$2.35M Grant to Improve Employment for Individuals with Disabilities

UR’s Institute for Innovative Transition Using Partnerships to Expand Programs Across State

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has awarded the University of Rochester’s Institute for Innovative Transition a $2.35 million grant to replicate the success the Institute has had in developing programs to improve employment opportunities for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Nationwide, only 17 percent of people with developmental and intellectual disabilities are employed and even fewer have obtained competitive employment that earns them at least minimum wage. This project, aimed at dramatically increasing that percentage, will enhance collaboration among the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC), New York State Education Department and its Office of Special Education, Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR), and the Institute for Innovative Transition at the University of Rochester.

“Far too few individuals with disabilities have the opportunity for competitive employment in New York,” says Susan Hetherington, principal investigator for the grant and co-director of the Institute for Innovative Transition. “With this grant, we’ll be able to work with our statewide partners to engage in systemic change and policies that will result in increased access... continued on page 2
Warner Hosts National Research Conference on School District Reform

At a time when there has been a growing national push for higher levels of student performance and accountability in school districts, 21 researchers from across the globe convened in Rochester on Nov. 2 through 4 for an intensive meeting. The invited meeting was intended to foster dialogue across research areas and produce knowledge of the highest quality about education and learning.

A $30,000 American Educational Research Association (AERA) research conference grant funded the meeting, themed “Thinking Systematically: Improving Districts Under Pressure,” and it was hosted by the Warner School, in collaboration with the University of California, San Diego. The grant was one of seven awarded as part of AERA’s three-year research conference initiative.

By focusing on issues related to school district improvement under pressure, the conference identified, synthesized, and disseminated district-level approaches and innovative research strategies to help improve the educational outcomes of students. The conference also highlighted practices that have been demonstrated by research as being more effective for districts and identified the most pressing areas for research-based inquiry into district reform.

Conference organizers include Kara Finnigan, an associate professor who directs the educational policy program at the Warner School, and Alan Daly, an assistant professor at the University of California, San Diego.

Finnigan says that little is known about how to successfully bring about school improvement for persistently low-performing schools and even less is known about how to do this for school districts.

“The conference is particularly timely, as it follows awards made under the federal Race to the Top competition,” Finnigan explains. “States awarded funding are required to find effective strategies to work with school districts to improve student performance. The dissemination of high-quality research around district reform under sanction will provide much needed empirical, theoretical, and practical information as everyone ‘races’ to improve.”

The dissemination of research around district reform that has evolved from the international meeting includes the organization of conference papers that will be widely disseminated to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.

For more information about the conference, please contact Kara Finnigan at (585) 275-9942 or by e-mail at kfinnigan@warner.rochester.edu.

$2.35M Grant for Employment

continued from front page

to and support for integrated, competitive employment.”

This project will create statewide and regional consortia of stakeholders (agencies, individuals, employers, and parents) to collaborate to bring about systems changes that encourage competitive employment. This will center on:

• Developing policies that support competitive employment in integrated settings (not jobs that only employ individuals with disabilities) at the first and desired outcome for young people.
• Removing barriers to competitive employment in integrated settings.
• Improving employment outcomes for young people.
• Enhancing collaboration to make the transition from secondary school to pre-vocational training or integrated employment smoother.

“For the past three years, the Institute has been committed to increasing employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities so that they can live healthy, independent lives,” says Martha Mock, director of the Institute for Innovative Transition. “This project will help us to further define and implement best practices for transition that will ultimately help young adults with disabilities improve their quality of lives by developing work skills to take part in the work life of their community.”

A partnership among several local agencies and funders brought Rochester its first Project SEARCH®, a program that helps young adults with developmental disabilities transition to the work world by giving them hands-on experience, in 2009. Coordinated by the Institute for Innovative Transition at Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities, which was initially funded by a grant from the B. Thomas Golisano Foundation, the program began at Golisano Children’s Hospital at the University of Rochester Medical Center with the collaboration of Monroe 2-Orleans BOCES. The Ace of Monroe County and New York State’s Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR). It has since expanded to two more sites and includes the Rochester City School District and the City of Rochester, Monroe #1 BOCES and Wegmans.

