Lab school provides hands-on learning

A few more hands have been added to the mix at USI's Children's Learning Center. The Center, long trusted by parents as providing one of the best daycare environments in the city, has added an additional layer of engagement, one geared at not only benefitting the kids attending the Center but also USI students.

The Center recently transitioned from a daycare only operation to a hands-on learning lab for USI's early childhood education majors, and is now under the direction of the Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education. The switch allows students to be immersed in the everyday operations of their future professions, as well as providing little ones with more one-on-one interaction.

Dr. Jill Raisor, assistant professor of education, and Amanda Wheaton-Collins, manager of the Center, believe the move toward a lab school model is a natural choice.

"Lab schools serve as model programs for future educators and offer a developmentally appropriate curriculum in a child-centered environment," said Wheaton-Collins. "The Center is a convenient place to provide practical experience for USI students—experience needed to work effectively with young children."

Training begins with students observing children at play and reporting their findings in their early childhood courses. Then, as students progress through the program, their interaction with the children advances from observation to creation of lesson plans and teaching.

Ellen Allen, a senior majoring in special education and early childhood education, credits the hands-on experience she gained at the Center with preparing her for her future teaching career. "Almost every day I'm working with children, and I always learn something new about becoming a teacher of young children," she said. "The teachers and the staff at the Children's Learning Center have really helped me excel and further my knowledge."

Students also gain further understanding of how young children learn. "I believe there is only so much that can be learned in the classroom, but to really become knowledgeable about working with young children you have to get out into the schools and practice. This is what the Center has allowed me to do," Allen said.

Through funds allocated from the College, the Center also was able to purchase new materials and supplies for the classrooms.
Welcome to the spring 2013 edition of Periodic Review. The year is almost in the history books, and what a great year it has been. Every year it seems we increase our activities with competitions, prominent speakers, new visitors to campus, new programs developed, and faculty and student accolades.

We are proud of the success and recognition our faculty and students have received. Once again a Pott College faculty member has been named the USI Distinguished Professor—we congratulate Dr. Bob Boostrom, teacher education, for receiving this honor. Also, Dr. Joyce Gulley, teacher education, was named as one of the University and Community Phenomenal Women.

Dr. Renee Frimming, kinesiology and sport, received the Health Educator Award from the Indiana Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (IAHPERD). In addition, Dr. Glenna Bower, kinesiology and sport, received the Leadership Award from the IAHPERD.

At our recent College Honors Convocation, we handed out more than 200 awards and scholarships. Chanse Ford, a geology major, won the 2013 Trustees Distinguished Merit Award. In addition, several students garnered external awards and recognition for their scholarly activities and service. Our Pott College students continue to excel in the classroom and the community. In this newsletter, you will read about activities, accolades, and successes in areas ranging from regional and national competitions to post-baccalaureate achievements. We’re proud of our students and faculty and their continued success!

This spring, we’ve been busy installing, testing, and calibrating equipment and instrumentation housed in our recently completed Applied Engineering Center (AEC). This facility will be ready for classes in the fall and will not only serve as a “learning factory” for our students but also as a resource for business and industry in our region. There has been tremendous regional and statewide interest in the AEC, and every week we have groups and individuals touring the facility.

Summer 2013 will be quite busy as we offer a wide range of undergraduate and graduate courses. In addition, we will have on campus the last class of students in our NSF-sponsored Early Undergraduate Research Program. The 18 student participants will work with faculty on a variety of research projects which encompass most every department and discipline within the Pott College. Thus far, this highly successful program has involved more than 70 students and dozens of faculty. The experience the students receive is invaluable, and the research undertaken has resulted in many students becoming involved with peer-reviewed publications and presentations. More information on these and other items can be found on our website at www.usi.edu/science.

I hope you find this edition of Periodic Review both enjoyable and informative.

Dr. Scott A. Gordon
Scott A. Gordon, Dean
Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education

Created in the 1980s, the Children’s Learning Center served as a facility for quality childcare while parents worked or attended class at USI. In addition to becoming a lab school, it remains a state-licensed facility with a Level 4 Paths to Quality rating—the highest possible rating in the state of Indiana—and is accredited by the National Association for the Education of the Young Child.

