



Graduate College Dean John Keller (left) presented professors (from left): Padmini Srinivasan, James Gloer, Kathy Schuh and Carolyn Colvin with the Graduate College Outstanding Faculty Mentor Awards during a ceremony Dec. 7, 2010.

## UI mentors honored for excellence

Carolyn Colvin, James Gloer, Padmini Srinivasan, and Kathy Schuh earned top recognition from The University of Iowa Graduate College for excellence in mentoring graduate students.

The professors were nominated by their students and colleagues and honored during a ceremony Dec. 7, 2010 at the Levitt Center.

### Outstanding Mentor Award

The Graduate College Outstanding Faculty Mentor Award in mathematical/physical sciences/engineering was awarded to Gloer, professor of chemistry in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CLAS), and Srinivasan, professor of computer science in CLAS. Colvin won the outstanding mentor award in social sciences. She is professor of teaching and learning in the College of Education. Each award carries a \$2,500 prize.

“Mentoring is an invisible activity that needs to be done well,” Colvin

said. “When tuition is rising and there’s greater pressure to get students through Ph.D. and M.A. programs and into jobs, we need to take this training more seriously.”

### Special Recognition Award

The Special Recognition Award for Mentoring in social sciences went to Schuh, professor of educational psychology in the College of Education. This award includes a \$500 prize.

Colvin, a UI faculty member since 1991, is described by her students and colleagues as someone who treats her students as intellectual equals and sets a glowing example of how to pursue high-quality research that emanates from service.

Most notable is Colvin’s service through her adult literacy program in West Liberty. Colvin and her student volunteers help adult speakers of English as a second language meet basic needs, such as passing the citizenship test.

—continued, p. 5

## Simmering recognized in national competition

Vanessa Simmering has built on the Graduate College’s tradition of strong showings in the Council of Graduate Schools CGS/UMI Distinguished Dissertation Award competition.

Simmering, who earned her doctorate in psychology at The University of Iowa in 2008, was honored with a runner-up distinction in the 2010 competition.

The CGS/UMI Distinguished Dissertation Award is the nation’s most prestigious honor for doctoral dissertations. Iowa has won five national awards, more than any other institution, public or private. Twelve other Iowa nominees, including Simmering, have been finalists in the competition.



Vanessa Simmering

Simmering, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, won the Graduate College’s D.C. Spriestersbach Dissertation Prize in social sciences for her dissertation, “Developing a Magic Number: The Dynamic Field Theory Reveals Why Visual Working Memory Capacity Estimates Differ Across Tasks and Development.”

The Graduate College nominated Simmering for the CGS/UMI Distinguished Dissertation Award after selecting her as a winner of the D.C. Spriestersbach Dissertation Prize—the Graduate College’s top doctoral honor.

Amrit De (physics) also received the Spriestersbach Dissertation Prize.

The Graduate College formally honored the winners of its most prestigious dissertation prizes—the Spriestersbach Dissertation Prize, the Graduate Deans’ Distinguished Dissertation Award and the L.B. Sims Outstanding Master’s Thesis Award—during a ceremony March 25 on the UI campus.



## Postdoc uncovering answers for hearing loss

Israt Jahan's research as a postdoctoral scholar in biology at The University of Iowa could have a profound impact on a deaf or hard-of-hearing individual's ability to hear with a surgically implanted electronic device.

Jahan, a native of Bangladesh, is studying the neurosensory development of the inner ear to understand the regeneration of hair cells and neurons in sensorineural hearing loss.

In July, Jahan and colleagues at the UI, including her mentor Bernd Fritzsich, published an article in the open access journal PLoS ONE showing for the first time that the absence of the gene Neurod1 results in transdifferentiation of neurons into hair cells. In the absence of Neurod1, the gene Atoh1 is upregulated in the inner ear ganglia, which normally would be suppressed by Neurod1. After upregulation of Atoh1, the cells differentiate into hair cells.

"Regeneration of hair cells and neurons using gene therapy would provide great hope for the deaf patient with our current progress in generating *intraganglionic hair cells* in Neurod1 conditional knockout mice," Jahan said. "These transformed hair cells in the surviving neurons in the mice could mimic normal functional hair cells and therefore maintain long-term function of cochlear implants."

Jahan asserts that Neurod1 suppresses the ability of sensory neurons to develop as hair cells. She adds that Neurod1 is regulated by Neurog1 and Atoh1 and provides a negative feedback for both genes.

"In normal conditions, neuronal differentiation starts two days earlier than hair cell differentiation. Neurod1 upregulates to differentiate the neurons, and then Atoh1 upregulates to differentiate the hair cells," Jahan said. "But when we take out Neurod1, Atoh1 and a few other genes continue to be expressed in the ganglia and switch the cell fate of neurons to hair cells."

