

# SPED Talk



A Newsletter for the Alumni and Friends of the UW-Eau Claire Department of Special Education

Fall 2008

## Special Ed Grad is Embodiment of Collaborative Leadership

by Vicki Snider

The conceptual framework of the College of Education and Human Sciences stresses the value of collaborative leadership. We all understand each of those concepts separately, but if you've ever wondered what they mean when put together, meet Tracey Gunderson (Busch), the very embodiment of collaborative leadership. Tracey received a B.S. in Special Education (learning disabilities) in 2001. She graduated with "University Honors" by completing the requirements of the honors program (and is one of only two Special Education majors to do so!). As a freshman in 1996, she attended the Leadership Institute, which was a life-changing experience. She recalled that by exploring her own self-determination, personal effectiveness, and interpersonal relationships; she became more proactive, more optimistic, and more understanding of others' perspectives. In 1999, she became a facilitator for the summer Leadership Institutes and in 2000, the co-coordinator of the program under Dr. Doug Hallatt.

During her five years at UW-Eau Claire Tracey was involved in two faculty-student collaborations. She worked with Dr. Asha Sen (English) on an analysis of a complex "coming of age" story of a young woman in Africa. She also worked with a multi-disciplinary collaboration that explored attitudes and beliefs about Attention Deficit Disorder with students and faculty from Nursing, Psychology, Special Education, and Communication Sciences and Disorders. She presented both a paper and a poster at the National Council of Undergraduate Research National Conference in Montana in April 2000. As a result of that research, she and Linda Arrowood (2001) published an article with me in the peer-reviewed journal, *Remedial and Special Education*.



After such a distinguished college career, it should come as no surprise that Tracey continued to succeed in distinctive ways that make her a strong collaborative leader.

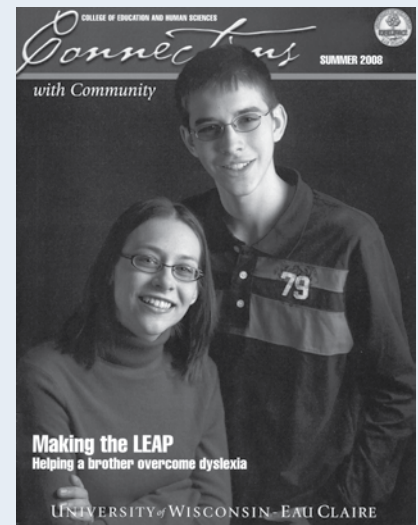
Her first teaching job was in Milwaukee at the Audubon Technology and Communication Center. She taught in a self-contained classroom for middle school students with learning disabilities. Most of her students came with a lot of baggage--feelings of failure, difficult circumstances, and many behavior problems.

She said, "reflecting on my students and their lives reminds me what wonderful kids they were. They had hearts of gold. Yet, their home lives and general environments were so difficult that sometimes the education they received at school was the only thing they could trust." It was during her time in Milwaukee that she became a believer in the power of Direct Instruction programs. Tracey's experiences convinced her that strong educational programs have the power to turn around the lives of students from impoverished environments.

Tracey began work on a Master's degree at Cardinal Stritch in 2003 while working part-time as a "resource specialist" at St. Joe's Middle School in Waukesha. Tracey hoped her graduate work would allow her to combine her successful experience as a leader with her passion for effective instruction. She received Principal and Director of Instruction licenses and a Master in Educational Leadership.

In 2005 Tracey began teaching remedial English and learning disabilities at Oconomowoc High School. There she enjoyed the camaraderie of a team of teachers where her collaborative leadership skills flourished. It was also there that she became interested in developing a remedial writing curriculum.

### ■ Connections



This past summer the College of Education and Human Sciences sent out a new magazine called *Connections*. Our department's LEAP Clinic was the focus in the article "Making the LEAP: Helping a brother overcome dyslexia." It featured Lindsay Michalski, who recently graduated from UW-Eau Claire with a degree in learning disabilities, and her brother AJ, who participated in the 2007 LEAP Clinic. For full text of the article, please visit our website at <http://www.uwec.edu/sped/info/Connections.pdf>.

Tracey realized that she had effective programs to teach reading but no effective curriculum for writing. Tracey and I began developing a writing program for high school students with poor writing skills that emphasized thinking skills and vocabulary development as well as sentence mechanics. That endeavor was interrupted, however, when Tracey was offered a position as Assistant Principal for Elementary Programs in Algoma where, it turns out, she was raised. Tracey admits that it "feels pretty unreal ... having so many memories from both elementary and high school," but is proud to return as an Assistant Principal. One of her responsibilities will be developing programs for students who are at risk for academic failure.

