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The Challenge: Magazine of The Center for Gifted Studies

The Center for Gifted Studies

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the challenge

Magazine of The Center for Gifted Studies

Alumni Association Plans: Full Steam Ahead

Participants in our summer programs have attended reunions marking the 15th and 20th years. So many more recall the cookouts, volleyball, classes, dances, and friends on a regular basis. What if these thousands of people had an opportunity to be in touch with each other at the click of a button?

We knew that a long tradition of providing programming for over 1000 gifted and talented students each year would create life-long friendships. However, when students who fondly remembered SCATS and VAMPY days approached The Center to create an alumni association, we realized that those friendships provided a network of support that extended across generations of students.

The Center for Gifted Studies Alumni Association is on track to come into existence just after the New Year. In fact, the Bylaws were accepted by the Western Kentucky University Alumni Associa-



tion this past October. Past participants in Super Saturdays, SCATS, and VAMPY have worked together for several months to create an association that will continue to provide opportunities for students and adults long after the last dance ends their years as a camper. The

Association will roll out a web page with information about how to join. Alumni can update their contact information, find old friends, look at pictures, and contact other alumni to establish a mentorship experience. There will be opportunities to be involved.

The Center has served students from 48 states and 11 countries. This extensive web of alumni will finally have a place to come together in 2005 to share memories, experiences, and visions of the future. In 1982, the Internet was a vision none of us dreamed would change our lives in so many ways. Now alumni will connect over the Internet. We can only imagine what the future holds for our alumni and the world they continue to change. Call The Center for more information or check the web for the alumni link.

Get a head start with the Alumni Association. Email your mailing address to The Center [gifted@wku.edu].

Letter from Julia

DEAR FRIENDS OF THE CENTER,

The Quiet Crisis! This term was first used by Joe Renzulli and Sally Reis in 1991 as they examined gifted education in the midst of education reform. In *National Excellence: The Case for Developing America's Talent* (1993), "a quiet crisis" described the anticipated result of not developing the abilities and talents of gifted students as a quiet crisis that won't be felt for a few years. People don't see the problem – many young people aren't being educated at challenging levels to allow them to pursue career opportunities that are essential for our country's prosperity and security.

A decade later the quiet crisis continues to build. *The Quiet Crisis: Falling Short in Producing American Scientific and Technical Talent* (2002) is the title of the report issued by BEST (Building Engineering & Science Talent). The report states: "There is a quiet crisis building in the United States—a crisis that could jeopardize the nation's pre-eminence and well-being. The crisis has been mounting gradually, but inexorably, over several decades. If permitted to continue unmitigated, it could reverse the global leadership Americans currently

enjoy." You may want to go to [www.bestworkforce.org/PDFdocs/Quiet_Crisis.pdf] to read or download the report and then share it with decision-makers who may not see the quiet crisis developing.



What can you do to help avoid a major crisis? Advocate! Keep decision-makers at the school, district, state, and national levels informed about the needs (created by their strengths) of children who are gifted and talented. Increase the awareness among legislators of the gaps in preparedness if many children who are currently in school aren't encouraged to take rigorous classes and if challenging learning experiences aren't available in all grades. Talk to Governor Fletcher and members of the Kentucky House and Senate about the importance of funding the proposed Kentucky Academy of Mathematics and Science. If you don't speak out, decision-makers will assume that things are going well and that no changes are needed.

The quiet crisis isn't very noticeable, but the results will be dangerous. Advocates can make a difference by making decision-makers aware of the pending crisis.

SINCERELY,

JULIA LINK ROBERTS

The Mission for The Center

We are committed to encouraging excellence by providing educational opportunities and resources to three populations: gifted and talented students, educators working with gifted students, and parents of gifted students.

The Vision for The Center

Becoming an internationally preeminent center is the vision of The Center for Gifted Studies. This vision includes expanding services in five areas: (1) offering educational programs for gifted children and youth, (2) providing professional development opportunities for educators, (3) enhancing communication and advocacy for gifted children, (4) conducting research and developing curriculum to remove the learning ceiling, and (5) building a testing and counseling component for gifted children and their families.

the challenge

Editor/Writer
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MARCUS DUKES

Some kids require a little more out of summer vacation – like two weeks of learning-oriented summer camp.

Nearly 200 middle school pupils are living on Western Kentucky University's campus in their second week of the 22nd annual Summer Camp for Academically Talented Middle School Students. Their days are spent in four classes, which can include chemistry, writing, Spanish, ancient Egypt, political science, and more.

There are 34 classes in all, but each student attends classes in the same four subjects each day, according to Julia Roberts, a professor in the university's Center for Gifted Studies.

"I think for the young people who are academically talented, this provides an



SCATS

Summer camp for gifted and talented kids includes crime scene investigation, maskmaking, taking apart computers

opportunity to be with others who share their interests," Roberts said. "I think that's extremely important for many of them."

As he watched over his computer programming class, Ray Haddix explained how his students were benefiting from this experience.

"It's hands-on every day," Haddix said. "One day we took apart the computer to the bare metal, then put it back together."