Jahan arrived in Iowa City as a postdoctoral scholar in 2008 after earning her Ph.D. degree from Gifu University, Graduate School of Medicine, in Japan.

For the past two years, she has enjoyed working with Fritzsich, professor and chair of the Biology Department, who studies ear and hair cell development, regeneration, and evolution.

"I feel extremely fortunate to work with Dr. Fritzsich, who is guiding me with excellence and care in each step of my learning, allowing me to understand this complex genetic interaction in neurosensory development of the ear and helping me to further my research career," Jahan said.

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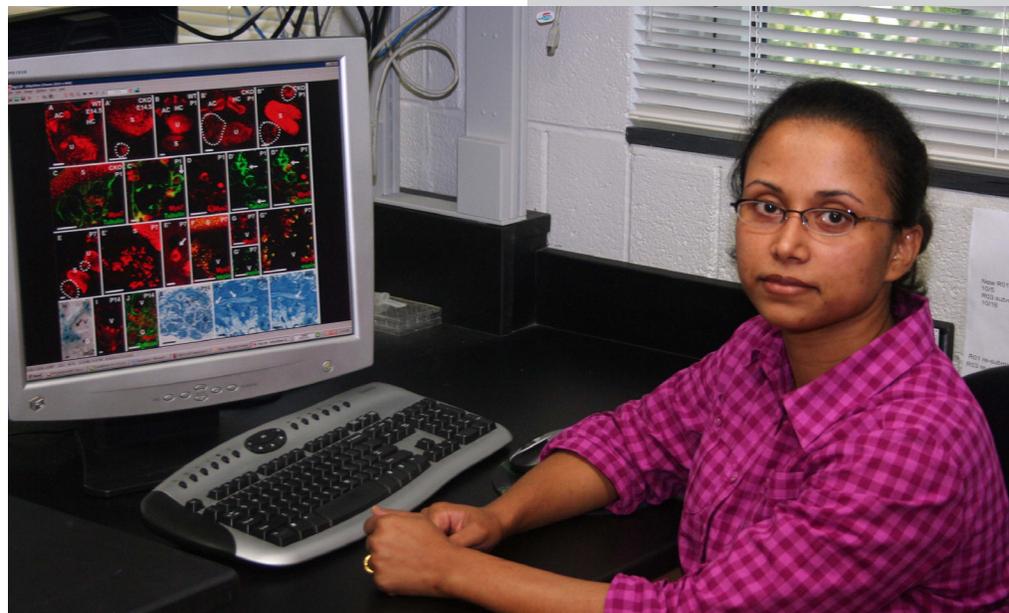
- Tom Jorgensen (p. 3)
- Jennifer Hill (p. 4)
- Iowa Review (p. 5)
- Jennifer Masada (p. 7)
- Kirk Murray (p. 10)

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*Israt Jahan, a postdoctoral scholar in biology, is exploring inner ear development to gain an understanding about the regeneration of hair cells and neurons in hearing loss.*

*Jahan, pictured in her lab in the Biology Building, works with Professor Bernd Fritzsich at The University of Iowa.*



## Prison choir enriches graduate students

About a year ago, Karletta White was invited to hear the Oakdale Prison Community Choir. She arrived for the concert at the Iowa Medical and Classification Center (IMCC, known as Oakdale Prison) in Coralville. Attending with her sociology professor, Karen Heimer, and several fellow graduate students, White didn't know what to expect.

She was quite pleasantly surprised. "I was blown away by my experience; I was so impressed with the high level of singing," said White, a fourth year Ph.D. candidate.

As a result, she joined the choir in fall 2010. "I study connections among crime, law, and ethnicity," she said, "but that actually had little to do with my desire to sing with this choir. I've been in choirs my whole life, and I just wanted to be with others who love to work on their craft."

Founded and directed by Mary Cohen, an assistant professor of music education with a joint appointment in the UI Colleges of Education and Liberal Arts and Sciences, the choir includes 30 inmates ("inside singers") and 30 volunteers ("outside singers").

Making music together transforms these two distinct groups into one ensemble, creating a positive blend of people from diverse backgrounds. Cohen said the project provides opportunities for participants to communicate with one another through song, supplying them with a temporary release from life stresses.

"This program gives all participants a chance to create new social bonds, to express themselves, and have fun," Cohen said. "We perform original songs co-created by members and me at two concerts each choir season in the prison gymnasium—one for IMCC prisoners and a second for outside guests."