*Continued on page 3*

## First Year Teaching Experience

My name is Jennie Helleen and I graduated from UW-Eau Claire's Special Education Program (K-12 CD/LD/EBD) in the spring of 2007. I am a second year teacher at Chippewa Falls High



School as an EBD teacher. I teach ninth-twelfth graders and have grown tremendously over the last year not only from my first year experience but also from the help and expertise of the professionals from the University. I have learned that a degree is only half of what teaching is all about.

My first year as an EBD teacher was eye opening and made me appreciate all teachers much more. I was inexperienced, naïve, and thought that everything (curriculum, managing the classroom, rules, etc.) would be laid out for me. Through lots of late nights developing curriculum, calling professors for behavior management help, and looking through the many binders I thought I wouldn't need again from classes I survived (barely). I learned more about what an IEP was and laws than I even knew were out there. It was a journey into the unknown, but I came out of it alive and motivated to teach and learn more.

One of the most important things that I have learned as a special education teacher is that you DON'T need to be their friend. I think that there is a very fine line between teacher and friend and it has taken me a year to figure that out. Students respect authority and I have learned to be an educator in every sense of the word. Another important lesson I have learned in education is you are not "just" a teacher. You are a parent, counselor, AODA consultant, tutor, health teacher, lunch lady, custodian, and much much more. You need to be able to leave your job at the door and have a life outside of the school. Get involved with the school, eat lunch with colleagues, and don't complain about things you can't change. It is a career that will change your life for the better, make you appreciate all you have, and learn more from your students than you could ever teach them. I have found the career that drives me and I'm thrilled to be where I am today.

## Director Program

The Director of Special Education and Pupil Services (DSEPS) program had 14 candidates complete the first cohort in June of this year. Currently, there are 22 candidates enrolled in the program. They will complete the program in June of 2009. Current candidates represent almost every section of the state of Wisconsin. Additionally we also have students from Minnesota. Because of the overwhelming response to the program, we had to offer two sections of each class in the program.

Many of the candidates are school psychologists. We would like to see more of our special education master's degree graduates consider pursuing their licensure for Director of Special Education and Pupil Services. The program is all online. If you are interested in the DSEPS program, contact Julie Aminpour, UWEC Continuing Education, 715-836-4021, [aminpojb@uwec.edu](mailto:aminpojb@uwec.edu).

## Introducing

### Dr. Angela Dalhoe – Assistant Professor

I am a native of the Chippewa Valley and have recently moved back to Wisconsin after completing my Ph.D. in Special Education at Michigan State University. I have experience teaching students with both cognitive and learning disabilities in Wisconsin and Minnesota. While in Michigan, I worked for the MI Department of Education developing an alternate assessment program for students with cognitive impairments. This experience led me to my current research interest in the area of assessment, state standards, and students with disabilities. I am very excited to be back in Wisconsin and am looking forward to my time at UW-Eau Claire!



### Cathy Thorsen, ABD – Assistant Professor

When I describe myself, I use one word—ordinary. I grew up in Central Illinois and lacked athletic skill, musical ability, and fashionable clothing, but I was nice to people. For this reason, I became the class tu-



tor for students struggling to learn or who had disabilities. These interactions developed compassion and a desire for working with and befriending children and adults with cognitive disabilities. This desire was satisfied through positions in a group home and as a paraprofessional before acquiring my teaching certificate.

What began as an ordinary life has evolved into something extraordinary and given me years of experience that have aided my professional development. I began my university experience when my children were in school full-time. I graduated from Illinois State University with a BS and an MS in Special Education, and I have taught in two primary classrooms; one with children with significant/multiple disabilities and the other with children with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities.

My transition to college-level teaching happened by accident. My family relocated and I began working at a small college as support for adult learners returning for degrees but who had academic skill deficits. As a result, I began teaching a few education methods classes and then was hired as full-time faculty teaching early childhood education. In 2005, I began my doctoral program in early childhood education at Concordia University Chicago where I have taught the last two years and coordinated the comprehensive special education program.

What continues to drive me professionally is my interest in early childhood special education, particularly the prevention of risks developing into disabilities in young children. What drive me personally are my family and hobbies. I love to cook and bake, enjoy sailing with my husband, visiting my children, and enjoying a good cup of coffee, chocolate, and quiet conversation or a movie and popcorn with butter.

## Foundation Scholarships

We had another great group of Special Education scholarship recipients for this academic year. It is the generosity of donors that allow many students to have a better balance between their education and the need to financially support themselves. With the cost of education rising, students rely more and more on these scholarships to support their educational goals. We are very proud of the recent scholarship recipients as they have demonstrated a dedication to their education and to Special Education.

