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Iowa State University College of Human Sciences

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Dear Alumni and Friends,

Throughout its inventive history, Iowa State University has championed equality and access for all. By enrolling working-class men and women in its very first courses in 1872, Iowa State broke down barriers to extend higher learning to a far broader populace. In 1891, when George Washington Carver enrolled for classes, the university turned deeply entrenched societal bias on its head to educate additional promising, young minds.

The wise and powerful vision of our forbearers consistently pushed the envelope to establish more equitable access. No doubt their land-grant vision was rooted in the ethic of social responsibility.

People in the College of Human Sciences embrace social responsibility. It is firmly planted in our very fiber. It swells in our hearts. Whether we are teaching youngsters, counseling families, devising new formulas, or advising Congress, our work advances the science and technology of living and learning.

In sync with our students, faculty, and staff, you – our alumni and friends – are working at home and around the globe to live our shared values of community service and global citizenship (pages 4, 5, 12, 14). Together, we are making school classrooms more equitable and safe (pages 5, 6). We are protecting people from physical harm (pages 6, 7). We are broadening access to academia (pages 8, 9). We are promoting better nutrition, health, and wellness (pages 9, 10, 11, 13). We are preparing others to nurture their children into well-adjusted, informed, and conscientious adults (page 12).

In the land-grant tradition, our problem-solving serves as a social investment – toward the greater good. We are grateful for your generous investment in our critical efforts and appreciate all you do to leave the world better than you found it.

Kindest regards,

Pamela J. White
Dean
Student recalls Iowa State fondly in speech

By Hillary Rodgers

Editor’s Note: Hillary Rodgers (’10 el ed) delivered the student address at the Fall 2010 College of Human Sciences Graduation Celebration in December. Below is an excerpt from her remarks.

To begin, I would like to offer my sincere congratulations and thanks to each and every person in this room for your part in this momentous day that is finally upon us. It is a day none of us could imagine when we first came to Iowa State.

I remember the first day I stepped on campus. My family and best friend loaded me up and we took the trip from Minneapolis to Ames. The moment I walked into my dorm room I was ready to run right back out again. While I watched those closest to me drive away and leave me alone in this unfamiliar place I didn’t know how I would make it through my first semester, let alone four years.

Slowly but surely, I began to find my place at Iowa State. I began to make friends, become involved in activities on campus and even started to make my mark on this huge university.

Despite the amazing experiences I have had here in Ames, it took me nearly four years to realize all that Iowa State has given me.

This past semester, I had the opportunity to student teach in the Chicago Public School District. Every day on my way home I passed an Iowa State billboard that read “One day you’ll wake up in your dream.” The first couple of times I saw this I smiled and thought “that’s a clever slogan,” but as the days towards graduation approached, I started to think about the truth behind that clever billboard.

If it hadn’t been for the time I spent at Iowa State, I would have missed out on a number of great opportunities, memories, and experiences. There is truth to the idea that one day you’ll wake up in your dream … I know that my time at Iowa State is something I would never take back for the world.

It seems I had been living my dream at Iowa State all along.

Iowa State has given me more than I had ever imagined and I wouldn’t give up the dream I found here for any other. I just hope my next path in life will be as fulfilling as my years here at Iowa State.
Service Learning Award winners shine

By Laura Dillavou

It was an internship in the Kamuli District of Uganda that changed the way Darrin Vander Plas viewed learning and living.

Vander Plas, a senior kinesiology and agronomy major, was recognized for his service-learning efforts with the Sally Rapp Beisser Service-Learning Award, a scholarship honoring students who have gone above and beyond to address critical issues affecting individuals or communities at large.

“Experiential learning, such as service-learning, helps students become actively engaged and to think critically about influencing the lives of others,” said alum Sally Rapp Beisser (BS ’71; MS ’77; PhD ’99). “As part of service-learning, students design projects and reflect on their own volunteer service to address social issues and problems that may impact the ISU campus, community, or global populations. In turn, they learn to understand critical issues in the world around them, and most importantly, make a difference to someone else.”

This recognition is now inspiring these young adults to pay it forward.

“This award recognizes people who are becoming active members of their community,” Vander Plas said. “Eventually, I would like to be able to honor students in the same way for their commitment to service learning.”