The choir tackles a wide variety of literature, with styles ranging from gospel to choral standards. Past concert themes



Mary Cohen sits at the piano, directing a rehearsal of the Oakdale Prison Community Choir.

include "Peace and Place," "Rivers and Rocks," "Light in the Darkness," "More Love," and "Truth, Justice, and Peace."

The benefits of the program are far-reaching, as the choir affords a means for inmates, community members, and UI students to build relationships through shared experiences of musical expression—opportunities that would not otherwise exist in the Iowa City area community.

For students, singing in the choir offers the chance to interact with and learn from an otherwise inaccessible portion of the population. Under Cohen's guidance, the choir also enriches UI students' experiences through graduate seminars and an undergraduate course on human rights.

A total of 16 UI graduate students have participated in the choir since it began in February 2009. Cohen appreciates their involvement, noting that some students not only commit to weekly rehearsals, but also participate in the optional writing exchange in the prison choir. One graduate student co-teaches the songwriters' workshop.

For the inside singers, choir is a welcome break from a regimented schedule and an opportunity for creative expression and connection with others. Prisoners' families receive CD recordings of the concerts, which opens potential avenues for conversation between inmates and those closest to them.

Cohen said programs like the choir are an essential part of rehabilitation processes for prisoners, helping to ease transitions back into society. Successful transitions are key, since 95 percent of all prisoners are released.

"It is time for U.S. citizens to think about prisoners as people," Cohen said. "It is time to consider more educational programs and activities behind bars that will heal the harm caused by criminal behavior as the tenets of Restorative Justice suggest."

Outside singers alleviate inmates' worries about stepping back into society, which is profoundly healing for the inmates. "There is a fear we all have: 'Will I be accepted when I get out?'" said Ron, an inside singer. "In the choir, people from the outside *do* accept us." Robert, another inside singer, agrees. "Extracted from all the experiences here, this will resonate as the best. We're treated as human beings, not as a number, not as part of a herd."

*"My experience with the Oakdale Prison Choir has had a profound effect on my work. In my future dissertation work, I hope to include a section on prisons and the programs offered for inmates."*

—Karletta White, "outside singer" and Ph.D. candidate in sociology

## UI alumnus using training to impart social justice

Like many things in life, Jennifer Hill's journey from Academia to the working world was not a linear one.

As a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Psychological and Quantitative Foundations at The University of Iowa, Hill thought her first job would focus on death and dying and grief work. After earning her doctorate in 2009, the first step of her professional career took her down a different path.

Hill currently is a licensed psychologist at the Oregon State Hospital (Portland campus). Her clients are people with chronic mental illness who are receiving in-patient care with their treatment focused on symptom management and reintegration into the community. Between the two campuses of Oregon State Hospital (Portland and Salem), about two-thirds of the hospital's patients have been found guilty of crimes, but also have been determined to be insane at the time the crimes were committed. All of Hill's patients have been found by a judge to be a danger to themselves or to others.

"It turns out that this is where I'm needed and I'm prepared to do it," Hill said. "My clients have experienced tremendous losses as far as their level of functioning and coping with chronic conditions. Many clients are also suicidal or very afraid of death, so there's a lot of commonality between this and my work in death and dying at The University of Iowa."

These clients—many with limited family support and financial resources—are not typical cases. Not only are they dealing with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder, but they have tried to access the mental health system only to fall through the cracks.

Since no two situations are alike, Hill individualizes treatment plans for each client to increase the chance



Jennifer Hill's patients are living with chronic mental illness.

of a successful intervention and discharge to the community.

Hill's UI training equipped her to take on a challenge of this nature.

"My training prepared me in both having classroom knowledge to do my job and to be a flexible enough thinker and learner to come into a challenging employment situation and handle it," Hill said. "These are not the average folks who wander into a counseling clinic, but I was taught to accept differences and to competently work with people from various backgrounds."

Hill credits mentors John Westefeld, Elizabeth Altmaier and Valerie Keffala—all faculty members in the College of Education's Counseling Psychology Program—who helped her become the psychologist she is today. Westefeld supervised Hill

while she worked on her dissertation, "The experiences of mental health professionals providing services to persons who are dying: a phenomenological study."

"The faculty challenged me from my first year as a doctoral student to think about how I would own my education and professional development," Hill said.

Ideally, Hill says, people with chronic mental illness will receive medical intervention while they still have the resources to live in community settings. Unfortunately, this isn't the case with

most of Hill's clients, who live with mental illness in a system that has failed them.