## FACULTY Notes

**Dr. Rose Battalio** has been appointed as the new chair of the department. She is excited about working with such a great faculty. Any recommendations or ideas that you may have for future development activities for the department, feel free to send them her way.

**Mr. Art Brandt's** past year was filled with the teaching of new and old classes and the excitement of seeing all grads that chose to seek teaching positions find them. One of the highlights of the year was having the opportunity to travel to New York City to attend the

Sprout International Film Festival. From this trip Art brought new and exciting ideas and current media resources to be used in classes by him and his colleagues.

**Dr. Angela Dalhoe** is currently teaching SPED 200, 331, and 416. She is also co-advisor of the Student Council for Exceptional Children and member of the Teacher Education Strategic Planning Council.

**Dr. Stephen Dempsey** was selected as one of UW-Eau Claire's favorite professors for the second consecutive year. He continues to serve on The Higher Learning Commission accreditation teams and will be visiting a college in West Virginia next spring. Additionally, he coordinates the Director of Special Education and Pupil Services program and serves on the editorial board Rural Special Education Quarterly. He was reelected chair of the Chippewa Area Mentor Program Board of Directors.

**Dr. Joe Morin** is beginning his 10<sup>th</sup> year in the department. He is currently teaching Assessment of Students with Disabilities (SPED 401/601) and representing Special Education in the Human Development Center. His scholarly interests continue to be preventing failure in mathematics through early, well-designed interventions. He is in the midst of developing a Counting Curriculum for PK-3. This curriculum is intended to provide a strong foundation in number sense for younger learners.

**Dr. Vicki Snider** participated in the Author's Celebration in October 2007, which was hosted by the Office of University Research and Sponsored Programs at UW-Eau Claire. Her scholarly work supports her never-ending crusade to set high expectations and provide

effective instruction for all "hard-to-teach" students. She developed activities to systematically extend vocabulary knowledge within the context of basal reading stories and pilot tested them in a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade classroom. She also worked on designing a remedial written language curriculum for middle and high school students, parts of which she piloted in the LEAP Clinic.

**Dr. Todd Stephens** will be returning to full-time teaching this fall after serving as Chairperson for five years. During this academic year Todd will also be working on research and service activities and will return to serve on the

Senate Executive committee. Todd extends his heartfelt thanks to the best darn department and group of students a person could hope to work for.

**Ms. Cathy Thorsen** spent eight years as teacher education faculty at institutions in both Central Illinois and Chicago prior to coming to UW-Eau Claire. Currently, her time is unequally divided between dissertation completion, teaching, and getting acquainted with the area and the people of Eau Claire.

### Collaborative Leadership cont. from page 1

Tracey married Gabe Gunderson (2001) in 2003 whom she met at UW-Eau Claire. Gabe is an excellent special educator in his own right who worked for seven years at the Oconomowoc Developmental Training Center, a residential school for students with moderate or severe disabilities (over 90% are on the autism spectrum). Tracey and Gabe have two children—Abrielle (Abby) age 2 and Reece who was born July 29, 2008.

Tracey believes that UW-Eau Claire was the perfect place for her. Her undergraduate experiences taught her *how* to learn so that she could continue to grow and change at every stage of her career. Her role as an administrator allows her to use her experience teaching low performing students as well as her leadership skills. I know that she will continue to wrestle with complex questions, seek clarity and guidance through interactions with others, champion human dignity and embody collaborative leadership.



Back: Art Brandt, Angela Dalhoe, Cathy Thorsen, Stephen Dempsey. Middle: Vicki Snider, Todd Stephens, Linda Brunner. Front: Joe Morin and Rose Battalio

## ALUMNI News

**Anna (Holm) Hill ('06)** and her husband Nick Hill moved to Helena, Mont., in May 2007. Anna is a special education teacher at a children's psychiatric hospital in Helena. They are having a great time exploring their new surroundings and are enjoying "Big Sky Country."

**Shannon (Ravey) Jorgensen ('01)** and husband Curtis announce the birth of son John Raymond on Feb. 26, 2008. Shannon works part time as an early childhood special education teacher. The family lives in Farmington, Minn.

**Jessica (Briggs) King ('99)** and husband Daniel are happy to announce the birth of son Levi Matthew on Nov. 30, 2006. He joins siblings Rose, Samuel and Amelia. The family lives on a farm in Luck.

**Michelle (Styer) Kressin ('97)**, a learning disabilities teacher at Menomonie High School, was honored by the Greater Menomonie Area Chamber of Commerce as the 2007-08 Outstanding Educator of the Year for Menomonie High School. She was nominated by her co-workers for the award. Michelle received the award at the 45th annual Excellence in Education Banquet April 16, 2008, in Menomonie. Michelle lives in Menomonie.