‘Global’ internships open students’ eyes to fair trade business

By Laura Dillavou

Cape Coast, Ghana, may not have some of the big fashion names like Manhattan or Los Angeles, but for two students, it was the perfect place to complete a one-of-kind internship.

Apparel, merchandising, and design graduates Jessica Galasso (’10) and Hillary Van Ham (’10) completed internships with the Global Mamas fair trade clothing company in the summer of 2010. While each student had reasons for choosing a company across the world, they were able to sum up their experiences quite simply: it was the opportunity of a lifetime.

“Having an internship in another country was automatically intriguing,” Galasso said. “But more than that, Global Mamas is a well-established company that is doing a lot in terms of female empowerment and monetary sustainability for their producers.”

Galasso, who now works full-time for Global Mamas, explained that the Ghana-based company works to increase the revenues of nearly 500 women-owned businesses in Africa, which in turn creates jobs and improves their standard of living. Many of the products are hand-dyed Batik garments. This method of design and production was a large part of Van Ham’s internship.

“The women taught me to dye fabric and stamp it with traditional Batik symbols,” Van Ham said. “I learned skills that I didn’t know before, but in exchange, I showed them things like patternmaking with Adobe Illustrator and they thought that was pretty cool.”

While Galasso spends her days in Ghana, Van Ham said that after graduating in December, she’d like to apply her worldly experiences to another sustainable industry job. volunteering at a ranch for delinquent and underprivileged teens.

“FCS Ed focuses a lot on parenting skills and family dynamics,” McAlpin said. “I would like to work with a population that perhaps isn’t familiar with that [because it wasn’t part of their upbringing]. I want to educate them on how to handle tough situations and improve their lives.”

“Taking the opportunity to do something non-mainstream was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made,” Van Ham said.
Preparing teachers to enter the classroom with an equity framework in mind is a critical component in teacher education, but one that is too often neglected, according to Iowa State University experts.

Sarah Roberts, assistant professor of secondary mathematics education in curriculum and instruction and a former math teacher, says while most teachers have learned the equity principle, it’s not always in the forefront of their pedagogy.

“We need to start laying the framework when we prepare our teachers that equity is an issue we need to be focusing on all the time in every discipline,” Roberts said. “Many times in mathematics, particularly with English language learners, teachers think it’s just math, it’s just numbers, but they need to approach their teaching considering strategies to support the distinct needs of all of their students.”

To understand why inequity in the classroom exists, Isaac Gottesman suggests looking to history. Gottesman, assistant professor in curriculum and instruction, studies 20th and 21st-century United States educational, intellectual, racial/ethnic, and radical history, and says it’s important to examine the past to understand why inequity exists.

“Like any other institution in the United States, schools have historically included some and excluded others, served some and diserved others,” Gottesman said. “An historical approach helps us understand how and why. We need to develop a rich understanding of the problem if we are going to appropriately identify and solve it.”

Some issues related to equity in the classroom stem from teachers not understanding where their students are coming from, Roberts said.

“It’s all about putting yourself in their shoes, and that can be challenging. We need to understand where students are coming from, and figure out how we can meet them where they’re at,” she said. “If you’re a math major, you are likely someone who excelled in math, but you might be teaching someone who doesn’t excel in it, and you are trying to get them to like the subject as much as you do.”

Gottesman said Iowa State’s renowned teacher education program makes him confident that students’ educational training focuses on equity.

“At Iowa State, there is an ongoing renewal process where people are constantly thinking about and reflecting on teacher education, and that’s critical.”
By Laura Dillavou

According to national news outlets, six young men in the United States committed suicide within a three-week period this fall as a result of bullying. This form of torment has moved beyond the playground to college campuses and cyberspace.

Warren Blumenfeld, associate professor in curriculum and instruction at Iowa State University, served as an author on the study, “The 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People.” The research documents the experience of nearly 6,000 students, faculty, staff, and administrators who identify as members of the LGBT community. Study co-author Warren Blumenfeld said campuses still project a chilly reception to this population.

“Higher education has failed to provide environments for LGBT people to learn, research, and grow professionally and socially to their potential.”

Blumenfeld and his colleagues across the U.S. continue to share results of the study with members of the media, lawmakers and educators.

