Greetings from the Dean

In the midst of these challenging times of budget reductions and scarce resources, the College of Education is not just surviving, but thriving!

Enrollment has increased, academic programs have been fine-tuned, our outreach has expanded, and we have a continued commitment to quality. As you will see in this edition of Connections, there is much good news to share!

The success of our students, our primary mission, is evident in the numbers, such as our 99 percent pass rate on state certification exams for all educators.

It’s also important to tell the story and to put a face to the numbers, so we have a collection of articles spotlighting individual students, alumni and faculty who exemplify Tarleton’s excellence. We hope you enjoy reading about current and former students and the impact that the College of Education has made on their lives.

Faculty members are the other half of the equation for success in education, and several award-winning faculty members are highlighted as well.

While our undergraduate residential programs remain strong and vital, and have been highlighted in the past, in this edition of the newsletter we are showcasing our outreach and graduate programs. Four of the five largest graduate programs and the university’s only doctoral program are housed in the College of Education.

In addition to the degrees that can be completed in Stephenville, we offer academic programs in Weatherford, Fort Worth, Waco and Killeen, including completion programs for undergraduates and an accelerated teacher certification program.

The College of Education is a complex, multifaceted organization dedicated to meeting students’ academic needs. If you have suggestions or questions, please feel free to contact me.

Dr. Jill Burk

Billie Diaz Named ESC Region 12 Elementary Teacher of the Year

Billie Diaz earned her degree from Bellvue University in Nebraska and worked for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice, where she was inspired to become a teacher. Diaz says, “I interacting with many offenders who never finished their education, made me want to become a teacher that students would remember.”

In her quest to become a teacher, Diaz enrolled in the Tarleton Model for Accelerated Teacher Education (TMATE), an alternative teacher preparation program that allowed her to become certified to teach. According to Diaz, “This is my eighth year in teaching, and I still, at times, look through the materials I used in TMATE for guidance.”

Diaz has spent the last three years at Martin Walker Elementary School in Copperas Cove ISD, where she teaches third grade inclusion classes. She has been called a model for her peers as she continuously strives to improve her teaching and provides examples of good character, responsible citizenship and educational excellence. She has served as the third grade chair at Martin Walker and has been an active member of the PTA for five years.

Diaz also serves as the 3-Tier Leadership Team facilitator, an interventionist for math and reading, and a mentor for the Ready, Set, Teach program. She has also received the Applebee’s Teacher of the Month award on four occasions. In receiving the Region 12 Teacher of the Year honor Diaz says, “I love teaching and the opportunity to impact the lives of my students.”
Matt Keefe, a graduate student at Tarleton, is living Michael Jordan’s philosophy of, if you put in the work, the results will come. Don’t do things half-heartedly. Because if you do, then you can expect half-hearted results.

After earning his BS in Health Behavior Management with a minor in Leadership Studies and a concentration in Sport’s Management from the University of Delaware, he left his home in Spring Lake, N.J. to take a graduate research assistant position with the Department of Kinesiology at Tarleton to work on his M.Ed. in Kinesiology. While pursuing graduate work, Keefe is acting director of operations for the Tarleton Texans basketball team under the direction of coach Lonn Reisman. Keefe’s seemingly endless responsibilities include traveling to away games with the team, future player recruitment, scouting trips and athlete tutorial sessions. Typically, Matt’s day begins at 6 a.m. and does not end until after 10 p.m.

Keefe played high school basketball in New Jersey, managed the collegiate men’s team in Delaware, and lived in Dublin, Ireland while working for Hoop Group, a worldwide leader in basketball camps before enrolling at Tarleton and moving to Stephenville.

With his love of basketball and a career goal of becoming a Division I basketball coach, Keefe chose a passionate thesis topic. As a result of his involvement in youth basketball, he became aware of the relationship that worldwide athletic apparel companies, like Nike, Adidas and Reebok, have with grassroots youth basketball programs. Each company’s business model required a substantial investment in youth athletic programs and ultimately into the lives of young players who might have future star power as a potential professional basketball players. In developing these long-term relationships, each company hoped to develop brand loyalty. His spring thesis, entitled “The Impact of Athletic Apparel Company Funding on Grassroots Basketball” (2003-2008), substantiated the cause and effect relationship that exists as a result of this business model.