The Institute for Innovative Transition is a partnership of the B. Thomas Golisano Foundation and the University of Rochester’s Warner School of Education and Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities. The Institute, which was launched in 2008 and sustained through $3.5 million in grants from the B. Thomas Golisano Foundation and a $2.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education, as well as grants from the New York State Developmental Disability Planning, is led by Martha Mock, PhD, and Susan Hetherington, who both hold joint appointments at the Warner School and URMC’s Department of Pediatrics. The Institute aims to improve the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families as they transition from school age to adulthood.

For more information about the Institute, visit www.nnytransition.org.
Warner Lands $1.25M to Improve Education for Children with Significant Disabilities

"Project PRESS provides training and experiences that are not offered at other higher education institutions that focus solely on serving students with mild to moderate disabilities," adds White. “With this project, we will be able to present aspiring and current teachers an opportunity to obtain one of the highest quality educations for teaching special education, with a focus on students with significant disabilities, in high-need districts such as the Rochester City School District. Warner will be one of only a few institutions outside of New York City where interested teachers can pursue this credential through the use of the materials to their observations of student thinking."
Science has relevance in every urban girl’s life. It trickles in local drinking water. It settles in the soil of city neighborhoods, schoolyards, and parks. It tiptoes among urban wildlife.

A National Science Foundation (NSF) $1,249,984 grant awarded to the Warner School of Education will provide powerful experiences for hundreds of urban teen girls to re-envision their neighborhoods and the world around them and their role in shaping it by participating in rich, inquiry-based investigations that will help them to develop their identities as scientists and agents of change in their communities.

The grant builds on years of Warner School Associate Professor April Luehmann’s commitment to engaging young women from minority groups and of low socioeconomic status in qualitative science and careers in science. “Our goal is to strengthen girls’ confidence in science and positive change, Science STARS will support girls as they learn and do science with the goal of improving their communities. Mentorship from Warner master’s students who are studying to become science teachers, local female engineers and scientists, and University female undergraduates studying ecology and neuroscience, will enable the girls to work alongside professionals and students while conducting authentic, ecology-based science investigations that challenge and empower them to make a positive impact in the environment and to develop a deep awareness of what they do and how it can change the future in a powerful way.”

With comprehensive focal points of both science and positive change, Science STARS will support girls as they learn and do science with the goal of improving their communities. Mentorship from Warner master’s students who are studying to become science teachers, local female engineers and scientists, and University female undergraduates studying ecology and neuroscience, will enable the girls to work alongside professionals and students while conducting authentic, ecology-based science investigations that challenge and empower them to make a positive impact in the environment and to develop a deep awareness of what they do and how it can change the future in a powerful way.

The first half of the school year will be devoted to carrying out original empirical scientific investigations situated in the community, where girls will pursue a question of their choice and then share their results with the public at a community-wide science conference. As an extension of this work, the second half of the school year will focus on honing literacy skills, when girls work directly with professional film-makers to create a science documentary that airs locally in schools and on TV. The free Science STARS program, which is expanding from 10 weeks in the fall to a total of 20 weeks during the full school year, plus three weekend getaways, for a total of 65 hours, will run the afterschool program, where they will work in informal settings to develop culturally-relevant, community-based, and inquiry-based science units and lessons around urban ecology that can be used in their classrooms in the future.

“We will have the opportunity to teach students how to do science by using inquiry-based lessons and activities that allow them to not only ask questions about natural phenomena around them, but to conduct their own investigations in an attempt to understand those phenomena,” adds Zeller, who hopes to learn more about being a teacher from this experience. “Graduating from a rural high school and rural private college, I came to Warner to embrace the urban setting. While I have already learned a lot about teaching in an urban environment, I hope to learn even more with hands-on teaching through Science STARS.”

While the inquiry-based, community-science investigations and science documentaries serve as the core of the enhanced Science STARS program, the NSF funds also will support new program features, including partnerships with community-based research organizations, designed trajectories of participation with actions to achieve leadership roles, and periodic formal advisories and critiques by professional filmmakers and scientists. The team of distinguished female scientists joining Science STARS to mentor and support local East High students include: Sandra Tor-terman, Anahita Williamson, Sarah Kingan, Ruth Lawrence, Lisa Schultz, Vivian Falla-dorns, Carol Tomentoski, and Molly Gildea.

One of the most impactful components of the grant is the academic research that will afford Luehmann and her colleagues, “Using a research lens to investigate how teens critically participate in and shape the social, political, ethical, and physical spaces of their work can illuminate how young women from minority groups understand and position themselves with respect to science—as a way of thinking, a body of knowledge, and as a discourse of power,” adds Luehmann. “Collaboratively taking on these essential social justice issues with leading scholars in feminist science education across the country is an incredible opportunity for me and my team here in Rochester.”