This is the second week of SCATS, and Haddix said his students have come a long way in their time at camp. After the first week, he had pupils filling out notecards explaining what else they would like to learn.

And the classes are a hit.

"I love it," said 13-year-old Will Perry of Bowling Green, a pupil at Drakes Creek Middle School. "We get to see computer parts I've never seen and see how they're built."

While Will said that computer programming class is his favorite, his friend, 12-year-old Grant Schumacher of Versailles, said he prefers his Chinese language class.

"I get to explore a different language with different vowels and sounds," he said.

Jacob Maynard, 12, of Russell, spends his time at camp learning a lot about com-

*By Courtney Craig
The Daily News, June 23, 2004
Reprinted with permission*

puters. In addition to the programming class, he is also in a C++ class.

"I get to learn computer language, programs, stuff like that," Jacob said, adding that he's thinking of pursuing a career in computers one day.

SCATS draws kids from several places – 13 states are represented, according to Roberts. To determine which students get into which classes, the kids rank the top 10 classes they would want, and Western's gifted center places them in classes based on their choices.

All the kids agreed that the camp's relaxed, hands-on environment helps make learning fun.

"It's not just reading a book," said Bracken Flynn, 13, of Franklin. "It holds your interest. We get to review information and let it sink in, then go over it in an in-depth way. We have a lot of freedom."

Bracken's friend, 12-year-old Justin Jatzak of Hopkinsville, said he likes it when the class plays educational games.

"It's better than classes with books," he said.

Many classes involve subjects that pupils wouldn't necessarily be exposed to in school. Popular classes include digital photography, crime scene investigation (think CBS' "CSI"), veterinary science and leaders of the Civil War.

As they sat in a maskmaking class, 14-year-old Sara Walden of Boyd County and 13-year-old Kat Welch of Frankfort talked about everything from the food to their other classes.

"I'm taking open-air painting, a clay class and epic literature," Kat said as she dipped strips of newspaper into a paste as part of her paper-mache mask. "But I do miss my PlayStation 2."

Classes are just a part of the SCATS experience. The kids have dinner every night, and other activities include a dance, trivia games, a talent show, and individual and team sports. The students are staying at Barnes-Campbell Hall.

"Really, the funnest thing to do is be stupid in my room with my roommate," Kat said.

This relaxed and fun environment is what has made SCATS successful for 22 years, Roberts said.

"I think it's a combination of a very positive learning environment with a living environment that provides young people an opportunity to be with their academic and age peers," she said.

College professors know the difference in their classes when they meet a student who has learned how to work hard, challenge assumptions, and think like a college student while in high school. Challenging, enriching course selection in high school makes a committed, interested student in college. But why not take the easy road; there's plenty of time to work hard later, right? Not really. Engaging in fast-paced learning now ensures a foundation for continued exploration at the college level. Some of the popular arguments against challenging classes can actually hurt you if you buy into them. Let's dispel some of these common misconceptions.

MISCONCEPTION 1: *I have a great GPA; I won't have any trouble getting into college.*

Congratulations! But you're going to need more to get into and pay for your dream school. Colleges take a close look at your transcript, not just your GPA. They want to know if you took the most challenging classes your school offered. If your schedule includes study halls, maybe you didn't take another year of Spanish or challenge yourself with Calculus. Would you contribute to the intellectual environment in college, or go with what is easy? Colleges look for applicants that will actively participate in and improve the campus community.

What kind of extracurricular activities are you involved in? Speech, Community Service, 4-H, FFA, Tennis, Boys and Girls Club, and Science Club can all help a college get to know you better and appreciate your energy. Do you stick with your extracurricular activities? Do you have leadership experience on your team or with your organization? The commitment you make to your activities indicates the commitment you will make to the campus organizations you join. A person who has organized a recycling drive for the Science Club is more impressive than someone who showed up to a few meetings.



Why Is It Important to Take Challenging Classes?

The Reasons Might Just Surprise You!

By Leigh Johnson

MISCONCEPTION 2: *If I take a harder class and get a lower grade, there goes my scholarship money.*

Universities are much more concerned that you challenged yourself and engaged in intellectual exploration. Harvard Admissions says, "There is no single academic path we expect all students to follow, but the strongest applicants take the most rigorous secondary school curricula available to them. The Admissions Committee recognizes that schools vary by size, academic program, and grading policies, so we do not have rigid grade requirements. We do seek students who achieve at a high level, and most admitted students rank in the top 10-15% of their graduating classes." Centre College looks primarily at the "quality of the high school

coursework." Your choice to take a more difficult class improves your chances of getting into the college you choose.

MISCONCEPTION 3: *If I get a lower grade in a College Board Advanced Placement class, I won't get as much Kentucky Educational Excellence Scholarship (KEES) money.*

KEES money, based on GPA with bonuses based on ACT and SAT scores, will reward you for taking AP courses. KEES requires high schools to weight AP classes on a 5.0 scale. So if you make a B in an AP class, it averages as a 4.0 on your transcript. AP classes can actually help you get more KEES money.