For many of these people, the Oregon State Hospital, where the Oscar-winning 1975 film *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was filmed, is

their last resort for medical help. Hill and her colleagues reach out to their clients with individual and group therapy, behavioral interventions, medication management, and psychological testing and assessments.

"I get to provide a very important service. I look at it

as one way I can impart social justice in my job," Hill said. "I am fortunate I got to go to an amazing university and get a doctorate degree, and I can use my education and experience to help people who really, really need it."

**"These are not the average people who wander into a counseling clinic, but I was taught to accept differences and to competently work with people from various backgrounds."**

—Jennifer Hill, Ph.D. graduate 2009 and licensed psychologist

## Graduate students receive 'leg up' in literary world

**A**s graduate student Bryan Castille reviews submissions for the Iowa Review, he is ever mindful of the magic of this literary magazine's work: discovering a new and compelling writer.

"I look for memorable characters that make me feel something," said Castille, fiction editor at the Iowa Review. "Good writing outs itself. You immediately know when you're reading a writer you trust."

The Iowa Review, founded in 1970 and issued three times a year, has published the works of authors such as Kurt Vonnegut, Alice Walker, and Denis Johnson. Alongside such luminaries, it has published the works of authors who became established only later, such as Joshua Ferris, Raymond Carver, and Marianne Boruch.

Graduate students play essential roles in the discovery process. As genre editors for fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, they review most of the several thousand unsolicited manuscripts that arrive each year from around the world. They also interact with authors (acceptance and rejection notifications), send out contracts, write reviews, and interview visiting writers.

The Iowa Review has a circulation of about 3,000, with between 1,000 and 1,500 copies distributed



to major bookstore chains. The magazine has recently featured a full-length play by Denis Johnson, excerpts from novels by T.C. Boyle and Dana Johnson, a collection of "Rabble Letters" by California penal system inmate Saint James Harris Wood, prose nonfiction by Lia Purpura and Lydia Davis, and poems by Craig Santos Perez, Carrie Etter, Timothy Donnelly, Meghan Grumbling, and Rebecca Lehmann.

"When people ask me what they can do to get an edge on the competition in submitting work to literary magazines, I first recommend working as a reader of submissions," said Russell Valentino, editor of the Iowa Review. "There is no substitute to seeing what other people are sending in and what is catching the eye of editors. The grad students who work for the Iowa Review get that in spades."

The current genre editors are graduate students Castille, Sarah Viren (nonfiction), and Catherine Blauvelt (poetry), all MFA candidates in English.

Valentino takes the same approach as previous editor David Hamilton with the graduate students, turning them loose as much as possible.

"What they receive back, besides their research-assistant paycheck, insurance, and tuition, is what most people would probably call professional training — a leg up in the literary world," Valentino said.

## Colvin, Gloer, Srinivasan win mentor awards

*continued from cover*

Through this once-a-week program, Colvin establishes a bond with her graduate students as they address literacy concerns of real-world importance for their adult students.

Colvin said, "The most important thing many of the students say to me is, 'When I work with immigrant parents, I will think about them differently.' They're not going to be dismissive of immigrant parents."

Gloer, a UI faculty member since 1984, is never "too busy" for his students. However, he doesn't believe in managing every aspect of their academic lives.

"My philosophy is to be there whenever they need help

as opposed to looking over their shoulder and pushing them really hard," Gloer said.

Srinivasan, a UI faculty member since 1989, displays seemingly infinite patience with students who are struggling, says UI Department of Management Sciences Professor Nick Street.

She never closes the door on a student who hasn't realized his/her potential.

"They are like my eyes. I have them work as a group, so a student may help another student find something of interest that I haven't seen yet," Srinivasan said.

# Culture, compassion, and creating new avenues

## Social work scholars forge careers with self-awareness, service to others, and field skills

Climbing steep stairs to the meeting room, Elle Victoria-Vasquez stops to catch her breath. A Master's student in the School of Social Work, she walks with Matthew Vasquez, a doctoral candidate in the same program.

Despite the stairs, there is a gentle ease in their conversation as they enter the space. It's clear that they are not just colleagues. *Ellos son familia—madre e hijo.* (They are family—mother and son.)

“He walks fast, and I'm so slow,” says Elle, laughing. Turning to her son, she says, “You know, there was a time when you were following me because you couldn't keep up. Now I'm the one who's following, and not just on the stairs.” To explain, she continues, “He's a Ph.D. student, and I'm in the Master of Social Work (MSW) program, so I can call him and ask questions. It's a total switch of roles, which is nice. He's a peer and yet he's ahead of me. It's really a good thing.”