Visit www.hs.iastate.edu/news/hsmatters to read the complete report of “The 2010 State of Higher Education for LGBT People.”
Lloyd Chair designs protective gear

By Mike Ferlazzo

When U.S. combat soldiers go into battle, they are now better protected because of Cheryl Farr’s work. That’s because Farr – Iowa State University’s new Noma Scott Lloyd Chair in Textiles and Clothing – was part of the federally-funded design team that developed the QuadGard™ limb armor, which provides soldiers extremity protection against fragments from improvised explosive devices.

The project was one of several Farr has worked on involving military functional apparel and emergency protective gear – much of it through Oklahoma State University’s Institute for Protective Apparel Research and Technology.

And since returning last fall to Iowa State, where she earned both her master’s and doctoral degrees in textiles and clothing, she has aspirations to bring federally-funded functional design research to Iowa State too.

“That’s why Cheryl is here as the Lloyd Chair,” said Robert Bosselman, professor and chair of apparel, educational studies, and hospitality management. “She’ll be a facilitator and mentor to new and junior faculty in the area of functional design technology, and we’re excited about her plans to build a product development and testing lab. She has a proven record in securing federal grants and projects.”

Farr plans to convert a room in Iowa State’s LeBaron Hall into a product development and testing lab. The lab will house a modern environmental chamber and other up-to-date functional design research equipment.

Farr says the arm and leg armor project was in response to data from the Bethesda Naval Hospital of amputation and loss-of-life limb wounds suffered by American soldiers during the early stages of the U.S. War on Terrorism in Afghanistan. She reports that the research team was able to produce and patent QuadGard™ over the next several years.

“In this case, the ‘quad’ in the name stands for four, where you use the existing ballistic vest and add protection to the shoulder, upper arm and lower arm, and then from the leg down to below the top of the combat boot,” Farr said.

Her latest project has been testing RYNOSKIN™ – ultra-lightweight, body-forming insect protection suits. The goal is to provide the maker with effectiveness data.

Farr hopes similar testing and functional design projects will be coming to Iowa State University in the near future.

Cheryl Farr, Iowa State’s new Noma Scott Lloyd Chair in Textiles and Clothing, displays one of the RYNOSKIN™ gloves that she helped to test. Photo by Bob Elbert, ISU News Service

Award winners, continued

Mary Dodds Schlick – Helen LeBaron Hilton award (BS ’47 household equipment). After relocating to eastern Oregon in 1960 and again in 1978, Schlick applied her educational background to the people of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, teaching them methods for improved child care and early education, and later, the craft of basket making.

Susana Muñoz – Outstanding Young Professional award (BS ’95 political science and international studies; PhD ’08 educational leadership). As one of a handful of researchers examining the experiences of undocumented Mexican immigrant students in higher education, Muñoz is quickly establishing a national reputation as an emerging academic leader.

Nancy Evans – Award for Superior Service to Alumni. In 12 years, Nancy Evans, professor in student affairs in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, has helped thousands of students achieve their educational and career goals, including 151 Master’s and 24 PhD degree recipients, along with the 27 students she is currently advising.

Virginia Olsen Molgaard – Alumni Merit award (MS ’81, family environment; PhD ’85 family environment). Virginia Molgaard, emeritus associate professor of human development and family studies, has brought distinction to Iowa State University by developing the effective “Strengthening Families Program for Parents and Youth 10-14.”

The College of Human Sciences is accepting nominations until Feb. 1 for the 2011 alumni awards. Read details of the various awards and nomination process at www.hs.iastate.edu/alumni/awards.
Pursuing access to scientific community

By Michelle Rydell

In nature, diversity is recognized as vital to sustaining life. Likewise, says Lisette Torres, diversity is critical in human society, but is not always viewed as necessary for a healthy existence.

It’s not surprising that Torres, a first-year doctoral student in educational leadership and policy studies with a social justice concentration at Iowa State University, would relate everyday life to science. Until last year, Torres was pursuing her PhD in aquatic ecology at Miami University of Ohio.

The switch from science to higher education came after years of being treated differently because of her Puerto Rican heritage and gender, Torres said.

“The longer I stayed in the sciences, the more I noticed covert racism,” Torres said. “Nobody ever said anything derogatory toward me, but it was very obvious I wasn’t welcome there. In my department, I was the only ecology student of color. I felt isolated.”

