

2007

## The Wright Message, 2007

University of Northern Iowa. Department of Mathematics.

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# Department of Mathematics

## THE WRIGHT MESSAGE

July, 2007

Dear Department Alumni and Friends,

Our annual mailing to you this year is taking a somewhat different form. Rather than the summary letter from the department head, we have adopted more of a newsletter format with different individuals contributing short items on selected topics that we hope will be of interest to you. Your input on the new format is invited. I thank Suzanne Riehl who has done most of the work in getting this issue together.

The header above is from the newly completed revision of our website ([www.math.uni.edu](http://www.math.uni.edu)). Please check it out and let us know if you like the new look.

The heart and soul of any university department is the faculty. I applaud the hard work and dedication of our faculty and believe some of the spots below reflect the excellence of their efforts. The test of the product though is in the quality of the student accomplishments. The notes on the alumni survey and actuarial program will give an idea of how well our graduates are performing.

One important ingredient in our success has been the generous support of alumni and friends through gifts to our UNI Foundation accounts. A list of donors for the year 2006-2007 is enclosed with this mailing. We wholeheartedly thank each and every donor. In total, we received \$38,500 between 1 July 2006 and 30 June 2007. Most of this money goes to support scholarships (a list of the scholarship recipients is also enclosed), though some contributions enable us to purchase instructional equipment and materials, assist in faculty development, support faculty and student travel, and the like. If you are able to help us this year, please use the enclosed form to direct your contributions to the desired account.

I hope fate has been kind to you and yours in the past year and wish you all the very best as we enter a new academic year at UNI.

Sincerely,

Jerry Ridenhour, Professor and Head

### 2007-2008 Tenured or Tenure-Track Faculty

<i>Russell Campbell</i>	<i>Bin Liu</i>	<i>Michael Prophet</i>	<i>Nikolay Silkin</i>
<i>Mark Ecker</i>	<i>Shangzhen Luo</i>	<i>Edward Rathmell</i>	<i>Marius Somodi</i>
<i>Joel Haack</i>	<i>Catherine Miller</i>	<i>Vera Rayevskaya</i>	<i>Adrienne Stanley</i>
<i>Theron Hitchman</i>	<i>Douglas Mupasiri</i>	<i>Jason Ribando</i>	<i>Bridgette Stevens</i>
<i>Syed Kirmani</i>	<i>Glenn Nelson</i>	<i>Jerry Ridenhour</i>	<i>Diane Thiessen</i>
<i>Min Lee</i>	<i>Genevra Neumann</i>	<i>Suzanne Riehl</i>	<i>Brian Townsend</i>
<i>Larry Leutzinger</i>	<i>Jihwa Noh</i>	<i>Doug Shaw</i>	<i>Jack Wilkinson</i>

## **New Faces in the Mathematics Department**

All our searches were successful last year and we are very eager to welcome these people to our ranks.

Bin Liu will bolster our Professional Science program. He earned his Ph. D. in Operations Research (1995) from the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing. Most recently, Dr Liu was a Research Visitor at Carleton University, Canada.

Theron Hitchman earned his Ph.D. in 2003 from the University of Michigan. His research interests include differential geometry. Last year, he was a visiting professor at Williams College in Massachusetts.

Nikolay Silkin's research is in combinatorial group theory. His Ph.D. is from Vanderbilt University (2003). His additional knowledge on systems administration places him well to help revitalize our applied mathematics track. Dr. Silkin has been a visiting professor at Grinnell College since 2004.

Supporting our office, Deb Blanchard joined our department as a Secretary II last September, filling the position vacated by Nan Sash who has now retired. Elaine Robinson joined us in January and works primarily to support the DoDEA and other sponsored projects.

## **Faculty Notes**

Faculty in the mathematics department continue to be successful in garnering awards. This year, kudos go to:

- Min Ho Lee who received a Professional Development Assignment (sabbatical) for Spring 2007
- Michael Prophet and Marius Somodi who each were awarded eight-week summer fellowships for 2007
- Catherine Miller, who received the Class of 1943 Teaching Award
- Douglas Shaw, who won the CNS Teaching Excellence in Department Programs award

In addition, two faculty members received tenure and were promoted, effective July 2007. Congratulations to new associate professors Drs. Suzanne Riehl and Marius Somodi.