“The Children’s Learning Center is a model of quality,” said Dr. Scott Gordon, dean of the College. “USI is an early childhood education leader and a pacesetter for new practices in early childcare instruction for the region. The move to the lab school will further distinguish the Children’s Learning Center as a model for excellence.”

Research Opportunities

The Children’s Learning Center offers the prospect of collaboration between early childhood faculty, staff, and students in an environment based on the latest research and ideas as to how young children learn. The transition to a lab school model has provided opportunities for research in teacher education to both faculty and students.

Raisor worked with the staff and children to plant an organic garden last summer, documenting the process as part of her research in social emotional development and self-regulation. Staff supervised as the children planted squash, tomatoes, beans, and other vegetables and herbs. The plants, nurtured by the children, were used as educational tools in math, science, cooking, and nutrition activities.

“The future for early childhood education is very exciting,” Raisor said. “We must realize what a lasting impact the early years have on a child.”
Speakers bring inspiration

A message of hope and transformation resounded in the presentations of guest speakers hosted by the Department of Kinesiology and Sport this spring. Paralympic triathlete and war veteran Melissa Stockwell and homeless advocate Anne Mahlum spoke on the empowering ability of athletics in helping the disabled and the homeless to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Stockwell lost her left leg above the knee in 2004 during her service in the U.S. Army in Iraq. She has since gone on to compete in the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing and become the three-time World Champion in Paratriathlon. This spring she gave a presentation titled “From Baghdad to Beijing and Beyond” as part of USI’s Disability Awareness Week and joined a campus spinning class.

Bring on the bots

Following a black stripe on a field of white may seem like a simple thing, but when the one tracking the contour is a robot built from a Lego’s Mindstorm kit, the task is anything but straightforward. In fact, it’s downright loopy—and that’s what made it fun for both the Tri-state students competing in the match against minds and the USI students who sponsored it.

In the sixth annual Robotics Competition—held by USI’s student chapters of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers in Carter Hall this April—49 teams of middle and high school students (competing in two categories) pitted their bots against each other in a contest to collect as many of the 225 points possible in the shortest time. And while triumphing over each other may be the aim of each team, it’s not what interests USI’s engineering students who host the event.

“The robotics competition is an opportunity to get kids interested in engineering and the importance of it in society,” said Tyson Miller, junior mechanical engineering student, and one of six working on the project.

Using the contents from one box of Mindstorm and no outside accoutrements, the competition tested each team’s ability to problem solve and think in terms of big-picture goals. They then had to translate the minutiae of their plans and predictions into robots that made decisions and redirected themselves based on information gathered from the course designed by USI engineering students. In other words, the competing students had to build a brain for their bot that could read the terrain, traverse bridges and rough tracks, and pick up blue blocks to score points.

At the students’ fingertips were sensor-reading elements to detect light, color, sound, and touch that they could program into the brick (or brain) of their bot. Based on its understanding of the information fed to it by the students, the robots would adjust their directions to stay on course and score the highest points.

Since its inception in 2008, the number of students competing has grown from 58 to 170, a sign Allison Grabert, director of USI’s Southwest Indiana STEM Resource Center, finds more than a little encouraging.

“Growth in the number of students participating in activities such as the USI ASME Robotics Competition shows that the University is making great strides in its effort to support and celebrate children in our area who wish to become successful STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) professionals.”
“Melissa’s story is so inspiring to me personally,” said freshman public relations and advertising major Clare Scheller, who lost her left leg to a bacterial infection in 2010—a result of complications from leukemia. “When I first lost my leg, it was hard for me to think I would ever be active again. Meeting her has made me want to keep pursing my goal of some day being able to run and swim competitively again.”

Mahlum is the founder and CEO of Back on My Feet, a national non-profit on a mission to inspire self-worth and self-value in homeless people through running. Through morning runs and partnerships with local homeless shelters, the organization helps homeless participants find housing and employment. She spoke at USI’s campus in April and ran in the inaugural Romain Subaru Spring into Fitness 10K. The proceeds of the event went to the USI Sport Management scholarship fund, professional development opportunities, and future events.