**Kim Lavold ('00)** reached the 19,340-foot summit of Mount Kili-manjaro in July 2007. She traveled to Tanzania



with a group of students from the University of Colorado at Denver, where she is pursuing a master's degree in math and science. Kim continues to enjoy teaching and coaching students at Cresthill Middle School in Highlands Ranch, Colo. She lives in Denver and can be reached by e-mail at [lavoldka@mac.com](mailto:lavoldka@mac.com).

**Jenne (Krultz) Miles ('98)** and husband Cassidy were married Dec. 8, 2007, in Onalaska. Jenne received a master's degree in education from UW-La Crosse in 2004 and has taught middle school students with learning disabilities for the past 10 years. She currently is employed by the School District of La Crosse. Jenne and Cassidy live in Onalaska and are looking forward to their spring 2008 honeymoon in Hawaii.

*Continued on page 4*

*Continued from page 3*

**Carrie (Seamans) Nygren ('98)** and husband Matt are happy to announce the birth of daughter Abigail Faith on March 26, 2007. Carrie received a master of education degree in professional development from UW-La Crosse in December 2004. She is an elementary learning disabilities teacher for the Reedsburg School District. The Nygrens lives in Reedsburg.

**Dana (Appleby) Sablin ('94)** is a teacher, currently on leave, in Apple Valley, Minn. She and her husband, Jonathan, are the proud parents of son Caleb Elliott, born Jan. 20, 2007. The family lives in Lakeville, Minn.

**Morgan (Redding) Ver Velde ('06)** and William Ver Velde were married Aug. 4, 2007. Morgan is in her second year as an early childhood special education teacher. The couple live in Fond du Lac.

**100% Employment Rate**

They say that special education is a field in high demand. Well that is definitely the case for our graduates! Not only did we have 100% of our students get jobs fairly rapidly, they have ventured all over the country such as Alaska and Colorado. The world was wide open for finding jobs wherever their hearts took them.

Congratulations to our latest new teachers!

**Name, Job, Location**

Megan Dhein, 12<sup>th</sup> Grade Resource, Hudson  
 Laura Eppert, LD Math, Minneapolis, MN  
 Lisa Fisher, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade LD, Schofield  
 Caitlin Hammer, Special Education,  
 Estes Park, CO

Tawny Johnson, Resource, Eau Claire  
 Amy Kimmes, 1<sup>st</sup> Grade, Black River Falls  
 Stephanie Krebs, CDM/CDS, Anchorage, AK  
 Heather Manzanares, HS Resource, Ashland  
 Lindsay Michalski, 4<sup>th</sup> Grade/Special Ed, Wausau  
 Mallory Molnar, Elementary EBD, Schofield  
 Erin Nance, Eau Claire Academy, Eau Claire  
 Melinda Olson, Resource, Milwaukee  
 Sheila Runge, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Special Ed,  
 Minneapolis, MN

Kelly Schilling, EBD/LD, Grantsville  
 Becca Smith, 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Resource, Hudson  
 Emily Steward, 5<sup>th</sup> Grade, Chippewa Falls  
 Derrick Thompson, EBD/LD, Barron  
 Kathleen Ward, ECSE, Brighton, CO  
 Kirsten Wekkin, Resource, Eau Claire  
 Shannon Wallraff, ASD, Forest Lake, MN  
 Michael Wendland, CDM/CDS, Anchorage, AK  
 Michelle Wilson, CD, Apple Valley, MN  
 Sarah Zboralski, Resource, Manitowoc

**Support Your Alma Mater**

The Department of Special Education invites contributions to its Advancement Fund. This fund is especially critical to the department because it provides the greatest flexibility in funding projects, programs, and activities that are not in the department's regular budget and/or cannot be covered by state funds. The department will help fund recruitment expenses for prospective faculty, activities for students, travel, special publications, etc. All contributions should be directed to the Special Education Department's Advancement Fund, UW-Eau Claire Foundation, Box 4004, Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004. Your gifts are tax deductible and will be recognized as contributions to the Foundation for tax and recognition purposes. Thank you for your support.

**SPED Talk** is published annually and edited by Linda Brunner. Send news about your location, job, educational endeavors, and family as an email through our website at [www.uwec.edu/sped](http://www.uwec.edu/sped) or email Linda directly at [brunnel@uwec.edu](mailto:brunnel@uwec.edu). Use the subject line "alumni news." We'd like to keep in touch.

Non-profit Org.  
 U.S. Postage  
**PAID**  
 Permit No. 219  
 Eau Claire, WI

**SPED Talk**  
 Department of Special Education  
 University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire  
 Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004  
 Forwarding Service Requested