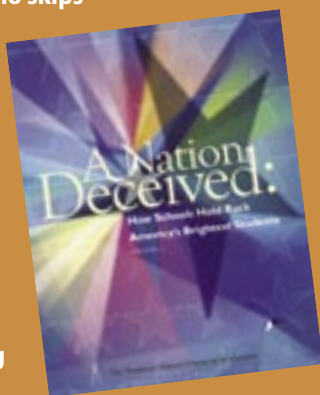
MISCONCEPTION 4: *The university I want to go to won't accept AP credit.*

By law, all Kentucky state-funded universities must give credit for AP scores of 3 or better (Senate Bill 74). Individual school websites will show exactly how much credit a student can earn. A student can get up to



Newly Released Study: Acceleration Works!

The Templeton National Report on Acceleration has just been released. *A Nation Deceived: How Schools Hold Back America's Brightest Students* is available, free of charge, from the Belin-Blank Center at the University of Iowa. While the popular perception is that a child who skips a grade will be socially stunted, fifty years of research shows that moving bright students ahead (whether that be through grade skipping, early entrance to school, or any other of the many types of acceleration) has very positive results, both academically and socially. Go to <http://nationdeceived.org> to see or order this ground-breaking report.



TYPES OF ACCELERATION

1. Early Admission to Kindergarten
2. Early Admission to First Grade
3. Grade-Skipping
4. Continuous Progress
5. Self-Paced Instruction
6. Subject-Matter Acceleration / Partial Acceleration
7. Combined Classes
8. Curriculum Compacting
9. Telescoping Curriculum
10. Mentoring
11. Extracurricular Programs
12. Correspondence Courses
13. Early Graduation
14. Concurrent / Dual Enrollment
15. Advanced Placement
16. Credit by Examination
17. Acceleration in College
18. Early Entrance into Middle School, High School, or College

From "Types of Acceleration: Dimensions and Issues," by W. T. Southern and E. D. Jones. *A Nation Deceived*, V. II, Chapter I, pp. 5-12.



DREW CURTIS was included in the last edition's Alumni Update as was his website: fark.com. Right after that edition went to print, Drew was featured in *Time* magazine's article "Meet Joe Blog" (June 21, 2004, vol. 163, no. 25) as the first of five bloggers to watch: "Now, with at least 5 million readers a month, Fark has become the No. 1 blog for weird and titillating links" (p. 65). Log on to see for yourself.

KARL MILLER was also highlighted in the last issue. This September he was named The 2004 Global Business Advocate of the Year by the Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce. Congratulations, Karl!

MEREDITH CLOUSE (Winter Super Saturdays 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004; Fall Super Saturdays 2002 and 2003; SCATS 2004) was awarded first place in the International Junior Division Individual Future Problem Solving Competition. Meredith, a seventh grade student

at Glasgow Middle School, studied the topic of immigration to prepare for the competition. In addition to FPS, Meredith enjoys Academic Team, reading, music, swimming, and traveling. She is an active member of Children of the American Revolution and Children of the American Colonists. She is eagerly anticipating spending part of her 2005 summer participating in one of the Center's summer camps!

Alumni UPDATE

MERRITT JOHNSON (VAMPY 1995 and 1996) graduated from the University of Kentucky College of Engineering in May 2004. He joined the Navy in Au-

gust as part of the Nuclear Submarine program.

"My weeks away from home at VAMPY gave me the courage to move away from home and go to college early."

KELSEY LADT (SCATS 2003) was named Kentucky's 2004 Nicholas Green Recipient and also received the Outstanding Youth Award in Paducah, KY. As an eight-year-old, she enrolled in (and has continued, now at age 9, to attend classes) at West Kentucky Community and Technical College. Kelsey decided to enter Lone Oak High School in January of 2004. In the summer of 2004 she traveled to Germany, Austria, and the Czech Republic as a singer with the West Kentucky Youth Chorus. She continues to raise funds for the St. Nicholas Free Family Clinic and the Lourdes Foundation Patient Mission Fund through her Foundation.

9 credit hours for one test. Private schools in Kentucky will accept a 3, 4, or better for college credit. Vanderbilt, Princeton, Yale, Harvard, and Stanford all accept AP credit. Nationwide, more than 90% of colleges and universities accept AP credit.

"I took AP classes starting with US History my sophomore year. These classes have allowed me to accumulate 27.5 credit hours, which is 2.5 hours shy of sophomore standing. Along with the credit hours, I have gained experience with a course load containing the breadth and depth of college coursework. It has been an invaluable experience."

—DEBRA CECIL, Western Kentucky University Freshman

MISCONCEPTION 5: I don't need to take honors or more difficult classes prior to the AP class.

Those foundation classes prepare you for the advanced thinking you will be asked to do in an AP or college class. Every time you challenge yourself in an academic environment, you become more prepared for and more likely to succeed in future scholarly endeavors.

MISCONCEPTION 6: The AP tests are too expensive!

The tests seem expensive. Consider though, an AP test costs \$82 and can net you 3 hours of college credit. At Western Kentucky University, where a credit hour costs \$169, you've saved \$425! At Transylvania University, you will have saved \$5060!

AP also offers fee reduction. A student going for the Commonwealth Diploma can be reimbursed by the state of Kentucky for her AP test fees. At these rates, you can't afford not to take AP classes and tests.

