



EducationFirst

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March 2009



Cohen, overwhelmed with the positive volunteer turnout, connects convicts and community in the Oakdale Prison Community Choir.

Oakdale Prison Community Choir Creates Unique Learning Opportunities

They won't be singing "Jailhouse Rock" or "Folsom Prison Blues." Rather, 20 inmates incarcerated at the Iowa Medical and Classification Center in Coralville are joining forces with 20 volunteer community members and eight University of Iowa students. Together, they're lifting their voices in jubilant song as part of a groundbreaking choral experience this spring semester.

The Oakdale Prison Community Choir, coordinated in conjunction with a UI graduate seminar in music education, provides an opportunity for the offenders to connect and sing with others and the tools to re-enter society successfully.

This pilot prison choir project will lead up to a performance in April called "Peace and Place."

"The idea as expressed in the book, *We're All Doing Time*, is that no matter where you are, if you aren't at peace with yourself and the place you are in life, you're just doing time," said Assistant Professor **Mary Cohen**, project director. "No matter what place you're in, you can find peace. This philosophy resonates with prisoners and creates a perfect theme for our performance."

Societal Benefits of Prison Choirs

Given the high rates of incarceration in the United States—and the state of Iowa—it is critical to provide more tools to enhance the safety of correctional facilities and to find ways to help this population re-enter society, Cohen said.

"If you think about the concept of getting along in society, and getting along in a choir, there are a lot of similarities," Professor Mary Cohen said. "Consider the symbolism between offenders creating harmony with people from the community, when previously they made a decision that caused dis-harmony."

Not only do the prisoners benefit from the program, but Cohen hopes the community volunteers and students will as well.

"One of the goals that I have is that the volunteers and students will think more critically about how we are leading the world in the number of people we incarcerate," she said.

Cohen wants to explore what positive things can be done with this population while they are incarcerated.

Funding for the choir comes in part from a private gift from two people involved with the Jubilation Foundation, a new organization geared toward providing funds for programs that focus on children's music making. Because the Jubilation Foundation could not fund Cohen's entire grant, the president of the foundation, Becky Liebman, liked Cohen's plan, so she wrote a personal check for \$1,000. Her mother, Mary Liebman, who attended the UI, also contributed \$1,000.

Remarkable Firsts

First Summit Empowers Teens for Personal, Professional Success

Doctoral candidate **Quiteya Walker** is passionate about inspiring African American youth. She conceptualized and helped host the first-annual Teen Summit for African American students in eastern Iowa.

"Our goal is to help youth acquire the tools necessary for personal and professional success," Walker said.

The summit, "Empowering our Youth in the 21st Century," was cosponsored by Delta Sigma Theta sorority and The University of Iowa Center for Diversity and Enrichment. More than 40 area teenagers attended the event last month on the UI campus.



Participants gain confidence, camaraderie at Teen Summit.

Walker said the purpose of the event was to encourage youth to explore ideas about leadership, develop skills for academic and career success, and to build confidence and camaraderie. The event featured seminars and local speakers.

Walker, a student in Rehabilitation Counseling, said the act of so many students turning up on a cold Saturday morning shows that they are eager to learn and grow as leaders.

"African American kids in this community really want to be involved in activities outside of school," she said.

Candyce Briggs, a doctoral student in School Psychology, worked closely with Walker to plan and run the event. She said she was inspired by the enthusiasm she witnessed among the summit participants.

"I was moved by how excited the students were," she said. "The Teen Summit not only gave the students information to help them succeed, but it also provided them with a chance to be around successful African Americans in their own community."



Delta Sigma Theta sorority helps sponsor Teen Summit.



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2009 Obermann Engagement Fellows

The Obermann Center for Advanced Studies and the Graduate College named four College of Education graduate students as 2009 Obermann Graduate Institute for Public Engagement Fellows. The Fellows are exploring new ways to connect scholarship and higher education to local communities.

Mohammad A. Basir, a Science Education doctoral student, taught physics for 10 years in his home country of Iran before coming to The University of Iowa. Basir's research considers ways that social interactions among scientists and social environments play a crucial role in scientific inquiries and science classrooms.



Mohammad Basir



Matthew Cassidy

Matthew Cassidy, a Social Studies Education master's student, says his primary professional objective is to enhance socio-civic education by creating a student-led organization devoted to active engagement in the community. Cassidy hopes this organization will foster a culture of civic engagement in the school so that students will regard active participation within the community as a natural behavior for any socially responsible citizen.

Amy Jones (MAT '04), a History Education doctoral student, taught American history in Cedar Rapids where she created and led a service-learning group with her students. The project was recognized both locally and nationally for its outstanding service to the community. Jones' research focuses on a new technological instructional method in history teaching and its effects on student engagement and history learning, her research interests include the incorporation of civic engagement and service-learning in history curriculum.



Amy Jones



Ashley Meredith

Ashley Meredith, a Social Foundations master's student, received both regional and national recognition for designing and directing Café Symposium, an after-school program that encourages philosophical discussion among high school students in Tennessee. Her work focuses on the necessity for critical thinking and civic engagement in secondary education, and she plans to continue developing and evaluating programs which foster these activities.

UI Participates in Collaboration to Increase Science, Math Teacher Pool

The University of Iowa is one of 27 institutions nationwide chosen to be part of The Leadership Collaborative, a group of institutions drawn from universities making the commitment to the Science and Mathematics Teacher Imperative (SMTI). The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges (NASULGC) developed this imperative. **Sandra Bowman**



Dean Damico leads collaborative efforts to increase the number of science and math teachers.

Damico, dean of the UI College of Education, serves as the UI collaborative team leader.

The imperative involves the presidents of 74 public universities and 11 university systems representing an additional 33 campuses working to reverse the crisis of the lack of highly qualified science and mathematics teachers in middle and high school classrooms across America.

The collaborative will examine ways to strengthen science teacher preparation at the chosen institutions and explore how to develop a deeper understanding of enhancing the priority of teacher preparation and share lessons learned throughout the community.

According to Judy Jeffrey, director of the Iowa State Department of Education, in any given year, there are always more openings for science and math teachers than can be filled in Iowa.

For more information, visit www.nasulgc.org/Net-Community/Page.aspx?pid=1154&srcid=183.

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