“The graduate course work was challenging, exciting and very rewarding,” said Keefe. He added that his organizational and time management skills were also enhanced and solidified. In offering advice for any student considering master’s coursework with a thesis, Keefe recommends students get to know the professors. He began his thesis for his M.Ed. by choosing Dr. Kayla Peak as chair of the committee, while Dr. Steve Simpson and Dr. Ron Newsome also served as committee members. Matt indicated that the thesis committee played a vital role in his success, as they were always available to meet in person, speak by phone, or correspond by email. In Matt’s opinion, the greatest strength of the Kinesiology master’s program is the academic relationships that a student has with the professors. Matt summed up his experience by saying, “In all my years as a student, I have never met anyone like them.”

A Student’s Journey to Becoming a Professor

After graduating from Martin High School in Arlington, Laurie McAdams initially chose to join the workforce rather than attend college. Her desire to pursue post-secondary education materialized at age 25 when she quit work to devote her attention to her growing family and started attending Tulsa Community College in Oklahoma. After completing two years at Tulsa Community College, her family moved to Orlando, Fla. where Laurie enrolled at University of Central Florida where she majored in education and graduated summa cum laude while receiving the Gene & Mary Longfellow Award as the top undergraduate student.

After graduating in 2004 with a BS in Elementary Education, Laurie accepted a scholarship at the University of Central Florida to complete her M.Ed. While pursuing graduate coursework, she worked full-time as a first-year ESL teacher. Shortly after completing the master’s program, in 2005, the McAdams family relocated to Mansfield.

With a love of teaching and writing, Laurie’s ultimate career goal was a university setting. She began evaluating doctoral programs near her home and after looking at several programs, she met Dr. Linda Jones, the Dean of the College of Graduate Studies at Tarleton, who served as an encouraging and supportive mentor through the application and recommendation submission process and portfolio construction. The more Laurie learned about the Tarleton Doctoral Cohort Model, the more she was convinced that TSU would be her academic home.

As a culminating piece of her doctoral work, Laurie’s dissertation analyzed the benefits of an early college framework whereby high schools provide college-level coursework to underrepresented junior and senior youth by concurrently obtaining a high school diploma and two years of college credit. Laurie’s dissertation entitled “Congruence of Perceptions Among Texas Early College High School Leadership Teams” provided evidence of the potential of decreasing high school dropout rates while immediately increasing college enrollment of minority and low-income students.

Of the Tarleton doctoral cohort, Laurie stated, “I really enjoyed the collegial student and professor relationships in the core courses and the opportunity to pursue elective coursework. The greatest strength of the TSU program is the high priority the faculty places on having good relationships with the students.”

Laurie currently serves as an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at Tarleton. She continues her research interest in the reading process and was awarded a university research grant this year that sought to examine “The Effect of Master Reading Teachers Knowledge and Application on Student Achievement.” Laurie says, “The transition from doctoral student to university professor has been an exciting journey and the culmination of a lifelong goal.”

Counseling Grad Becomes Instructor at Tarleton

Jamie Borchardt started at Tarleton State University with an interest in psychology. As she explains it, “I was not exactly sure as to what I wanted to do, but never thought I would be a teacher.”

After finishing her bachelor’s degree in psychology in 2005, she enrolled in graduate courses and started work on a master’s in counseling. While she was a graduate student, Jamie also served as a graduate assistant and taught labs for the Department of Curriculum & Instruction. It was during her master’s coursework that she discovered her love of teaching.

Jamie graduated with a master’s degree in counseling in May 2009 and was hired immediately to teach undergraduate courses in psychology. She says, “I love teaching and have taught a number of classes including Introduction to Psychology, Human Lifespan and Abnormal Psychology, which is my favorite.”