"My AP classes gave me enough credit to graduate a semester early. The money I saved by not going that semester allowed me to study abroad in Romania, something I've always wanted to do! I guess you could say, AP opened up another side of the world."

—LEIGH JOHNSON, Western Kentucky University Graduate Student



MISCONCEPTION 7: AP might help me get into college, but it won't help me once I'm already there.

An AP class gives you a chance to "take a college class for free." Do you know what a syllabus is? You'll learn in college if not in your AP class. A rigorous AP class will help you learn time management and study planning. The AP test is much like a col-

lege final—in some classes a final can be 30-60% of your grade. Most importantly, AP classes teach you how to think and ask questions—essential skills for a university setting. These statistics can make it even more clear:

- College students who have not taken an AP class have a 33% chance of completing a Bachelor's Degree;
- College students who have completed one AP course have a 59% chance of completing a Bachelor's Degree; and
- College students who have completed two or more AP courses increase to 76% their chances of attaining a Bachelor's Degree.

From: Answers in the Tool Box: Academic Intensity, Attendance Patterns, and Bachelor's Degree Attainment at <http://www.ed.gov/pubs/Toolbox/toolbox.html>.

AP classes will not only help you in college, but they also substantially improve your chances for successfully completing college.

Participating in a challenging learning environment prepares students for the academic curiosity and commitment necessary to succeed in a university setting. Colleges recognize that students who actively pursue intellectual opportunities in high school are more likely to be the kind of students that do well on an interactive college campus—even if they didn't get the highest grades in their challenging classes. If you've ever climbed a hill you didn't think you could climb, or written an essay you couldn't even figure out how to start, then you can imagine the satisfaction of completing a challenging class with a new definition of "your best effort."



Advanced Placement Institute: An Incredible Opportunity!

By Leigh Johnson

While students continue to challenge themselves by choosing to take harder classes, their teachers also challenge themselves by working to create classes that engage students and encourage learning with critical thinking skills. During the summer of 2004, 275 teachers from fourteen states honed their teaching skills at the Advanced Placement Summer Institute. The Center for Gifted Studies and the College Board work together to provide quality opportunities for beginning and experienced teachers to spend time with College Board consultants – and 2004 was the 21st year for the partnership!

One participant was particularly impressed with her experience with the French language workshop and was inspired to create a French-only classroom with her students. A biology participant remarked, "It was great having their [the consultants'] input and experience with AP teaching—not just the test." One participant's (US History) only regret was that he hadn't taken the institute earlier; he would have helped more students. Teaching an AP class is rewarding when one has the tools to match the challenge. The AP Summer Institute helps provide those tools for teachers from across the nation.

<i>Highest Math Studied in High School</i>	<i>Percentage of High School Grads Earning Bachelor's</i>
Calculus	79.8
Pre-Calculus	74.3
Trig	62.2
Algebra II	39.5
Geometry	23.1
Algebra I	7.8
Pre-Algebra	2.3

As the table shows, students who elect to take more difficult and higher levels of math in high school have a higher success rate in college.

www.ed.gov/pubs/Toolbox/toolbox.html

Volunteers Honored

Given annually in October, the Summit Awards at Western honor the volunteers who have committed themselves to the excellence of the University. Bob and Carolyn Pitchford received this award for their continued support for The Center. Since 1993, the Pitchfords and their children have been involved in every program for young people The Center for Gifted Studies offers, plus Bob serves on our Advisory Board. He not only proposed a possible scholarship donation from the Laura G. Turner Foundation for Allen County young people to attend the programs, but he also made initial contact, and followed up with visits and phone calls. Once the \$10,000 award was made, the family encouraged young people to take advantage of the opportunity the funding brings. The Pitchfords have broadened the scope of the possible by making volunteerism and advocacy a "family affair."

VAMPY: Not Your Ordinary Camp

By Katie Johnson

School's out for summer, and most kids want to remove themselves as far as possible from the classroom. Homework and lectures become distant memories replaced by fun, warm days of playing in the sun. Though it's quite typical for a child to attend a camp of some form in the summer, it is unique – and wonderful — that the students attending The Center's Summer Program for Verbally and Mathematically Precocious Youth (VAMPY) are choosing to go to class in the summer. For three weeks, these 170 students from 14 states and two countries live in dorms, eat in college cafeterias, and take challenging classes, which range from Nazi Germany and the Holocaust to Forensic Chemistry to Pop Culture. Classes are small and are focused on intensive study in one field. The classes are far from ordinary, made exhilarating by field trips, stimulating material, and passionate instructors who make learning a constant adventure. Time spent in the classroom is only the tip of the iceberg for this camp, though. Under the supervision of residential counselors, these students also enjoy outdoor activities, attend a Broadway show, and make lasting friendships.



Counselor Cory Alderdice poses with three "first years" – Jackie Martin, Chad Chumbley, and Ma'ayan Plaut. What a difference a few years make! They were "fourth years" this past summer.



The Center pops up in the strangest places! Imagine wandering on the great wall of China and running into your VAMPY roommate—the one who loved DUC's egg rolls. Center sightings are coming to a neighborhood near (or far) from you.