Torres’ experiences caused her to disengage from the scientific field, and she began questioning the lack of representation of scientists of color. She knew it was time to find another path when she attended a conference and her suggestions for increasing diversity in the field were met with silence.

Soon after, Torres transferred to Iowa State to pursue her doctoral degree in higher education.

“It’s leaps and bounds more supportive than where I’ve been,” she said. “It gives me hope that there is a place for women of color in higher education.”

Torres plans to focus her dissertation on the deconstruction and reconstruction of the phrase “scientific community,” specifically how male and female scientists of different racial and ethnic backgrounds find a place in that community. She believes that while the scientific field makes an effort to recruit diverse students, there is little discussion about retention or the underlying institutional barriers for people of color.

“I’m hoping that through my research, the scientific community might rethink recruitment and retention efforts of students of color,” Torres said. “This research is about equity and giving people the opportunity to pursue something that they love without a struggle.”

National award brings attention to ELPS social justice concentration

By Michelle Rydell

The educational leadership and policy studies (ELPS) program at Iowa State University was recently recognized as a national leader in social justice education.

The Commitment to Social Justice Education Award, bestowed by the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) Commission for Social Justice Educators, honors commitment to social justice education and development, training, or programming.

The social justice concentration in ELPS is one of few higher education social justice programs in the nation, said Nana Osei-Kofi, program coordinator.

Despite the program’s newness – the certificate was approved spring 2009 and the concentration was launched in fall 2007 – the award affirms the faculty’s efforts to develop higher education scholars and practitioners who can work cogently with social justice issues.

“We’re doing something that has an impact,” Osei-Kofi said. “We are seeking to address unequal social realities and these are issues we must continue to pursue – not just for us as a department or at Iowa State, but as a nation.”

Lisette Torres, a first-year doctoral student with a social justice concentration in the higher education program, visits with Nana Osei-Kofi, an assistant professor in educational leadership and policy studies. After years of being treated differently because of her Puerto Rican heritage and gender, Torres switched from pursuing her PhD in aquatic ecology to studying higher education. Photo by Jaclyn Hansel.
It may have been her experiences as a nurse that introduced alum Mary Mincer Hansen (PhD ‘93 higher education) to the health field, but it was her education at Iowa State University that taught her the value of critical thinking and the importance of policy, and led to a new role advising Congress on health care reform.

Hansen, director of the Master of Public Health program at Des Moines University and former director of the Iowa Department of Public Health, was appointed to a two-year term on the National Health Care Workforce Commission, an independent body created under the Affordable Care Act to advise Congress and the Obama Administration on health care policy.

Hansen said the goals of the commission are to provide recommendations regarding how the workforce can better accomplish health promotion, disease prevention, and chronic disease management. As an Iowan, Hansen aims to bring unique perspective regarding the needs of rural America.

“The lack of primary providers and specialists, as well as a lack of resources for public health, is an acute problem in rural areas,” Hansen said. “We’re hoping to talk to Congress and the president so that there are incentives for practice in rural areas.”

Hansen also hopes to push for changes in curriculum for future health care providers, focusing more on preventative health and healthy communities.

“It think this approach will lead to healthier kids who are better learners, healthier workers who are more productive, and a healthier state and country that will thrive, both economically and in terms of quality of life,” Hansen said.

Assistant Professor Ryan Evely Gildersleeve and doctoral student Susana Hernandez, both in educational leadership and policy studies, have teamed up to examine access and participation of undocumented immigrant students in higher education, specifically looking at state-based tuition policies.

“From an economic and educational perspective, many in higher education see the social opportunities that come from earning a degree, regardless of citizenship,” Gildersleeve said. “But on another side, there are those who see this strictly as an issue of immigration and do not see the benefits of increased college access. We’re trying to get at the intersection of these ideas.”

The team has looked at 11 legislative policies that have allowed undocumented immigrant students in-state tuition and the five states that explicitly deny these benefits. Thirty-five states are policy-ambiguous, meaning they have no policy one way or the other.

Gildersleeve and Hernandez are slated to present at a number of education conferences in the coming year.

“This topic is fairly unexplored,” Hernandez said. “We want to cut through the noise surrounding this issue and really examine the policies for their material effect on these students. It’s no secret this is important to education and society today.”
Reddy takes research, service overseas

By Laura Dillavou

Recognized as a leader in global research, Manju Reddy, associate professor in food science and human nutrition, has traveled to the far regions of the world with students to observe the nutrition and dietary habits of Indian, Ugandan, and Ghanaian people.