Already a seasoned social worker, Elle spent nine years in San Diego helping families, single mothers, the homeless, and the unemployed. She succeeded in helping her clients to financial independence because she could relate. Elle knows what it's like to struggle financially and raise children on her own; she has personal experience moving beyond circumstances toward a better life.

### Making education the priority

With her dream of attending college, Elle had long recognized the importance of education, but lacked encouragement from extended family to pursue it. “Our family has been unable to support education. I'm the first to go to college, and Matthew is the first to go to graduate school,” she reports.

For both of them, getting to this point has meant realizing “there's a place for me, I have a right to learn, I have a right for chances to advance,” says Elle. The barriers along the way have proven formidable.

Early on, Matthew was diagnosed with disfluency, typically called stuttering. “In addition, he couldn't see in the center of his field of vision. He could not function well in the typical school environment. They said he would never be able to read, and that he just wasn't going to be able to achieve anything.” Elle refused to believe it. She began to home school Matthew, and eventually he was able to attend school and excel academically.

### Facing family pressures

Even so, both of them faced other barriers that could have thwarted their college-bound goals. Significant among those obstacles was the lack of support from family members who felt uneasy about college plans. Elle says that such

hesitation is commonly rooted in a need for financial security within a family that has experienced poverty. “It is difficult to know what to do about that, especially when it is transmitted across generations,” she says.

In many Latino families, children are encouraged to develop a practical trade—to become a mechanic, a baker, or another type of skilled worker. Such work is viewed as a safety net—a business that can provide for multiple generations of a family. In Latino culture, Elle explains, “concepts and values of family are stronger and different. For example, a daughter is expected to take care of siblings. If the mother says, ‘You need to take care of your sister,’ the daughter will likely drop out of school and do it.”

Pressures to prioritize family over college made it difficult for Elle to continue her education. Eventually, though, Elle left southern California to attend Norwich University of Vermont College in Montpelier. Recognizing her family's unease and fears about school, she knew attending college far from home was her best option. “I had to move all the way to the East Coast to make sure I wouldn't be distracted or pulled back in by my family. They meant well, but they were worried.”

### First steps on the career path

Relocating was difficult. As a single mother, Elle juggled both school and parenting without assistance from extended family. Fortunately, Norwich allowed Matthew to attend class with her. “I was able to finish school while home schooling Matthew, and that made such a significant difference.” Elle earned a BA in social psychology, including an internship with the ACLU Poverty Law department, where she (with Matthew alongside) worked as a lobbyist with the Vermont legislature.

After completing her degree, Elle returned to California to pursue a career in social work. She was hired by Lorna Pallares, director of Metro United Methodist Urban Ministry in San Diego.

As the two worked together for several years, Lorna recognized Elle's talent for social work—a rare combination of empathy and an ability to get

**Matthew Vasquez** plans to graduate with a Ph.D. in 2014. He is researching childhood mental illness in adopted children, looking at methods of **enhancing communication between state child welfare systems and adoptive families** to heighten families' awareness of issues, leading to prompt treatment and improved outcomes.

*“Matt began his graduate studies with clear academic and research goals to prepare himself to be an educator, researcher and policy advocate. Toward that end, in addition to his course work, he has worked to further refine his research skills by joining projects to examine school social workers in Iowa, programs for children with Reactive Attachment Disorder and cultural competence among students and faculty. His work on these projects is enriched by his professional social work practice. Given his great talent, it is truly exciting to look forward to Matt's future contributions in our field.”*

—Jeanne Saunders, professor, UI School of Social Work



(From left): Matthew Vasquez and Elle Victoria-Vasquez, in the front room of the Iowa City Community Mental Health Center, where Elle is completing a year-long practicum.

things done. “Elle has a high level of compassion and an ability to guide people through issues to resolution. Working primarily with the hardest-to-serve individuals, she was very successful in moving people away from welfare dependency to economic stability,” says Lorna. “Her clients included ex-offenders and people involved with drugs and gangs. She succeeded by emphasizing training and education to improve her clients’ chances of supporting themselves and their families.”

Assisting some of San Diego’s toughest cases sharpened Elle’s skills and gave Matthew his first official exposure to social work. “I took him to work with me often,” says Elle. “He’s done every job. He’s given out food, done mailers—any work that needed to be done, he did it.”

Matthew’s early introduction to the field led to familiarity but also a certain ambivalence. “I’d been around social work since before I was a teenager. I didn’t even realize it was called social work. As a career, it wasn’t initially on my radar. I just thought, ‘This is my mom’s job, and it’s just what people do.’”

Based on his mother’s example, Matthew saw social work as a way of responding to the world – more fundamental than a job or career path,

what I want to do. This is what fits.”

