees. A total of 55 teachers from low-performing schools in the Miami-Dade County Public School district will have an opportunity to earn a Masters of Science in Urban Education, 20 students a Master of Science in Higher Education with graduate assistantships, and 10 administrators from the school district a Doctor of Education in Educational Administration and Supervision. The project was conceptualized based on the identified professional development needs of teachers and administrators in the district and our local student population. Drs. Glenda Musoba and Joan Wynne will collaborate in the implementation of this project with Dr. Garcia and Fabiola Hernandez, Coordinator. For more information, please contact 305-348-6219.

Project PEACE: Federal Grant Awarded

Drs. Diana Valle-Riestra and Elizabeth Cramer (left to right) were awarded an Office of Special Education Federal grant for Project PEACE (Preparing Educators about Autism through Collaborative Efforts). PEACE seeks to improve the education of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder by providing coursework leading to an autism endorsement for special education teachers. This project is designed to recruit and educate two cohorts of 24 teachers who will earn a Master of Science of Education (MS) degree in special education with a Florida endorsement in Autism. The first cohort began taking classes Fall 2009. This degree includes a 36-credit program of study focusing on research (9 credits), advanced special education knowledge and skills (15 credits), and a specialization in Autism (12 credits). In addition to credit hours, graduate students will have the opportunity to participate in professional development seminars, field-based experiences within classrooms and other clinical settings, a mentoring program, a research-to-practice conference, an extended family project, and an action research project. For more information, call the Special Education Graduate Assistant office at (305) 348-3226.
Dissertation Year Fellowships: Summer and Fall 2009

Three College of Education Doctoral Students were awarded Dissertation Year Fellowships (DYFs) during Summer and Fall 2009 semesters. DYFs provide support to highly-qualified FIU doctoral students during the data analysis and writing phase of their dissertation. It is intended to facilitate the timely completion of high-quality manuscripts and dissertations. Students who are conducting outstanding research in their discipline and have established a notable record of publication during their doctoral studies are favored in the application process.

Martin Wasserberg (above) and Debra Pane (right) who were both doctoral students in Curriculum and Instruction were Summer 2009 recipients of the DYF awards. Subsequently, both completed and successfully defended their dissertations and graduated and Fall 2009. Martin’s dissertation was entitled "Stereotype Threat and the Standardized Testing Experiences of African American Children in an Urban Elementary School." Debra’s dissertation was, "The Relationship Between Classroom Interactions and Exclusionary Discipline as a Social Practice: A Critical Microethnography." We wish them both the best of luck as recent FIU doctoral graduates.

Maria Plakshotnik (right) was the COE’s Fall 2009 DYF recipient. Maria is a doctoral candidate in Adult Education and Human Resource Development in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. She will begin her Fellowship next semester which will allow her to focus her energies on her dissertation, “How Employees with Different National Identities Experience a Geocentric Organizational Culture of a Global Corporation: A Phenomenological Study.”
Fall 2009 Doctoral Graduation Photos

Front Row: Antonietta DiGirolamo, Susan Nullman, Debra Pane, Cary Unzueta, Katrina Landa
Back Row: Ron Myers, Sean Madison, Jessica Cardenas, Martin Wasserberg, Ric Cumming

Dr. Manfra and Jessica Cardenas

Interim Dean McDemmond, Sean Madison, and Dr. Musoba
I am an Exceptional Student Education doctoral candidate and a member of the Urban SEALS (Special Education Academic Leaders) cohort. Urban SEALS is a federal grant to prepare doctoral-level leaders in urban special education. This grant support provided me multiple learning opportunities outside of my doctoral coursework. For example, I have taught several undergraduate special-education courses and worked with faculty on research and grants. Also, I have been actively involved in presenting at state, national, and international conferences. A highlight of my experiences was a research presentation at the American Educational Research Association in 2008. This research resulted in the preparation and submission of a manuscript with some fellow doctoral students that was accepted for publication in the premier journal, Teacher Education Special Education. This particular research project was a direct result of collaboration with peers in Dr. Linda Bliss’ qualitative research class.

Professional service has also been a critical component of my doctoral experience. I am a member of the new COE Dean search, the current president of the FIU College of Education Graduate Student Network, and a member on the FIU College of Education Research Conference Committee. Also, I have served as a reviewer for conferences and professional journals. Overall, as a result of academic training and professional growth experiences with the Urban SEALS doctoral cohort, I believe I have the required skills to make a positive impact in the field of urban special education.
## Summer/Fall 2009 College of Education Doctoral Graduates’ Dissertations and Committee Memberships

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Peter Barbatis: Recent Graduate Earns Dissertation Recognition and More

Dr. Peter Barbatis graduated from the College of Education in Fall 2008 with a doctorate in Higher Education Administration. Peter was a highly-accomplished educator prior to receiving his doctoral degree and his successes have continued. After graduating, he was appointed Vice President of Student Services at Cañada College, an Hispanic-Serving Institution of 7,000 students in Redwood City, California. His division oversees admissions, registration, career development, counseling, disability services, and financial aid, along with other critical areas.

Shortly after graduating from FIU, Peter was presented the National Council for Student Development (NSCD) Dissertation Award for 2009. NCSD is an affiliate council of the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and is the only organization solely dedicated to serving the needs of student development professionals in the community college. NCSD is the nation's primary voice for sharing knowledge, expertise, professional development and student advocacy for community college student development professionals. Peter’s dissertation focused on the perceptions of underprepared community college students regarding their educational achievement. Amongst other accolades, the award selection committee described Peter’s dissertation as “timely and addressed leading issues in community colleges with underprepared students . . .”; and,“ . . . could be a major contribution to Developmental Education at community colleges.”

More recently, Peter received more positive professional news. His dissertation was accepted for publication in the Journal of Developmental Education, a top tier journal in the field. The article will be entitled, "What do Underprepared Ethnically Diverse Community College Students Say about the Factors that Contributed toward their Persistence." We wish continued success to Peter in the future.
Recent COE Student In-Press Publications


This article explores the development of employee engagement through a historical lens using an integrated literature review. The concept is defined and situated within the HRD field by systematically reviewing and organizing literature across various disciplines and fields of study. Seminal works on the topic were identified and reviewed to gain an understanding of the topic’s development. A working definition is proposed and implications for theory, scholarship, and organizational practice are discussed.


This research article explored the perceptions related to cohort education models (CEMs) of special education professors and doctoral students at a Carnegie-designated research extensive university in a multicultural, urban area in the southeastern USA. Benefits and negative effects of a CEM were identified. Recommendations were made to faculty who work in the CEM model.