The power of human invention

In the dark days of January, a small team of determined engineering students began meeting at odd hours to conjure up a craft that one day might modify life in urban societies. Brewing in the back of their minds was not only the notion to create a craft that could change the way people go about their daily lives, but also to build a bike that would blow away the competition. Using 41/30 gauge steel, fiberglass, and lots and lots of chain, the students designed and built a human-powered vehicle (HPV) named Quietus, and entered it in the national Human Powered Vehicle Challenge.

This was USI’s first appearance in the national competition—something Brett Bielefeld, senior engineering student, attributes to the small size of the department—but it won’t be their last. “It takes a lot of work and commitment to a project that is difficult to envision—but now that we have one, it should generate a lot of interest, and create a bright future for USI in coming competitions.”

The HPV is a bike, specifically a recumbent bike, with an aerodynamic enclosure. If designed right, people might ditch their cars in favor of the sleek cycles for getting around town and running errands. “If bikes had more efficient designs they could make a more practical form of alternative transportation for short trips in-town, such as grocery shopping,” said Bielefeld.

With a meager budget of $2,500, the team spent $1,600 constructing the 84-pound Quietus (whose name means death or release from life) and shipped it to Ferris State University in Big Rapid, Michigan, where elite teams from schools such as Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and University of Toronto (UT)—contenders with years of experience and bigger budgets—awaited them in the East Division.

Despite being first-time contenders in a field of 31, and undaunted by UT’s $14,000 budget, USI’s team maintained a middle-of-the-pack score in each of the five categories—design, innovation, endurance, men’s drag race, and women’s drag race.

Today’s engineering students are tomorrow’s professionals, and it’s opportunities like this that will inform their innovation. “It gave me a broader perspective of engineering—actual application and real-world experience instead of just book work,” said Cameron Reed, a junior engineering major, who rode in the women’s drag race competition. “It’s cool to see the results of your labor in action.”

The mistakes USI’s team made in the design of Quietus will inform future thinking and innovation. Bielefeld said they already see ways to improve next year’s design. “We’re looking at developing a regenerative braking system that stores energy to provide bursts of energy during takeoffs or on hills.”

But that’s for the future; today the team is happy and proud to have been a part of putting USI’s engineering department on the map. “It was good to represent USI at a national competition; to get our name out there and promote our school,” Bielefeld said.
Core courses lead merit award winner to new career

As a University of Southern Indiana student, Chanse Ford has discovered a love for geology, traveled to India, and will work near the shores of Lake Michigan and in Yellowstone National Park this summer.

Ford, a senior geology major and honor student from Manila, Indiana, is the recipient of the 2013 Trustees Distinguished Merit Award. The award recognizes outstanding achievement not only in the student’s major but also in the liberal arts and sciences that form the core curriculum. Each college nominates one student for the honor, which includes a $1,500 award.

Brian Steinkamp, instructor in physics, said Ford is “remarkable” in that he’s accomplished in both mathematics-based science courses and the liberal arts. “Based on my experience, it is very rare that someone has the ability that Chanse has to excel in physics. It is, however, exceedingly rare that such a student would also be gifted in subjects related to the arts as well.”

This summer, Ford is assisting Dr. Paul Doss, associate professor of geology, in research directed at understanding the role groundwater plays in sustaining ecologically critical surface water flows for important trout and salmon habitat in Michigan’s Manistee National Forest. Ford became interested in geology after taking Doss’ Geology of America’s National Parks and is spending more than a month in the field with him quantifying groundwater discharge to the White River, a designated Michigan State Natural River. Then Ford will travel to Yellowstone National Park with an upper level class Doss teaches only for geology majors.

Ford became more aware of world-wide water issues while he was in India in summer 2011. He and two other USI students participated in the University’s first Global Engagement Initiative, spending two weeks with the Society for Development Studies in Alwar, India. “India definitely influenced me when it comes to the water issue. Over there, it’s even more of an issue. I realized out in the middle of rural India that what I was going to be studying could be applied globally,” he said. “As a freshman, scholarships brought me to USI. To receive this scholarship as a senior eases my mind as I go into my final year here.”