Elle wasn’t surprised. “Matthew has always been extremely sensitive and caring. We didn’t have money, but he was always worried about other kids.” Turning to Matthew, Elle says, “Do you remember? You would say, ‘Can I please give so-and-so some of my toys?’”

With a smile, Matthew nods. His compassion, along with solid research and academic work, led to his interest in child welfare. He completed his MSW and is now pursuing a doctoral degree, working with adopted children who suffer from mental illness. He also works as a therapist at The Grace C. Mae Advocate Center of Cedar Rapids. “Before earning my MSW, opportunities for employment were low. The UI’s School of Social Work offers so many opportunities. That’s one of the reasons I wanted to continue, and one of the reasons I wanted my mom to have the same advantage.”

### Graduate studies enriched by field work

With Matthew studying at the UI, Elle thought again about pursuing her MSW, something she had long wanted to do. In the fall of 2010, she began work on her Master’s. She hit the ground running. With a full course load, Elle still makes time to assist Spanish-speaking individuals. In fact, her efforts have evolved into a Master’s practicum project on the availability of bilingual services. Elle also works as a therapist with the neediest of immigrants at the Iowa City Community Mental Health Center.

Reflecting on their journeys so far, Matthew and Elle emphasize the importance of support for those bound for college and graduate school. “I came from a place where no one said, ‘You have the ability to go to college,’” says Elle. “From the day Matthew was born, I told him, ‘It’s not *if*; it’s *when* you go to college!’” Without that support, Matthew says, “I would have had very little chance to succeed given the surrounding poverty and crime. Statistically, I should have been in jail or dead.” Succeeding despite barriers has taught him to look beyond an individual’s circumstances. “I don’t limit my view to see only what people *can’t* do or *haven’t* done, because everybody has the potential to overcome.”

**Read Elle’s and Matthew’s thoughts on preparing Latino families for higher ed at [www.grad.uiowa.edu/prep-latino](http://www.grad.uiowa.edu/prep-latino)**

**Elle Victoria-Vasquez** plans to graduate with an MSW in 2012. She is researching the **availability of bilingual services** in social services agencies and developing a plan to advocate for such assistance where it is crucial to an individual’s (or family’s) basic well-being, financial independence, or ability to make positive contributions to their community.

*“Elle brings a leadership role to class projects. In working with Latina mothers of children with disabilities, she has been central to the work, with tremendous skills in communicating and connecting. With her experience in community organizing, she brings so much to academics and is definitely a leader in our field.”*

—Susan Murty, associate professor, UI School of Social Work

more basic than an ideal. As a result, social work simply didn’t come to mind as he considered career options.

### Social work is “a good fit”

After completing his bachelor’s degree, Matthew thought about entering law school, but was surprised to find himself focused instead on human services and social work. “I realized, ‘Wow, this is

## Letter from the Dean



**H**igher education continues to feel the effects of the recession. As budget concerns consume discussions at colleges and universities nationwide, the impact on graduate education at The University of Iowa increases.

We continue to watch, assess, and position ourselves for the future.

### Educating in areas of national need

The Council of Graduate School (CGS) and Association of Graduate Schools (AGS) leaders are monitoring federal-level discussions about eliminating or reducing GAANN (Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need) grants.

At Iowa, these are funds that support efforts to enhance diversity among areas of national need (biology, chemistry, computer and information sciences, engineering, mathematics, nursing, physics, and educational assessment, evaluation and research).

We are also listening closely to conversations about Javitts Fellowships, which is the only graduate fellowship program supported by the federal government.

AGS leaders are advocating for combining the Javitts and GAANN into a new GAANN program that includes select humanities and social sciences in the areas of national need.

*With continuing budget constraints affecting higher education, we continue to watch, assess, and position ourselves for the future.*

### Engaging the public

Continued funding for graduate education, nationally and here at Iowa, will depend in part on public awareness of the crucial contributions of graduate education.

Our national organizations emphasize the importance of increasing and improving the engagement of graduate

students, faculty, and programs with the public.

The UI has invested in several public engagement initiatives, and the Graduate College continues to support and participate in them.

- **The Obermann Center's Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy**—The Graduate College partners with the Obermann Center to support up to 15 graduate students who are selected to participate in the Institute each year. Through this program, these Obermann Graduate Fellows seek cross-discipline exchanges, investigate complex ideas and issues with broadened views, and engage in meaningful interaction with the public through community-based learning.
- **The new UI Public Humanities Cluster Hire initiative**—The Graduate College will see new hires in the Schools of Library and Information Science and Urban and Regional Planning. Both programs make significant contributions to Iowa communities as well as to national research in their fields.