As an instructor at Tarleton, Jamie has also taken on the role of advising new students entering the graduate programs in counseling. She meets with students and reviews all of the admission requirements with them. She provides an overview of the counseling programs, discusses course pre-requisites and helps set up their degree program.

Since she has discovered her love of teaching at the university level, Jamie has started a doctoral program in psychology and has been involved in both online and face-to-face instruction. She is looking forward to completing her degree so she can continue to work with students and teach at Tarleton State University.
Autry, Edwards named Alumni Academic Forum Honorees

Dr. Linda Autry grew up on a cotton farm in West Texas. She attended Howard Payne University where she received her bachelor’s degree in psychology and sociology. She then came to Tarleton and graduated with a master’s degree in counseling in 1990.

Autry was a school counselor for 11 years and became a Licensed Professional Counselor. She currently serves as a Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor.

Autry taught at Texas State Technical College for five years, and then was accepted into the doctoral program in counseling education at A&M–Corpus Christi. She received her degree in August 2007. She has served as a lecturer and now assistant professor at UT-Permian Basin since 2006.

In 2008 Autry became the program chair of the Counseling Education Department at the UT-PB where she also serves on the University’s National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education Committee and UT-PB’s Faculty Senate.

Autry teaches a variety of classes, both face-to-face and online.

Dr. Cindy Edwards currently serves as the superintendent of Lipan ISD. She is a proud Tarleton alumna receiving her baccalaureate degree in Vocational Home Economics in 1982, her master’s in Education, Guidance and Counseling in 1983 and was a member of the first Educational Leadership Doctoral Cohort to graduate in 2006.

From left, O.A. Grant Excellence in Teaching Award recipient Dr. James Gentry, and 2011 Alumni Academic Forum Honorees Dr. Cindy Edwards and Dr. Linda Autry.

Throughout her graduate work, she never left the public schools, serving as teacher and then superintendent.

Her dissertation entitled: “An Analysis of the Relationship of Superintendent Instructional Leadership Behaviors and District Performance Outcomes” developed a unique mathematical formula for integrating a number of educational outcomes into a single numerical performance index, thus setting a new standard of assessing schools’ performances.

Edwards’ formula has been utilized as a model for other school performance research, and she has presented her findings throughout U.S. A key role that Edwards continues to play at Tarleton is mentor to many doctoral students and an adjunct professor.

Tarleton and Weatherford College: Teaming to Meet Students’ Needs

After joining academic forces five years ago, the College of Education at Tarleton and Weatherford College continue to provide students with the Completer Program. This program is designed to meet the needs of students who are enrolled in the associate of arts in teaching program but would like to finish with a bachelor’s degree in education.

In this program, students spend two years at Weatherford College as freshmen and sophomores. They then apply to Tarleton and fulfill the requirements of the Teacher Education Program (TEP) admission as juniors and seniors. After acceptance to the TEP, students continue to receive academic instruction at Weatherford College.

Faculty members from the Department of Curriculum & Instruction travel to the campus in Parker County. Alison Thomas, director of the Completer Program describes the intent of the program, saying, “We designed this program for nontraditional students who require full-time employment or for family reasons are not able to devote time daily to their higher education courses."

Recently, Kelsey Bray Smith graduated from TSU in the Weatherford Completer Program. While the desire to teach was, as Kelsey puts it, “in her blood,” she didn’t want to leave home or quit her job as a summer camp director and gymnastics coach. Since the coursework is offered on Monday and Wednesday from 9 a.m. to noon and 1-4 p.m., Kelsey was able to continue full-time employment while completing her degree.

During her student teaching at TSU, Kelsey received the Robert H. Elliot Memorial Award. This award is presented to students for exemplary qualities of dedication to the needs of students, being supportive of colleagues and administrators, displaying an awareness of the vital role teachers play in the lives of their students, and “going the extra mile.” For Kelsey, this award exemplified the encouragement and support that she received from her professors including Dr. Rebecca Miller, Dr. Melissa Becker, Dr. Michael Hawke, Dr. Michele Staples, Dr. Ingrid Graves, Dr. Laurie McAdams, Ms. Debby Hopkins-Higham and Dr. Debra Bay-Borelli.