BRUCE KESSLER

(VAMPY Math Teacher):

I attended an international conference on wavelets this summer at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. As I made my way to the registration desk, I noticed that the girl working the desk looked very familiar, but I just could not place her. Several graduate students from the Mathematics Department at Vanderbilt were helping with the local arrangements, and I thought that perhaps I had seen her in the department during one of my frequent research visits. I spent two days trying to figure out how I knew her, while she arranged overhead projectors, ran errands, and attended talks at the conference. On that second day, she walked up to me and said, "Dr. Kessler, do you remember me?"

It was Fumiko Futamura, a former mathematics student in VAMPY (VAMPY 1994, 1995, 1996, and 1997). She had been in Kenney Lee's Algebra I class as a 7th grader. As coordinator of the three classes in the math section, I have always made a point of getting to know all of the students, and frequently visit the classes. She had 10-year-old memories of me coming by and looking over her shoulder, asking her how it was going. She went on to tell me that she was working with Akram Aldroubi, a top wavelet researcher (my area of research) and professor at Vanderbilt, and just how important that summer experience was to her.

I was so proud. While main credit for her accomplishments goes to her, and certainly Mr. Lee before me, I could not help but think that just maybe something I said or one of the presentations that I gave that summer helped shape her future. I spent the rest of the conference introducing Fumiko to other conference participants, with a small swagger, as a "former student of mine."

TRACY INMAN

(Associate Director, The Center for Gifted Studies):

The cold drizzle of the day did not dampen my spirits in the least. On my first (and only) trip to England, I was actually walking along the same stoned walkways that King Edward II, Queen Victoria, and Queen Elizabeth had walked! I was in Windsor Castle on a blustery day roaming the grounds, exploring the tapestried rooms – and doing a bit of souvenir shopping in the smallest of the gift shops tucked into a back corner. Only a few other people milled around the miniature doubledecker busses and wooden swords. An American accent – a male's voice – a young male's voice – then two – met my ears. I glanced around, and there were Louisville pals Matt Burgess and Gabe

Wood from my VAMPY Humanities class several years earlier! (Matt took it in 1995, Gabe in 1998 – this happened in 2001). What fun! They were part of their DuPont Manuel High school group touring England, while I accompanied The Center's Spring Break to London trip. Our groups just happened to plan the same event on the same day at the same time – and the three of us just happened to want to step into the same shop at the same time!

HARPER LEE

(VAMPY 1997 and 1998; SCATS 1995 and 1996; Counselor; Teaching Assistant):

It was absolutely the coolest thing that has ever happened to me. I had been in the Czech Republic for four weeks teaching English in a town called Oloumouc. My professor took us to Prague for our last week. While in Prague, we could do whatever we wanted to do as long as we saw the Museum of Modern Art at some point during the week. The morning of our second day was kind of rainy, so I decided it was a good a day as any to see some art. I was wandering rather aimlessly through the museum when a free standing piece of sculpture caught my attention. As I came around the corner of it—not paying any attention to where I was going—I nearly slammed into this poor kid standing on the other side. I was squeaking out frantic apologies when I realized—I knew this kid. It was Geoffrey Barton (SCATS 1996 and 1997)! Not only had we gone to camp together, we had been very close friends during our summer as Governor's Scholars. I was delighted to see him, and he seemed reasonably happy to see me, too. He had been in Prague for awhile, so we met up later in the week and roamed around the city. I had a marvelous time that summer, and seeing him was certainly a highlight.

Do you have a story about seeing someone from VAMPY in an unusual place? Please email us your stories: gifted@wku.edu. We'd love to hear them.





Summer Campers Visit Trace Die Cast, Inc.

‘The tour was awesome! I would love to be an intern there sometime.’

— Chase Barclay

THE CENTER FOR GIFTED STUDIES CONTINUES TO WORK CLOSELY WITH TRACE DIE CAST, INC., OUR BOWLING GREEN AREA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE BUSINESS/EDUCATION PARTNER. EACH YEAR, THE RELATIONSHIP STRENGTHENS AS NEW OPPORTUNITIES ARE OFFERED.

Bowling Green entrepreneur Lowell Guthrie founded Trace Die Cast in 1988 to manufacture and distribute aluminum casing. An important piece of the puzzle, Trace provides parts necessary for the assembly of engines and other products all over the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Strongly committed to education, the Guthries support The Center in many ways.



Since our partnership began, Trace has both participated in and created opportunities with The Center. Last summer Trace Die Cast sponsored a student to attend SCATS, giving a young man who otherwise would not have been able to attend a chance to expand his

horizons and explore his interests. Another new opportunity was the tour of Trace for VAMPY and SCATS kids. Part of the fun was watching students become intensely interested in the engineering and manufacturing processes. St. Louis native Chase Barclay (who felt inspired to create a special thank you note to Trace) remarked: “The tour was awesome! I would love to be an intern there sometime.” Well, Chase, you may get your chance. Hopefully, Trace and The Center will team up to match interested students with internships where they can increase their understanding of engineering and manufacturing.