### Continual assessment and quality improvement

To ensure that the UI is investing in graduate programs that serve our academic, research, and creative missions, the Graduate College continues to review all UI graduate programs, assisted by our local task force work and the National Research Council assessment on doctoral programs.

Over the past two years, we have eliminated or are in the process of eliminating 12 graduate programs, closing nine non-viable program subtracks, changing the names of two graduate programs following efforts to revamp the programs, and suspending admissions to several others.

At the same time, we have taken advantage of new opportunities in graduate education to seek approval for nine new graduate programs, including an exciting new MFA program in Book Arts.

As we work within current budget realities at Iowa, we will continue work in these and other areas to support

**John C. Keller**

*Associate Provost for Graduate Education  
Dean, Graduate College*

*John Keller currently serves as President of the Association of Graduate Schools (AGS), a constituent group comprised of the graduate deans of the Association of American Universities (AAU).*

*AGS provides a forum for addressing issues concerning doctoral education and serves as an advisory body to the AAU on graduate education policy.*

*Keller also serves on the board of the Council of Graduate Schools (CGS), which advocates at the national level to improve and advance graduate education in order to ensure the vitality of intellectual discovery.*



(From left) Doctoral students Mohand Nada, Khalid Al-Gharrawi, Diar Ibrahim, Adnan Abdulwahib, and Sabah Enayah are part of the Iraq Education Initiative.

## Helping rebuild their homeland piece by piece

As an international educator, Scott King constantly looks for ways to effect changes in higher education. Rarely, however, does an opportunity like this come along.

Through the Iraq Education Initiative, King, director of the Office of International Students and Scholars at The University of Iowa, and his colleagues nationwide are helping Iraq join the global academic community.

The UI welcomed five Iraqi doctoral students—Adnan Abdulwahib (mathematics), Khalid Al-Gharrawi (chemical engineering), Sabah Enayah (biology), Diar Ibrahim (petroleum geosciences), and Mohand Nada (immunology)—to campus last August. Three more Iraqi graduate students joined them this semester.

King was among a delegation of 22 U.S. educators who traveled to Baghdad in January 2009 at the invitation of Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki to attend the Iraq Education Initiative Symposium. The students' arrival at the UI was an outgrowth of this trip.

"We were the only Big Ten university that sent a representative to Iraq," King said. "That gives us a chance to take some leadership in this and make a name for the institution."

In fall 2010, an estimated 80 students representing the "cream of the crop" of Iraqi scholars were placed at universities across the country.

The Iraqi government pays for the students' tuition, living expenses, and medical insurance with the stipulation that they return home after graduation to help rebuild Iraq's higher-education infrastructure.

"We have a good theoretical background in Iraq, but the practical side is poorer. We have had a war each decade in the last three decades," Al-Gharrawi said. "The engineering industry in Iraq is broken. We need raw materials and we need equipment. Most of this stuff is unavailable, so it's a good opportunity to come here and study."

"Leaving Iraq was not easy, but I have a plan for myself. Getting the Ph.D. is a good opportunity and not everyone can get it. I thank my government for sending us here in this new program. It's a good opportunity to change my life, and in the future I will be able to change a piece of Iraq."

Al-Gharrawi and the other four initial students earned their bachelor's and master's degrees at universities in Iraq, where all were lecturers or assistant lecturers.

The students were conditionally accepted into their graduate programs and are taking ESL classes in preparation for the Test of English as a Foreign Language before starting their degree course work.

For Ibrahim, being in America is a dream come true.

"The education system, the social and cultural system, everything is better here," Ibrahim said. "It couldn't be better for my future career."

## Andre Brock: Defining ourselves, each other online

Diversity and ethnic identity was part of everyday life during André Brock's adolescence in New York City. But he didn't grasp the analytical challenges of race until graduate school.

"My brother teases me, saying I didn't get black until I went to graduate school," says Brock, a native of Alexandria, LA, who earned a bachelor's degree at the City University of New York, a master's degree at Carnegie Mellon University, and a Ph.D. at the University of Illinois.

An assistant professor at The University of Iowa with joint appointments in the School of Library and Information Science and Project on Rhetoric of Inquiry (POROI) since 2007, Brock studies the complex interactions between race, gender, and technology.

In one project, he examined the way African-American bloggers engaged media representations of race in the days following the hurricane in New Orleans. In February 2010, he was a panelist during POROI's public rhetoric seminar titled, "Media, Space, and Race: The Case of the 'Southeast Side' of Iowa City." Brock examined online commentary associated with an Iowa City *Press-Citizen* article about a local curfew.