News Briefs

Dr. Brent Summers, associate professor of biology and assistant dean of the Pott College, has been named the new chair of the biology department beginning July 1.

Dr. Shelly Blunt, associate professor of chemistry, has been named the new assistant provost of Academic Affairs effective July 1.

Dr. Robert Boostrom, professor of education, is the 2013 recipient of the Distinguished Professor Award. Colleagues selected him for his achievements in scholarship, teaching, and service.

Dr. Glenna Bower, associate professor and chair of the Kinesiology and Sport Department, was awarded the Indiana Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance Leadership Award.

Dr. Renee Frimming, assistant professor in the Kinesiology and Sport Department, was recently honored by the Indiana Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance as the recipient of the 2012 Health Education Teacher of the Year Award. She also received the 2013 American Association Health Education’s College/University Health Education Specialist Award.

USI will host the fall 2013 section meeting of the Mathematical Association of America (MAA) on October 26, 2013. MAA is the largest professional society that focuses on mathematics accessible at the undergraduate level.
Grant advances scientific contributions begun in 1826

When noted naturalist Thomas Say settled in New Harmony 187 years ago, he did so specifically to collect and describe as many specimens of insect and mollusk species as he could find in the bottomlands and terraces of the lower Wabash River. His single-minded efforts paid off prodigiously as he amassed and identified 1,575 new species in his lifetime (not all from New Harmony).

Say, a celebrity scientist, came to New Harmony as part of The Boatload of Knowledge, a cadre of scientists and educators who traveled from the east in a keelboat to be part of Robert Owen’s utopian community. His accumulation of data helps scientists understand local bio-causations, which is the first step in seeking explanation to changes within the environment.

“New Harmony is arguably the birthplace of North American entomology, yet despite this historical significance the natural history of many insect groups in the area are poorly documented,” said Eric McCloud, associate professor of biology. That’s because not only was Say’s collection scattered and lost after his death, but also there has been little work done to recoup the collection in the last 180 years—a calamity McCloud seeks to rectify through a grant from the New Harmony Outreach and Engagement Faculty Fellowship.

“The pursuit of descriptive biology has not happened in a long time in New Harmony,” said McCloud, who hopes to help re-establish the role New Harmony has historically played in science with his research project.

To do this, McCloud will replicate Say’s collection to include as many of the original local species as possible, a feat he’ll accomplish with the help of two USI undergraduate biology students, Peyton Russelburg and Christopher Holt. The students began collecting physical specimens of insects from within the town of New Harmony last July, and plan to concentrate their efforts this summer on farmland south of town as well as in New Harmony State Park. In total, the collection sampling will come from roughly five to six square miles in and around New Harmony.

“Whether we can duplicate Say’s collection or not remains to be seen,” McCloud said. “We will, however, be able to reproduce some of it to fill this gap in scientific data.”

To date, data on insects inhabiting Vanderburgh and Posey Counties is scant. “When you look at a map dotted with spots designating areas of collection, there aren’t a lot of dots for these areas,” McCloud said. “And, it’s not because the insects aren’t there but rather they’ve not been collected.”

The project is significant because it will provide a permanent collection of local specimens that will then be on loan to scientists globally. The international sharing of data will aid in the advancement of labeling various groups of insects to help complete the big-picture understanding of nature’s entomological evolution.

The new collection will provide not only an insight into how land use changes but also will allow the students an opportunity to gain experience in data collection, description, preparation, labeling, identification, and data base assimilation, McCloud said; soft skills that will translate into any field the student enters after graduation.

Once the process of collecting is complete, the work will be displayed in the summer of 2014 at Beal House in New Harmony. The collection will be part of a public learning service that will allow visitors to witness science and scientists in action as they describe and label their findings.

Peyton Russelburg collects specimens from the Wabash River in New Harmony.
Research puts Doss and students on environmental front lines

USI students Caleb Gravemier and Jessica Heighton take temperature readings from the White River in Manistee National Forest, Michigan.