Former SCATS camper and Trace Die Cast employee Joe Napier said, “Trace loves to be an advocate for the mission of The Center. It’s just fantastic; it’s just great stuff!”



DIFFERENTIATION TIPS FOR TEACHERS: PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

Part I: Preassessment (*first of a series*)

By Jana Kirchner & Tracy Inman

What Is Differentiation? Why Is It Important?

As educators, we know and agree that it is critically important to have a classroom that meets the academic and emotional needs of each student. However, with a classroom of twenty-five to thirty students and the pressures of day-to-day school demands, that task becomes a challenge. Oftentimes, we as teachers feel overwhelmed and underprepared to effectively run a classroom focused on continuous academic progress for all students. In order to ensure that continuous

progress, we need to be aware of the critical components of differentiation. Using differentiation in the classroom means designing and implementing curriculum, teaching strategies, and assessments to meet the needs, interests, and abilities of all students. In fact, Kentucky's regulation for gifted education, 704 KAR 3:285, Programs for the gifted and talented, defines differentiation as a "method through which educators shall establish a specific, well-thought-out match between abilities, interests, needs, and curriculum opportunities in terms of enrichment and acceleration options that maximize learn-

ing experiences." Differentiated service experiences are defined as "educational experiences which extend, replace, or supplement learning beyond the standard curriculum." It's the law in Kentucky; check your own state regulations.

Planning: The Need for Preassessment

In order for differentiation to be effective, assessment must be an ongoing part of teaching and learning. Preassessment is especially critical to be able to determine the student's level of readiness to proceed with the new unit of study. These three questions should guide every lesson:

- Planning: What do I want students to know and/or to be able to do?
- Preassessment: Who already knows the information and/or can do it?
- Differentiation: What can I do for them so they can make continuous progress and extend their learning?

Planning: What Do I Want Students to Know and/or to Be Able to Do?

Those educators following best practice must plan their instructional objectives carefully. These objectives reflect national and state standards, the Core Content, Program of Studies, and Learning Goals. If a teacher has not assessed what she is doing in a unit, then she can certainly not guide her students to those outcomes. He is like the captain who doesn't chart his course and doesn't know his destination.





Sheryl Hagan-Booth

Preassessment: Who Already Knows the Information and/or Can Do It?

Once those objectives are created, the teacher must then ascertain who already knows the information or can already perform the skill. There are myriad ways to preassess. Teachers match the preassessment with their content, their students, and their own teaching styles. Some will use the final assessment as the preassessment. If a child already knows 80% of the material, then there is no need for him to “learn” it all over. He’s already mastered it.

Another strategy that works particularly well with skills is “the five hardest questions” (Winebrenner 1992). In math, for example, ask the five hardest questions in the unit. If a child gets four out of five correct, then she doesn’t need to study that material.

Not all preassessments must be pen and paper. (Although written preassessments provide important documentation.) Teachers can determine what kids already know by a class discussion, a KWL chart (What do you already KNOW? What do you WANT to know? How do you want to LEARN?), or even an oral question/answer session.

If something written is a better match, it still does not have to be the printed preassessment in the teacher’s manual (although those are handy to use and important to document the starting

point). It could be that before you begin a new unit on photosynthesis, for instance, you instruct students to jot down what they know about the topic. A quick skim over the papers helps the teacher put them into three piles; those who write a page with diagrams go in one while those saying “photo-what?” go in another.

The form of the preassessment isn’t nearly as important as its utilization. Not only do educators need to preassess, but they must also use those results in teaching the unit. That’s where differentiation comes in.

Differentiation: What Can I Do for Them So They Can Make Continuous Progress and Extend Their Learning?

Now that a teacher has a strong understanding of who knows or can do what, she plans. He will differentiate the content, process, or product to better meet the needs, abilities, and interests of all kids. Stay tuned on how to accomplish that.

The next article in the series will look at practical differentiation strategies.

Winebrenner, S. (1992). *Teaching gifted kids in the regular classroom*. Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.



Shelby Hagan-Booth

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The challenge of an Advanced Placement (AP) course can seem daunting to both teachers and students. All that material in one year! Pre-AP Vertical Teaming—a team of committed teachers from grades 6-12 in a subject area—offers an opportunity and an alternative. For students to meet their AP goals, it is important for them to have had feeder classes that prepare them with analytical skills and main concepts. Our strong partnership with the College Board allows The Center to offer Vertical Team training during the summer to ensure that feeder classes do just that.

Summer 2004 saw the ninth summer for the English Vertical Team and the seventh for Math Vertical Team Institute. The institute provides an opportunity for teachers to explore ways to bridge the gap between middle and high school curriculum so that more students can reach high standards. The College Board points out, that by starting earlier with students, districts can provide the motivation and preparation for more students to enroll in their AP programs.

Participants reported “being motivated to try new methods,” “positive strategies,” and “exciting materials” as the important ideas they took from the institute. They agreed that the strategies would “greatly improve student learning!” An institute attendee from Metcalfe County reports: “English Vertical Team was a great success. I learned many things that have helped in class this year. My favorite was the fishbowl technique. My class discussions are much better now, I think, because of this questioning technique.”