"People go online to be themselves, not to be online people or digital citizens. People use technology, like many other things, to define who they are," Brock says.

Brock's academic interests in race and rhetoric were sparked when he began graduate school at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh, PA.

"Carnegie Mellon was the first school I attended where I was questioned about my academic abilities because of my skin color," Brock said. "Before I even opened my mouth, they were sure I had received an affirmative action or



*Despite being a UI faculty member, André Brock has experienced racial issues in Iowa City.*

special dispensation to get in, even though I was sure that I had better scores and better grades than pretty much everyone in my cohort.

"That pushed me over the edge. I was like, 'Let's talk about this race thing and why it's such a shaper of people's opinions about any particular person.' Before I was just smart, but now I wasn't smart. I was just lucky and black."

Brock experienced similar treatment after leaving the big city to take a faculty position at The University of Iowa, nestled in the middle of America's heartland.

While apartment hunting, he learned that race issues aren't as in your face in Iowa City as metropolitan areas, but they exist.

"I had my own minor encounters walking into town and looking at apartments," Brock said. "I identified

myself as faculty to the various landlords and renting agents and was told they didn't accept Section 8.

"I looked at them like, 'Really, they don't pay faculty here?' They didn't even hear where I said I worked. That's the idea that my physical appearance says something about me that my words don't."

In his presentation at POROI's public rhetoric seminar, Brock reminded local residents that Iowa City isn't immune to racial strife.

"When talking about the blogs, I said people try to construct them as 'not Iowa City,' but people who contribute to the *Press-Citizen* blog are your colleagues or next-door neighbors," Brock said. "People were shocked, because the Iowa City they had in their minds is not this place where people are close-minded and prejudiced. But that is Iowa City as well."

## Feedback key to foreign language learning

By **Travis Varner**

*University News Services*

**M**aking errors is part of learning a new language. But is it better for a teacher to interrupt a student mid-sentence, or to offer a correction after the student has finished?

University of Iowa graduate student Zhengwei Qiao proposes a bit of both.

Qiao, a fourth-year graduate student in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) interdisciplinary doctoral program and a recipient of a Presidential Fellowship from the Graduate College,

is investigating how classroom dynamics influence language learning. After studying the strategies used by language teachers, she recommends combining two preexisting instructional methods to increase retention of new information.

“Appropriate feedback plays a crucial role in effective language learning,” Qiao said. “When learning Chinese, for example, student errors are inevitable. When one stumbles, instructors must intertwine both implicit and explicit correctional methods to ensure the maximum success rate.”

With the explicit method, when a student produces a speaking error in mid-sentence, the instructor stops the student and corrects the error on the spot. In contrast, when following the implicit method, the instructor allows the student to continue speaking despite the error. Once the student has finished, the instructor repeats the student’s sentence, but without the error.

Used separately, each method presents pros and cons.

“The explicit method can be a quick fix, but if a student is new to a tense, word, or sentence structure, it is ineffective because the student’s working knowledge of that lesson is too new,” Qiao said. “But if implicit correction is overused, students may become unaware of their errors.”



*Zhengwei Qiao*

Qiao conducted a semester-long study comparing implicit and explicit correction strategies as part of her dissertation proposal. She divided her participants into three groups studying Chinese: groups receiving zero corrective feedback, only implicit correction, or only explicit correction.

Findings indicated that both types of corrective feedback promoted language learning. Qiao hypothesizes that a combination of both implicit and explicit correction may be the most effective approach. Varying the method from student to student and lesson to lesson may help keep students alert resulting in more attentive learning.

Her work to date has garnered national recognition, including the Cheng & Tsui Chinese Language Teachers Association Walton Presentation Prize this past November. Qiao considers this one of her greatest achievements.

“I used to be skeptical of my research abilities,” Qiao said. “As my journey continued, I became confident in myself and submitted my work to the Chinese Language Teachers Association. Winning was eye opening and special to my life.”

“I feel very fortunate to study in the SLA interdisciplinary doctoral program. Everyone has helped me successfully combine the theoretical with the empirical when completing this project.”

Qiao’s research would not have been possible without the Presidential Fellowship. She was almost unable to attend the UI for financial reasons, but the fellowship provided the necessary support to focus on her studies.

Her work ethic has caught the keen eye of SLA faculty member and program co-director Judith Liskin-Gasparro.

“I have great admiration for students like Zhengwei because of their remarkable ability to absorb knowledge and information from multiple sources at the same time,” said Liskin-Gasparro, associate professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. “Zengwei is very smart, very self-directed, and produces high-quality work. I expect her to have a wide range of career options very soon.”



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