During the summer of 2009, Reddy, along with 11 Iowa State University students, traveled to Kalkarnatka, India, for four weeks. Working in teams, students observed agricultural practices, nutritional issues affecting rural Indians, women’s business groups, and school lunch programs.

“Everything the students observed is very sustainable,” Reddy said. “It’s progressive farming and living unlike what they’ve seen before. The meat, vegetables, dairy, and grains are all grown on one acre of land and the farmers have to make their living on that one acre. This experience teaches the students a lot about how to best utilize limited resources.”

When Reddy and a group of students travel to India in 2012, she said students will be much more hands-on, conducting needs assessments and creating action plans.

“Studying abroad is a different kind of learning,” Reddy said. “It forces the students to recall their classroom lessons and apply those skills to populations that are in need of assistance. It’s service learning at its very best.”

Study finds corn bred to contain beta-carotene a good source of vitamin A

By Mike Ferlazzo

A new Iowa State University study has found that corn bred to contain increased levels of beta-carotene is a good source of vitamin A. The discovery gives added support to the promise of biofortified corn being developed through conventional plant breeding as an effective tool to combat vitamin A deficiency in developing countries.

Beta-carotene is converted in the body to vitamin A. The researchers found that the beta-carotene in the corn was converted to vitamin A at a higher rate than what’s predicted for corn, and higher than the rate for beta-carotene in vegetables.

Wendy White, an associate professor in food science and human nutrition, led the six-week study conducted at Iowa State’s Nutrition and Wellness Research Center. The results validate the promise of ‘orange’ maize that will soon be released to combat vitamin A deficiency in sub-Saharan Africa.

According to a 2009 World Health Organization estimate, vitamin A is deficient in more than half of the world’s countries, with Africa and Southeast Asia having the highest deficiencies. Medical researchers have reported vitamin A deficiency to be one of the most serious causes of malnutrition in developing countries and can cause blindness, poor immune function and even premature death – particularly in young children.

“Biofortification is a revolutionary approach to combating micronutrient malnutrition in developing countries and it has the potential to be self-sustaining,” White said. “The seeds are bred by plant breeders to be naturally high in key micronutrients, such as vitamin A, zinc, and/or iron. The seeds will ultimately be distributed to poor farmers in developing countries and they’ll be able to reproduce the seeds so they can share them with their communities.”

An important step in fighting malnutrition

White says the study’s findings provide an important step in the process of making the biofortified corn available to the people who desperately need vitamin A in their diets.

“Our subjects were mostly graduate students based in the United States who were screened for excellent health, so this study was conducted under ideal conditions,” White said. “And so the next step – knowing that under ideal conditions the beta-carotene can be well absorbed – is to take it into a field setting.”

White reports that there is already a pilot program being conducted in Zambia to feed the beta-carotene, biofortified maize to young children.
Food service director transforms school meal program

By Michelle Rydell

Running a school lunchroom like a restaurant may not be the most conventional approach, but for Iowa State University alum Mary Kate Harrison (’10 lodging and food service management, PhD), that approach has proven to be a successful tactic in getting kids to eat healthy foods – while keeping the budget in check.

Harrison, general manager of student nutrition services for the Hillsborough County School District in Tampa, Fla., says convincing students to eat a nutritious lunch can be challenging. But Harrison, who was named national Outstanding Director of the Year by the School Nutrition Association, is no stranger to difficult situations. When she arrived at the district 20 years ago, its student nutrition budget was operating with an annual loss of $2.2 million.

Within four years, Harrison had overhauled the district’s school meal program by cutting expenses, reallocating staff, and revising menus to generate a $3.4 million profit.

Harrison said it was important to view the lunchroom as a business that has to work to reach its customers. Her student nutrition managers, who run 220 kitchens and serve more than 200,000 meals per day, are required to complete an 18-week internship program before they are hired, and lunchroom staff must undergo ongoing training.

“I know that some people think students have to be there so you can give them whatever you want,” Harrison said. “But it’s their choice to come eat with us. We try to give them a food experience and treat them as our very important customers.”