Another English Vertical Team participant says: “I have found the activities to be novel in the sense that it gives the students more ownership to their work instead of the traditional method, such as questions at the end of a selection, summaries, etc. I’ve found that the students seem to enjoy these activities more as well.” Students in these districts will certainly benefit—not only on the AP test—but also from their teachers’ enthusiasm and effort with the Pre-AP Vertical Team!

Vertical Teaming: The Path to AP Success

By Leigh Johnson



Sheryl Hagan-Booth

Kentucky District Strives for Best Practice in Gifted Education

Director Julia Roberts and Associate Director Tracy Inman have had the pleasure of serving on Elizabethtown Independent Schools District Gifted Education Task Force. The Task Force was charged with revamping and improving Gifted Education Services in their district. This Task Force met several times during the past year to thoroughly review what Elizabethtown was doing, look at best practices and state regulations, and put a framework of Guiding Principles in place. The district has now moved to the second phase: creating an ad hoc committee to help put specific strategies and “meat” to the framework.

Under the leadership of Carl Stoltzfus, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Elizabethtown’s services for gifted children should ultimately be a benchmark to which others in the Commonwealth may look for guidance and replication.

For people to hand out advice, they must be awfully wise and confident in their life choices. As for me, I write this article as a young woman who is far from wise, daily being confronted with life choices and often making large mistakes. The saying goes that hindsight is 20/20, but in actuality it's even clearer than that because the roads not taken are often dreamed of late at night, and one is left wondering what might have happened. Therefore I write this as one who has grappled with what could have been, hoping that you will take advantage of opportunities that I either let

educational level). Invite your high school teachers over to your home for dinner to meet your parents in an informal setting. Ask your college professors about their personal interests in the academic field of their choice. As an added bonus, when it comes time to apply to college or graduate school, you will need recommendations, and those professors you sought out will be more apt to write you a shining recommendation as a result of their previous relationship with you. Many of them will be excited that you asked for their help in lending a hand in forwarding your educational career.

college experience as well. Gaining a community view will create strong ties to your alma mater so that as an alumnus you will be even more inclined to visit and give back to your school. Your memories will be rich with color because not only will you have gotten involved in your school, but you also really took the time to know the area of the country you lived in for four years.

ADVICE #3: DON'T BE SCARED TO GET A "B."

We all have our strengths and weaknesses academically. Our weaknesses can hinder us from enrolling in classes that will challenge our thinking and help us improve those less sharpened skills. Our vision becomes GPA focused, and taking that tough course may drop it a few "critical" points. This is a crippling way of thinking, because it shuts doors of incredible opportunities.

As a gifted math student, I had to work especially hard to excel in my literature classes in high school. In fact, when I placed out of all necessary English classes, I was tempted not to take one at all in college. My curiosity got the best of me, though, and I enrolled in an English Literature seminar for majors. It was a small, discussion-based, intense class that introduced me to new ideas as well as challenged my writing skills. Even though the professor disliked my writing style and consequently gave me the lowest grade I ever received, I am so thankful to have had that learning experience. I struggled daily to meet my own expectations as well as my professor's, and the challenge was so beneficial for me as a student. As for my GPA, it suffered, but not beyond repair!

This advice is far from exhaustive, but I wish I had learned these lessons even sooner than I did. May these ideas help improve your high school and college experience. I wish you every success as you walk along life's interesting path. Keep us informed at The Center; we want to hear of your every achievement and cheer you on from afar!

Advice for the College Bound!

By Katie Johnson

slip by in my educational experience or was unwilling to take a risk in seeking out to the fullest extent.

ADVICE #1: SEEK OUT YOUR TEACHERS/PROFESSORS.

See them as your greatest resource. Your learning will be incredibly enriched by garnering all you can from them both inside and outside the classroom. In general, your teachers are more than willing to help you with any question or concern, but you must take the initiative. Especially if you enroll in a large research-oriented university, your classes might be as large as 500 students. In such a setting, it is virtually impossible for your professor to give you the personal attention you might need. It might seem awkward to visit their office at first with your questions, but take a deep breath: it will get easier.

The most rewarding experience, though, is taking an even greater leap to get to know your teachers outside the classroom (this applies to every edu-

ADVICE #2: GET INVOLVED IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

It is increasingly tough to get into the college of your choice these days. I read articles all the time about the pressure being put on high school students to be scholastic and school leaders; so many high school juniors and seniors are getting less and less sleep each night because of their responsibilities. With being in charge of this team, that organization, or being a part of that play, where does that leave you as a part of your city or county and not just as part of your school? This concern is not meant to overload you any more than you already are, but there is so much to gain from getting plugged into your community. You will begin to take such pride in where you come from as well as develop relationships with people from different walks of life from yourself or your peers. You will see your life being enriched from giving back in ways you would not begin to imagine.

This advice still applies to your

Berta Fund for Excellence: Education Series – An Excellent Event!

September 3, 2004, marked the inaugural event in the Berta Fund for Excellence: Education Series. Jill VonGruben, author of *College Countdown: The Parent's and Student's Survival Kit for the College Admissions Process*, conducted a seminar for parents and students. Her mantra? Start early! The event drew a crowd of 130.