City students are not the only ones who will benefit from the program. Master’s students who are preparing to become science teachers will run the afterschool program, where they will work in informal settings to develop culturally-relevant, community-based, and inquiry-based science units and lessons around urban ecology that can be used in their classrooms in the future.

“We will have the opportunity to teach students how to do science by using inquiry-based lessons and activities that allow them to not only ask questions about natural phenomena around them, but to conduct their own investigations in an attempt to understand those phenomena,” adds Zeller, who hopes to learn more about being a teacher from this experience. “Graduating from a rural high school and rural private college, I came to Warner to embrace the urban setting. While I have already learned a lot about teaching in an urban environment, I hope to learn even more with hands-on teaching through Science STARS.”

While the inquiry-based, community-science investigations and science documentaries serve as the core of the enhanced Science STARS program, the NSF funds also will support new program features, including partnerships with community-based research organizations, designed trajectories of participation with actions to achieve leadership roles, and periodic formal advisories and critiques by professional filmmakers and scientists. The team of distinguished female scientists joining Science STARS to mentor and support local East High students include: Sarah Tor-}

The course will be held on a competitive basis for this course this year. For more information, contact Mardie Howe Rossi, LMHC, at mardierossi@gmail.com.

Learn to use the arts to work with clients to help them express their thoughts and feelings, develop awareness and find meaning, develop new perspectives, and make changes in their lives. No skill in the arts is necessary.

The course will be held on a competitive basis for this course this year. For more information, contact Mardie Howe Rossi, LMHC, at mardierossi@gmail.com.
Blogging as Change: Transforming Science and Math Education Through New Media Literacies

This book explores how blogging can be used to support teachers’ reflection, introspection, meaning-making, community-building, and growth through new forms of digitally-supported communication.

“Blogging can promote authentic engagement in learning and teaching and contribute to a much-needed transformation of science and math education so that all students, especially those historically marginalized from participating in their school-based education, are involved in doing the real work of science and math,” says Luehmann, who began exploring the potential of blogging in science education nearly seven years ago.

The book was inspired from Luehmann’s own practice as a teacher educator as well as years of studies on part of her research team on the use of blogs in a number of different instructional contexts. The 14 chapters in Blogging as Change, which were written collaboratively by Luehmann and her graduate students as well as Borasi, illustrate and critically analyze the potential of blogging to encourage different ways of communicating, interacting, learning, and thinking about science and math.

“This book is an excellent example of how practice turned into research,” says Borasi. “I could see how all the work that April Luehmann had done in science education was appropriate for math. Working together with her research team to put together this book was a great opportunity to build on our complementary expertise and strengths.”

Grounded in empirical data gathered from teachers and students engaged in blogging in a variety of contexts, the book examines ways in which blogging can be most conducive to transforming science and math classrooms into places that are more equitable and just—places that invite and nurture new, more social and authentic, forms of participation and learning for both students and teachers.

The book focuses on two different, yet valuable, forms of blogging. The first is classroom blogging, where blogging practices are introduced and often designed by teachers, and taken up and often customized by students. Classroom blogging can engage students more centrally in their own learning and in ways that transform their identities in science and math. The second is teacher blogging, where teachers develop professional blogs as a tool to support professional learning. The book looks at the power of blogging not only to foster new modes of interactions in the classroom through classroom blogs but also as a tool to support teachers’ reflection, introspection, meaning-making, community-building, and growth through new forms of digitally-supported communication.

“The change agents who are spotlighted in the chapters of this book demonstrate ways that new media literacies can be used to support students in developing identities as science and math people and science and math teachers as reform-minded teachers committed to social justice,” adds Luehmann. “This book explores characteristics of new media literacies, like blogging, that make them exceptionally positioned to support these goals.”

Luehmann is a science educator, teaching in the science teacher preparation and doctoral programs at the Warner School. She focuses her research on the design and use of new media literacies, out-of-school learning contexts and experiences, and innovative teacher development programs to explicitly address issues of equity and social justice.

Borasi is dean of the Warner School and a mathematics educator with a special interest in an inquiry approach to teaching school mathematics, school mathematics reform, and professional development.