It’s not just about dollars and cents, however. Nutrient-dense food is a top priority for the district, and though quality ingredients come at a higher cost, it’s a commitment the schools stand by. By incorporating whole grains and organic and locally-grown produce into a kid-friendly menu, students are able to eat healthily and enjoy their food at the same time.

The focus on nutrition comes in part from Harrison’s belief that empty stomachs contribute to misbehavior in the classroom. Her advocacy helped lead to a district-wide policy of offering universally-free breakfasts to every student, which Harrison says has led to fewer trips to the school nurse, improved performance, and happier teachers.

“If kids are well-fed before they get to class, they will do better,” Harrison said. “We are helping build lifelong, healthy habits in these children, and by doing so we are doing our part to support learning in the classroom.”

Visuals help Wapello County workers learn ‘why,’ ‘how’ of food safety

By Laura Dillavou

Lakshman Rajagopal, an assistant professor in apparel, educational studies, and hospitality management, recently completed the first round of a research study, “Use of visuals as a method for food safety education in southern Iowa.” Rajagopal conducted training sessions for non-English speaking Hispanic foodservice workers to educate them about safe food handling techniques.

“People handling food need to understand the ‘why’ as well as ‘how’ of safe practices,” Rajagopal said. “This training focused on visual examples and hands-on participation to convey critical messages. Language differences don’t have to be a roadblock in effective training.”

Rajagopal’s work is supported by a College of Human Sciences Heddleson grant. The Heddleson faculty grant program was established to introduce junior faculty to Extension or community outreach targeted to families in Iowa counties.
On their horizon: Community collaboration

By Laura Dillavou

Columbus Junction is like many small towns in Iowa. Changes in local industries have meant a shift in demographics, which is then reflected in schools, organizations, and most of all, the community.

But what sets Columbus Junction apart from similar towns is its attitude toward these changes. The town is part of the Horizons project, a program administered through ISU Families Extension that helps rural communities of fewer than 5,000 strengthen their leadership systems.

Freda Sojka, one of the community leaders involved with the Horizons project, said one of the overarching goals is to bring people closer together. Language barriers and unmet needs for resources had segregated the town.

“We’re a melting pot of ethnicities and languages and decided that the first step in having a strong community was having people feel welcome,” Sojka said. “Church groups are now leading services in different languages and specific ethnic groups are sharing their skills and knowledge with others. What is really impressive is the way the youth just come together and accept everyone as a friend. Seeing that is very inspiring.”

Columbus Junction is in the fourth of five phases of the Horizons project and is working toward building awareness of resources offered through Extension and other organizations. Horizons is at work in 37 Iowa communities and is funded by the Northwest Area Foundation.

Child Welfare Project strengthens Iowans of all ages

By Laura Dillavou

It may not be well known, but the Child Welfare Project of Iowa is impacting Iowans on a daily basis.

Since 1988, Iowa State University researchers in human development and family studies (HDFS) have teamed up with staff in the Iowa Department of Human Services (DHS) to create stronger, research-based training programs for the case workers and specialists working with people who are disabled, elderly, or underprivileged.

The Child Welfare Research and Training Project focuses on four functions: child support recovery, home and community-based care, targeted case management, and service training. HDFS professors Steve Garasky, Gong-Soog Hong, and Dianne Draper serve as the project’s lead investigators. ISU employees and graduate students also assist in the training and facilitation.

“There is a strong relationship between the theory and research on the academic side and the practices implemented on the DHS side,” Garasky said. “Because research-based practices are part of the implementation process, and research informs policy, we can present a wealth of data and information to program administrators and legislators in attempts to create more effective programs and policies impacting thousands of Iowans.”

One ongoing example of this work is the prisoner re-entry program, which helps incarcerated parents transition back to society with better parenting skills and preparation for involvement with the child support system. The DHS staff hopes to improve parenting when parents are given tools to succeed.

“The Child Welfare Research and Training Project is a true example of the land-grant mission of the university,” Hong said.

Over the 22-year partnership, ISU has conducted research and training valued at more than $50 million to improve the welfare of children.

“There are other institutions that the DHS could work with, but they have chosen to stay with us,” Draper said. “That speaks very highly of the quality of our research and programs.”
Neighborhoods can influence mental health

By Mike Ferlazzo

In 2009, the nation’s poverty rate climbed to 14.3 percent – the highest level since 1994 – according to the Census Bureau’s annual report on the economic well-being of U.S. households. That means one in seven Americans now live in poverty, and that may have an especially depressing effect on people living in bad neighborhoods, according to two Iowa State University researchers.