The next day, Ms. VonGruben spoke with 80 area school counselors, giving them strategies to assist their college-bound students. The advice she gives helps all students reach their college goals. Her mantra? Start early!

And The Center is starting early as well as planning is underway for the next Berta Fund for Excellence event in the fall of 2005.

Two of the nation's leading education groups are calling for schools, teachers, and parents to assure that all middle school youngsters are in classrooms where "both equity and excellence are persistent goals for each learner." The National Middle School Association (NMSA) and the National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) have issued a joint position paper and call to action to meet the needs of high-ability and high-potential young adolescents. The call to action notes that educators must meet the challenge of providing the highest possible quality education, especially when students exhibit varying levels of development. The key to providing high quality education is being responsive to the students' development. For more information, go to their websites: www.nagc.org and www.nmsa.org.

Gifted Education: Focus on Middle School

The middle school years are a significant transition period for young people and their parents. For more information check out *Making the Most of Middle School: A Field Guide for Parents and Others* (Teachers College Press, 2004), by Anthony Jackson, Gayle Andrews, Holly Holland, and Priscilla Pardini. Holly Holland, a respected author, gifted advocate, and friend of The Center, is also the author of the video *It's in Your Best Interest* produced by the Kentucky Advisory Council for Gifted and Talented Education and the Kentucky Department of Education.



Sheryl Hagan-Booth

A note on the warm-fuzzy board... a conversation at dinner...an evening of Ultimate Frisbee...sharing a lab bench...VAMPY campers know the importance of these daily interactions in making friends. What if it led to something more? We are celebrating weddings where the bride and groom have a VAMPY connection! Yes, there are more than one!

Wake Norris (VAMPY 1989, 1990, 1991, and 1992; Counselor) and Elizabeth Zimmerman (VAMPY 1992 and 1993; Counselor) wed September 5, 2004, in Louisville, KY. They met at VAMPY in 1992. When Wake needed a place to stay in the summer of 1996, he called his friend, Hank Zimmerman, from VAMPY. Hank says, "He was originally supposed to stay for two weeks, until he was able to move in with another VAMPY friend, but ended up staying the entire summer (and the next summer, and the next, and...)." Congratulations, Wake and Elizabeth!

Tonya Gray (VAMPY 1999, 2000, and 2001) and Tony Merriam (VAMPY 1999 and 2000) got married May 8, 2004, in Louisville, KY. Lauren Snead (VAMPY 1999, 2000, and 2001) and Debra Cecil (SCATS 1999; VAMPY 2000 and 2001) were bridesmaids in the wedding. Regarding how they met, Tonya says, "At VAMPYstock, Tony drew a dragon on the sidewalk in chalk. I saw it on the way to dinner that night and thought it was



Unintended Consequences

By Leigh Johnson

extremely well done. So, I put a fuzzy on the board addressed to 'Whoever drew that awesome dragon on Saturday.' Tony got the fuzzy and wrote back. We arranged to meet by the spiral staircase in DUC the next day. We hit it off extremely well as we were both very interested in fantasy and science fiction novels. He got down on one knee in the lobby of the dorm that Wednesday and asked me out. Honestly, I believe we are soulmates, and we never would have met if

it weren't for VAMPY." Congratulations, Tony and Tonya Merriam!

Dr. Bruce (VAMPY Teaching Assistant then Instructor) and Heather (Counselor and Endorsed Teacher) Kessler met at VAMPY! Heather says, "One of my most interesting stories about The Center is how it actually served as my matchmaker! My second year as a residential counselor in the summer programs proved to be more than just a way to make some extra money. During that summer it just so happened that one of the academic counselors and I started a friendship that soon turned into an engagement that soon turned into a wedding. That is how I met my husband, Dr. Bruce Kessler." The Kesslers have two sons and twin daughters, and are still involved with The Center. Congratulations, Bruce and Heather Kessler!

So the law of unintended consequences does hold true—in a good way! VAMPY brings students and adults committed to academic pursuits together for three weeks that sometimes turns into a lifetime. Congratulations to you all!



Welcome Graduate Assistant

Leigh Johnson (SCATS 1993; VAMPY 1994; Russia; Head Counselor) has joined The Center for Gifted Studies as a Graduate Assistant for 2004-2005 school year. She graduated from Lewis and Clark College in 2002 and is now pursuing a Master's in English at Western. She has been a tremendous asset. We are thrilled to have her be part of the team!

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Winter Super Saturdays

April 1 – 10, 2005
Spring Break in Paris

May 27, 2005
Kentucky Recognition Ceremony:
Duke Talent Identification Program

June 7, 2005
Winebrenner Workshop: Teaching Gifted
Children in the Regular Classroom

June 12 - 24, 2005
The Summer Camp for Academically
Talented Middle School Students (SCATS)

June 26 – July 1, 2005
Advanced Placement Summer Institute (AP)

June 26 - July 16, 2005
The Summer Program for Verbally and
Mathematically Precocious Youth (VAMPY)

July 11 - 14, 2005
English and Mathematics Vertical Team Institute