## **Alumni Survey Conducted**

President Ben Allen spent much of his first year as UNI's ninth president asking questions and listening. In response to his request that we document the strengths of our department, we conducted surveys of recent alumni (degrees since 1990). We first had to grapple with the issue, "What is the evidence of a successful program?" We haven't completely answered this, but here is a sampling of our findings.

The vast majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements like "My UNI mathematics degree has been valuable to me," and "I would recommend a UNI mathematics degree to a student whose career goals include teaching (or working in industry or business)."

Fourteen of the forty-five respondents from our Middle Grades Master's program have won teaching awards and thirty-six of them have presented at professional conferences and/or facilitated professional development programs or in-service workshops.

Surveys were mailed to approximately 600 people who have graduated with an elementary education major and a math minor since 1991 (year of first math minor graduates). Nearly 40% of the surveys were returned. Of those returned,

- 80% are still in education;
- 37% are teaching at the PreK-6 level;
- 31% are middle grades/junior high teachers; and
- 12% either are secondary school or community college teachers, are in administration (principal or superintendent), or are consultants or specialists.

We appreciated all the feedback we received – praises and criticisms!

## **Actuarial Program Thrives**

There are approximately 60 students (freshmen through seniors) in our actuarial/statistics track. Each year, the Actuarial Club provides many opportunities for them to learn about various companies and the profession in general. Many students are hired as summer interns with companies in Iowa and other states. Nearly all the actuarial students have passed at least one Society of Actuaries exam and have received a job offer by the time they graduate. Of special note this year, three students each passed four exams. Congratulations to Kyle Nodurft, Colby

Goetsch, and Jake Ferguson on this fantastic accomplishment!

### **Board of Regents Collaborative Mathematics and Science Initiative**

President Allen identified mathematics and science education as a priority focus for UNI. Subsequently, the Iowa BOR named UNI as the Regent institution to lead a collaborative initiative. The three goals are:

1. to improve mathematics and science performance of Iowa students;
2. to prepare more high quality mathematics and science teachers for Iowa's schools; and
3. to promote statewide collaboration and cooperation

Our mathematics education faculty is working hard in support of that challenge. Efforts have included an all-day planning retreat, the development of a Math Ed Action Plan, participation on the UNI internal committee by Ed Rathmell, Diane Thiessen, Cathy Miller and Vicki Oleson, and participation on the overall steering committee by Joel Haack. A summit was held on July 11 that included stakeholders in education at all levels in Iowa. A proposal is now being drafted by the Steering Committee that will be presented to the Legislature in the next session.

### **TEAM News**

TEAM (*Teaching Educators About Mathematics*) was re-established in the fall of 2006 as a two-fold student organization for UNI's Elementary and Middle Level education majors focusing on both professional development and service.

At monthly meetings, activity-based, hands-on lesson plans are presented by the membership. Invited speakers help to fill out the agendas. The organization also holds manipulative sales for other Education students. In February, the organization hosted its first annual Math Fair for local 4th and 5th grade students. There were over 30 booths facilitated by UNI TEAM members and faculty, with more than 60 elementary students from the area, and their families, attending the event.

TEAM became an official NCTM affiliate when Co-Presidents Kristin Kanaskie and Kayla Davis received TEAM's charter at the 2007 NCTM Annual Meeting in Atlanta, Georgia. The organization is going strong, with over 60 members and continues to grow.

### **DoDEA/UNI Project**

The UNI Mathematics Department and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have partnered to provide professional development to improve mathematics instruction of teachers serving military families since 1993.

Last summer, elementary educators assigned to military bases around the world gathered in Des Moines to participate in workshops based on Developing Mathematical Ideas, which is designed to deepen teachers' understanding of mathematics and to develop strategies for teaching mathematics. Also last summer, fifteen master teachers, all with connections to UNI, participated in a workshop to learn how to facilitate DMI in an online environment.