Daniel Russell, a professor of human development and family studies; and Carolyn Cutrona, professor and chair of psychology, presented “Stressful effects of where you live: Studying the influence of neighborhood context over time,” in August at the World Conference on Stress and Anxiety Research in Galway, Ireland. Their presentation summarized data taken from the Family and Community Health Study (FACHS), an ongoing ISU study of 800 African American families – approximately half living in Iowa and half in Georgia – that started in 1997.

Russell and Cutrona reported that negative neighborhood infrastructure can keep neighbors from forming social ties. And it’s the absence of those social ties that have a small but significant impact on an individual’s mental health.

“If you’re living in neighborhoods where there’s a lot of crime, gang activities and so forth, you see weaker social ties,” said Russell, a noted loneliness researcher. “One of the things we tried to assess was essentially community support – to what extent people in that neighborhood turned to others for child care, other forms of assistance – and whether they socialize and know each other. And it’s clear that in these negative neighborhoods there’s this inverse relationship in terms of their various problems and lack of strong ties.”

In neighborhoods where social disorder – or a lack of social ties – was perceived to be high, the effects on the subjects’ perceived personal risk were amplified. The effects of personal risk were muted in neighborhoods with low social disorder.

“The effects of things going wrong in your own life are magnified when you live in one of these negative neighborhoods,” Cutrona said. “It affects all of us to have a sick family member, or lose our job, or to be robbed. But when that happens to someone in these neighborhoods, it increases the probability that the person will be diagnosed with a major depressive disorder over the next two years.

“Yet if the same event happened and you were in a more benign neighborhood, your chances of becoming clinically depressed were less.”

Sixty-two percent of the study’s participants subsequently moved to different neighborhoods between 1997 and 2005.

But the ISU researchers found that the lack of racism was the only factor that significantly improved depression among the African American subjects after they moved.

“If the new neighborhood was less racist overall – not just their perception, but the perception of multiple people who lived in that neighborhood – then the subjects’ moods improved following that move,” Cutrona said. “So it was not about moving to a wealthier neighborhood, or even a safer neighborhood, but moving to a less racist neighborhood that impacted depression levels.”

The researchers emphasize that the study’s sample does not solely reflect perceptions of low income families. But both Cutrona and Russell agree that it is the low-income subjects living in negative neighborhoods who are most vulnerable to prolonged depression.

“If you have to live in one of these neighborhoods, you may not have the resources for health insurance and good mental health care,” Cutrona said. “And you may not have the support around you to say, ‘This is depression and it’s treatable.’”
AmeriCorps member volunteers make a difference

By Laura Sternweis

One volunteer experience can easily lead to another ... and another.

That’s what 25 Iowa AmeriCorps members discovered as they were training for their new positions with this volunteer program.

“Today we are sorting clothes at Youth and Shelter Services in Ames,” said AmeriCorps member Stephanie Conant. Her AmeriCorps experience involves working in Winneshiek County for the Northeast Iowa Food and Fitness Initiative (NIFF). But she was more than willing to organize clothes by size and age group during the Make a Difference Day community service effort this fall.

Iowa State University Extension 4-H Youth Development hosts the Iowa AmeriCorps State of Promise program in collaboration with Iowa’s Promise and the Iowa Commission on Volunteer Service. These AmeriCorps members serve with youth development programs in communities across the state.

“There’s always something you can do, always something out there to be involved with,” Conant said.

4-H member promotes arthritis awareness, citizenship

By Michelle Rydell

Kaylee Wellik was only 4 years old when her parents found her curled up in a ball, unable to move.

The next 90 days were filled with 61 doctor’s appointments as specialists attempted to figure out what was wrong. Her parents feared the worst when doctors told them they suspected leukemia. While they were relieved in part when they learned Kaylee had juvenile rheumatoid arthritis (JRA), they also realized that their daughter would have to struggle with a crippling disease her entire life.

But Wellik has not allowed her disease to slow her down. Now a junior at Roland-Story High School, Wellik is paying it forward through her 4-H club, the Howard Rockets. The 16-year-old spent last year completing a citizenship project in which she collected more than 300 quilts and filled backpacks with notebooks and supplies for other kids with JRA. She hopes to reach 350 quilts by the end of the year.