Protecting Natural Resources

When the Ice Mountain water bottling company set up a test well just across the boundary from public lands in Michigan, Paul Doss, professor of geology, was hired by the U.S. Forest Service as a guest scientist to evaluate potential risks related to water resources in the Manistee National Forest.

The water resources inside the boundaries of the Forest Service property included streams that were ecologically important to trout and salmon, both in terms of seasonal spawning and as an economic resource for commercial fishing.

“These streams are dependent on ground water,” Doss said. “My job was to research the effects of an extraction well and evaluate potential outcomes.”

In 2008, Doss set up a monitoring site next to the Ice Mountain well and began taking readings. The bottling company decided not to move forward with the well, but maintains a strong presence in the state as the issue is ongoing. “You could say they’re having ‘water wars’ in the state,” Doss said.

He took on the project during a sabbatical in 2008-09. While there his work expanded and today, he continues to work with the Forest Service monitoring a network of wells related to a variety of issues, including ecosystem restoration projects and endangered species concerns. Doss regularly incorporates students into the work, and it has become a regular destination for student summer research projects.

This summer, Chanse Ford—a geology major and the recipient of the 2013 Distinguished Merit Award—will assist Doss in ongoing research directed at understanding the role that groundwater plays in sustaining ecologically critical surface water flows for important trout and salmon habitat. They’ll spend more than a month in the field, quantifying groundwater discharge to the White River in the Huron-Manistee National Forest.

“Chanse is precisely the type of student that I look for to work with in my research endeavors,” Doss said. “He has a genuine thirst for knowledge and the enthusiasm to support his efforts. More importantly, he wants to apply the knowledge he gains in the classroom to real-world scientific problems.”

Environmental Watch

In 2006, Paul Doss, USI professor of geology, began work on a third-party independent review of the management of coal combustion byproduct for Alcoa Warrick Operations—Evansville. He was hired by Alcoa through USI’s Center for Applied Research and Economic Development (CARED) after updates to pollution control devices dramatically increased solid waste byproducts such as sulfur oxides and ash.

Alcoa designed a disposal site using an abandoned strip mine pit with oversight from an outside engineering firm. “They also wanted someone from the community to watch both the engineering firm and their own work,” said Doss. “What I provided was independent data collection and expanded monitoring of the project.”

Around 2008-09, the disposal facility was put into use. Doss extended his contract with Alcoa, again through CARED, to continue to monitor the site and its use. Several good things came out of that relationship. Doss was able to publish his findings from the study and also stay abreast of the latest developments in the industry. “It’s been a benefit to me to work alongside engineers and keep up that part of the science,” he said. “I’m able to see firsthand and understand modern practices.”

Even more importantly, Doss has been able to involve his students. “My students are able to see what the private sector looks like.” Over the last few years more than 20 USI geology students have visited and observed the site and several have conducted research at the site.

The collaboration is a benefit to Alcoa as well. To have an independent geologist from the local scientific community overseeing their work provides a certain level of transparency and accountability. “I admire their efforts to do that,” Doss said. “Obviously it’s their call, but I foresee this relationship as ongoing.”
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PERIODIC REVIEW

Chemistry students take on the Big Easy in a big way

In a city known for its dark, blues-y jazz clubs, beignets and bowls of gumbo, something extraordinary happened as a handful of USI undergraduate chemistry students descended on the city of New Orleans. The students met and mingled with industry research leaders, government scientists, academics, and undergraduates to present their year-long research findings to packed symposiums of their peers.

The American Chemistry Society’s (ACS) spring conference (attended by 14,000) provided the forum for nine USI chemistry students to present their research to other undergraduates from across the nation. The scope of their projects ranged from a study on cage molecules to fluorescent molecules to theoretical chemistry.

“As a student, I was able to not only present my research but to hear about endless research projects from all over the country,” said Alison Konieczki, a chemistry major, whose team project included two others, Sarah Schwartz and Lauren Martin.

The occasion to associate with the nation’s leading scientific thinkers is a rare experience for most students, and one that shaped the perspective of the USI students attending. The conference allowed them access to graduate school representatives and industry leaders, and gave them the chance to glimpse what was trending in research.