UNI's work with the DoDEA has expanded to include the district of Hawaii, part of the Military Impacted School Association (MISA). This year's projects include facilitating online courses, developing and hosting workshops for teachers and developing and giving an online facilitators training course. This year alone, the professional development we provide will impact over 800 Department of Defense and Hawaiian educators, and by the end of this year we will have trained a total of 35 online facilitators.

Ed Rathmell and Vicki Oleson have co-directed this project for two years, taking the reins from Jack Wilkinson and Catherine Miller in previous years.

### **Online Course Development**

Last summer several faculty members participated in an online course development course through the Educational Development Center (EDC). With the knowledge we gained from this experience, several graduate courses were developed and offered to our graduate students online through the use of WebCT. Both the Middle Grades and High School Teaching MA Programs now offer the fall and spring courses online rather than through the use of the ICN. This has enabled our enrollment in both programs to increase as we are now able to reach students not only in Iowa, but across the U.S. and potentially throughout the world. Over the next school year we plan to continue discussions about the effectiveness of WebCT as a delivery system for mathematics and mathematics education classes.

## **Math Day at UNI**

This year we invited top mathematics students from high schools across the state to visit UNI for our first annual Math Day! This was an exciting day where the students competed for scholarships, learned about the mathematics programs at UNI and participated in workshops designed to introduce them to mathematics at the next level. As the students were learning more about math at UNI, their parents were learning about the benefits of sending their child here. It was a great day. We look forward to hosting it again this fall.

## **First Millar Scholarship Awarded**

Michael H. Millar retired from UNI in June of 2001 after a long and distinguished career in the Mathematics Department. A scholarship endowment account was established that year by former students Stephen and Amy Walk, with additional contributions by several alumni, faculty and friends.

A major gift pledge of \$25,000 by Mike and Ruth Millar in February of 2006 raised the endowment level to the point where scholarships can now be offered. The scholarships are based on merit and need and are for students enrolled in the M.A. in Mathematics program (either non-teaching or secondary emphasis). The first scholarship of \$500 was awarded to Travis Peters for the 2006-2007 academic year.

The generous support of all who have contributed to this account over the years, especially Stephen and Amy Walk and Mike and Ruth Millar, is gratefully acknowledged.

## **In Memory of Paul Trafton**

In December of 2005, we lost a valued colleague and friend. Paul Trafton died suddenly of heart failure.

During his 11 1/2 years at UNI, Paul made substantial contributions to teachers and to Mathematics Education. A major accomplishment was his work in helping conceptualize and implement our professional development Masters degree program for middle grade teachers. Another accomplishment was his work with primary teachers in helping them develop student-centered classrooms

that emphasized students constructing their own knowledge; this work resulted in *Learning Through Problems*, a publication co-authored with the teachers and published by Heinemann.

The Paul Trafton Mathematics Education Graduate Student Scholarship was established in 2007. The first award was made this summer to Michele Carnahan who is finishing her Master of Arts degree in Mathematics for the Middle Grades.

## **Major Gifts to the Department**

The Mathematics Department received four very substantial gifts or gift pledges this year. The first is from the FINE Foundation, in the amount of \$60,000, and will be used to provide scholarships for students in the Middle Grades M.A. Program. The FINE (First In the Nation in Education) Foundation is a private, nonprofit educational research organization focused on improving teaching and learning in elementary/secondary schools in Iowa through the use of educational research.

The second major gift is a pledge by Carl and Wanda Wehner designating an additional \$150,000 in their estates to benefit their three scholarships – The Carl & Wanda Wehner Math Teaching Scholarship, the Carl & Wanda Wehner Chemistry Teaching Scholarship, and the Carl and Wanda Wehner Computer Science Scholarship.

The third major gift is from Patricia Trafton and pledges \$100,000 through a bequest in her estate to establish the Paul R. and Patricia A. Trafton Math Education Fund. This fund is to be used to provide overall program support in the area of mathematics education, with expenditures to be allocated by the Mathematics Education Committee.

The fourth gift is from Bill and Marcia Poston and involves a bequest of \$100,000 from their estates to provide scholarship support for UNI student majoring in math or science education. We are grateful indeed to these alumni, former faculty and friends for supporting our programs and students in such significant ways.