Currently, Kelsey is teaching 5th grade English Language Arts at Austin Elementary in Weatherford where she regularly incorporates technology in the classroom. “This generation of students has grown up thinking that the Internet has always been available,” said Kelsey. “When students are engaged in Webquests or creating storybooks online, they are highly engaged in the process of thinking and learning. The Internet has undeniably added effective educational strategies into the classroom, but my students still enjoy reading the old-fashioned way too!” Kelsey plans to pursue a M.Ed. in Educational Leadership where she’ll commute to Tarleton’s Hickman Building in Fort Worth.

“By providing the opportunity to stay in Weatherford through the Completer Program, I have had the opportunity to live at home, work full-time, and develop wonderful relationships with TSU professors who encouraged, supported and pushed me to be the teacher I am today,” said Kelsey. “I have a great respect for them and I am a better teacher because of what they did.”

Gentry Presented O.A. Grant Excellence in Teaching Award

Dr. James Gentry is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at Tarleton. He earned his B.S. in psychology and M.S. in education from A&M-Texarkana, and his Ed.D. in supervision, curriculum & instruction with an emphasis in reading from A&M-Commerce.

Gentry serves as the assistant editor of the Journal of the Effective Schools Project and has published two children’s books with supporting instructional strategies for teachers. He has co-authored several chapters in various textbooks related to games in the classroom, special education learning challenges and assessment.

Gentry also presented his research findings at the Council for Exceptional Children in 2008 and the Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education in 2007, 2009 and 2010. In 2010, he received the College of Education Faculty Excellence Award in Scholarship.

He prepares future educators and has served students with special learning needs for 19 years. Gentry believes that an environment immersed in continuous learning aids others in viewing learning as a way of life. Gentry works with others to provide a quality instructional experience for students and their respective teachers in an inclusive environment which incorporates best practices, assistive technology and personal relationship connections.
Dr. Kayla Peak Receives Jack and Louise Arthur Excellence in Teaching Award

Dr. Kayla Peak, assistant professor in the Kinesiology Department, has received the Jack and Louise Arthur Excellence in Teaching award for her innovative ideas and great rapport with students. The Jack and Louise Arthur Excellence in Teaching Award, first presented in 1989, recognizes superior classroom instruction and a commitment to creating a quality educational environment.

Comments from Dr. Peak’s students confirm her excellence in teaching. One student wrote, “This class was one of the greatest classes that I have taken in all my years of college and the professor is one of the most incredible individuals that I have ever met.” Another student said, “I love Dr. Peak! She is so passionate about individuals with disabilities. She is an amazing person and teacher!”

Still another student observed, “Dr. Peak was very open about the information that we were learning. She created an outgoing and fun atmosphere inside the classroom. The interactive nature of her classes are not only a welcome change from lecture-based teaching, but also refreshing as an overall component of the learning experience.” Finally, one student summed it up by saying, “Dr. Peak has a wonderful teaching style. I was interested and looked forward to class each day. Visual, tactile, auditory, class discussions and hands-on activities, were beneficial to my learning. Dr. Peak incorporated all learning styles while teaching and the energy that Dr. Peak brings to teaching lifts everyone to try harder.”

When asked to summarize her philosophy of teaching, Dr. Peak said, “I absolutely love being in the classroom! I believe in the holistic nature of teaching and I want my students to engage their mind, body and spirit as they immerse themselves in the subject matter. Specifically, I utilize Bloom’s Taxonomy to intentionally focus efforts to enhance the students’ basic knowledge and comprehension with applied learning experiences. By providing applied learning experiences such as Fantastic Field Day, Rock the Gym and Research Symposums, the students are able to ‘own’ their education and develop a true appreciation for the discipline.

Dr. Peak has been previously recognized for her teaching by receiving the Excellence in Teaching Award, which is based solely on student evaluations and awarded by the chancellor of The Texas A&M University System. Dr. Peak received the award in 2009 and 2010.