“It allowed me the opportunity to be in the midst of the most current research and see what great ideas are out there in the science world. It also gave me the chance to talk to graduate students and get an idea of what to expect in graduate school,” said Luke Maurer, a biochemistry major.

The sentiment was echoed by Konieczki, who said, “It made me excited for what the future of chemistry has in store for me.”

The ACS is the largest professional scientific organization in the nation, with members from academia, government, and private industry, as well as a few international representatives. Held twice a year in a major metropolitan city, the conference offers students a chance to travel and share ideals with like minded individuals from every facet of the chemistry industry.

“In class they learn foundations, but at the conference they get to see what’s happening in the research industry,” said Jeff Seyler, professor of chemistry.

Fluorescent molecules designed to help researchers identify certain anomalies.
Life-long learner speaks at Commencement

Rhonda Brown ’92 delivered a ringing message to the Pott College of Science, Engineering, and Education 2013 graduates when she returned to USI as this year’s commencement speaker. “The path to success is not the same for everyone. And as my own journey attests, the path to success may take many twists and turns along the way.”

Her road to higher education was less than traditional. She first earned an associate degree in biology that lead to a position at Mead Johnson as a biologic researcher. But she wanted more, so she began taking classes at USI on her lunch hour and eventually enrolled in the Teacher Education Program once her son was in elementary school. As he advanced through school, so did she, earning an undergraduate degree in biology from USI before going on to garner a master’s degree from Indiana Wesleyan University.

The result of her path in life left her with an insight she wanted to impart to new graduates, “Don’t let others steer you away from your dreams. But if that happens, you can always get back on track—often with newfound insight and skills.”

The Evansville native is currently the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) project manager for Lake County Schools in Florida. Before taking this position, she was one of 28 teachers from 15 states and the District of Columbia honored with the Albert Einstein Distinguished Educator Fellow for collaborating to improve STEM education in schools.

Pund builds on knowledge gained at USI in position at Red Spot

Melanie Pund ’10, chemistry, is a chemist with Red Spot Paint and Varnish in Evansville, where she is responsible for new product development of thermal cure technologies, including formulating coatings for the exterior automotive and sports markets.

“Red Spot is a great place to work and an even better place to learn,” said Pund. “I’ve learned a vast amount in my first two years here, and I look forward to building on the foundation that USI has given me.” At USI, she worked closely with Dr. Evan Millam, associate professor of chemistry, on a research project on the formaldehyde photoelectron spectrum. Her calculations formed a solid foundation for future work on the molecule.

“The high expectations of the faculty and staff of the Chemistry Department prepared me for similar expectations working for Red Spot,” she added.

While at USI, Pund interned with Red Spot, Mead Johnson, REU at the University of Arkansas, and Berry Plastics. She was a recipient of the O. John Logsdon Chemistry Scholarship and the Science and Mathematics Faculty Scholarship. She received the ACS Undergraduate Award for Inorganic and Analytical Chemistry and the GLVC Council of Presidents’ Academic Excellence Award.

Outstanding educators named

Five spring graduates of the teacher education program were recognized with the Outstanding Future Educator award, in acknowledgment of their excellence in student teaching. Based on recommendations from University faculty and staff, the Indiana Association of Colleges for Teacher Education selected the following students for the award:

- **Kasey Conkling**
  - K-12 visual arts
- **Cynthia Hamon**
  - elementary education
- **Kirsten Smock**
  - early childhood
- **Brittney Stallins**
  - middle and high school English and psychology
- **Matthew Wilburn**
  - middle and high school mathematics

Alumni Insight

Tri-state science fair draws crowd

A handful of the area’s 500 K-12 students participating in USI’s Tri-state Science and Engineering Fair file into USI’s Recreation, Fitness, and Wellness Center with their projects. More than 1,000 students from within a 75-mile radius of Evansville attended the annual fair to see chemistry and physics demonstrations presented by USI faculty, Central High School staff and students, as well as the projects the K-12 students exhibited.