“Last year was my tenth year of having arthritis, and I wanted to help out other kids like me,” Wellik said. “There are only two doctors that specialize in JRA in Iowa, so I knew a lot of kids would be traveling like I was. The parents can use the notebook to keep track of all of their doctors’ appointments, and the quilt is for the car ride there and back.”

Wellik’s citizenship is a reflection of the national 4-H theme, Revolution of Responsibility.

“The Revolution of Responsibility is a movement of positive change in every community across America, and it’s happening right here in Iowa as well,” said Shelly Greving, marketing director for the Iowa 4-H Youth Development Program. “This revolution comes to life every day through 4-Hers who are making a real impact on their communities. 4-H youth are breaking through obstacles, pushing our country forward, and inspiring others to do better for their communities, their country, and their world.”

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For Wellik, helping others just comes naturally. She hopes her actions inspire other youth to get involved and work toward improving the lives of others.

“It’s a good feeling, knowing that you’re helping others,” she said. “I know I’m helping families that are going through a tough time, and that’s rewarding to me.”
One way to reduce the nation's childhood obesity epidemic is to identify children who may be predisposed for obesity before they become overweight or obese. That's why a pair of Iowa State University researchers has developed the Family Nutrition and Physical Activity (FNPA) Screening Tool.

Gregory Welk, an associate professor of kinesiology and director of clinical research and community outreach at Iowa State's Nutrition and Wellness Research Center (NWRC); and Michelle Ihmels; an adjunct assistant professor of kinesiology and NWRC researcher, developed the screening tool as part of Ihmels’ doctoral dissertation. It was developed using results from a comprehensive evidence analysis of childhood obesity conducted in partnership with the American Dietetic Association (ADA).

The FNPA tool assesses 10 constructs that were shown to be consistently associated with a child’s weight status in the ADA’s evidence analysis. Parents complete the assessment tool and responses are scored to predict a child’s likelihood of becoming overweight.

The tool was first used six years ago with nearly 1,100 first graders and their parents from 37 Des Moines elementary schools. Subsequent body mass index (BMI) measurements of students the next year found the FNPA to have predictive validity for identifying home environments that may increase children's risk for becoming overweight.

"The standard practice for clinical obesity screening involves measuring height and weight to determine BMI," Welk said. “A physician or nurse might tell a child they were overweight or obese and the parent would then be told they have an overweight child.

“The whole point of prevention is to intervene before a child becomes overweight and so the premise behind the FNPA is as an awareness tool to screen for home environments that may predispose a child to becoming overweight," Welk said.

Support for development and validation of the FNPA tool was through a grant program funded by the United States Department of Agriculture and administered through Iowa State's NWRC.
For the fifth straight year, the College of Human Sciences has welcomed a record-breaking number of students to campus. Fall 2010 enrollment in the college tallied 3,926 new and returning undergraduate and graduate students. From 2005 to 2010, faculty have seen a 19.4 percent increase in the number of students declaring majors that focus around the science and technology of living and learning.

The increase in the College of Human Science student body has outpaced the overall increase in students enrolling at Iowa State. Total enrollment for the university is 28,682 graduate and undergraduate students – an 11.4 percent increase from 2005 to 2010.

College of Human Sciences Dean Pamela White attributes the college’s phenomenal growth to the relevance of programs offered to students.

“Our programs focus on improving people’s lives, whether that’s studying diet and exercise, living conditions, curriculum standards, or sustainable clothing,” White said. “Our students leave the College of Human Sciences equipped with skills to help others lead more fulfilling lives.”

Not only are numbers of all students up, but 2010 university enrollment shows a record 5,942 international and U.S. minority students, comprising nearly 20.7 percent of the university’s student body. In the College of Human Sciences, 532 students, or 13.4 percent, are either international or multicultural students.

The number of transfer students coming to Iowa State after a two-year tenure at one of Iowa’s community colleges is also on the rise. The College of Human Sciences admitted 201 new Iowa community college transfer students, for a total community college transfer enrollment of 712 students. Popular majors among transfer students include kinesiology and health, elementary education, and child, adult, and family services.

“Our outstanding growth speaks to the excellent support students receive from alumni, fellow students, faculty, and staff,” White said.