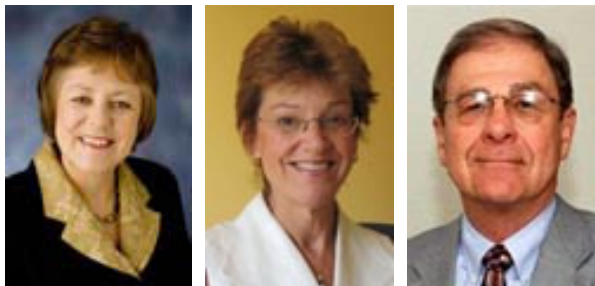


University of Iowa News Release

Oct. 17, 2007

New: UI program debuts to assist students with learning, cognitive disabilities



University of Iowa President Sally Mason and former Iowa Lt. Gov. Sally Pederson unveiled a new campus program for students with multiple learning and cognitive disabilities at 2 p.m. today, Wednesday, Oct. 17 during a public announcement at the Belin-Blank Center in the UI Blank Honors Center. The program, named Realizing Education and Career Hopes (REACH), is initially supported by private gift commitments totaling \$1.4 million and will enroll an estimated 16 to 20 students in fall 2008.

Based in the UI College of Education, REACH is a two-year certificate program with core classes in academic enrichment, career development, and life and social skills for independent living. It is one of the first programs of its kind to be offered on a major public university campus with students fully integrated into the university's life experiences.

Mason applauded the tremendous collaboration and support that brought REACH to fruition, making it possible for dozens of students across the state and nation to have an opportunity to attend college, seek rewarding careers, and realize their full potential.

"This program is a real testament to the University of Iowa's and the state of Iowa's commitment to diversity and will help ensure that all students have an opportunity to pursue their dreams and make contributions to society," Mason said. "I commend the generosity and vision of many individuals who are making this innovative program a reality, a program that further solidifies Iowa's standing as a leader in promoting opportunities for all students."

Pederson chairs the REACH Advisory Board, which met for the first time earlier today to review development of the program.

"Hundreds of Iowa students with learning and developmental disabilities graduate from high school every year unprepared to get a job or live on their own," Pederson said. "REACH will help many of those young people to develop the skills they need to succeed in life."

Pederson became a partner in the effort to start REACH in Iowa after sending her own son, Ronald, who has autism, to a similar program in Illinois.

The launch of this program was made possible by gifts to the UI Foundation from the following:

Jon and Lillian Lovelace of Santa Barbara, Calif; the Myron & Jacqueline Blank Fund, Fred and Emily Weitz of Wes Des Moines, and Michael and Barbara Gartner of Des Moines.

The lead gift from the Lovelaces provided \$750,000 for program faculty and a challenge grant of \$250,000 for student scholarships. The Blank Fund met the challenge with an additional \$250,000.

The Weitz gift of \$100,000 and the Gartner gift of \$50,000 in honor of Ronald Autry bring the total contributions for the REACH program and scholarship fund to \$ 1.4 million.

Dennis C. Harper, REACH founding director, said that the program will help students achieve their full potential. He said the UI program is a rarity in the United States; the only similar program at a major public university is based at the University of California- Los Angeles.

"This is an amazing life opportunity for a lot of youth who really don't have access to join in and be full members of society, and that is what is unique about this program," Harper said. "We want to empower students with the skills necessary to be independent, engaged and contributing members of their community."

He said that while some other programs are supportive of inclusive concepts, "we're the only one in the country that has these students living in residence halls. That's one of the real hallmarks of this program.

"This is fundamentally an opportunity for students to become contributing members of society and to enjoy a living/learning experience like their peers do on the University of Iowa campus," he added.

Harper said that as a collegiate and career education program, REACH strives to provide full access to its students, just as it does to other UI students.

"Iowa is a very egalitarian place," he said. "Our faculty are extremely open to this. Not only have we had great participation, I've had involvement beyond expectations, both from the university and the community." He said he's especially grateful for the support of Sandra Damico, dean of the UI College of Education, and Tom Rocklin, University of Iowa vice provost and dean of the University College, who helped launch the program.

Harper said that although the primary obligation of the program is to Iowa students it is open to nonresidents as well.

"This is certainly a national effort," he said, adding he's collaborating with many of the most influential experts in the nation.

Sixteen to 20 students will be accepted into the two-year program in fall 2008, although in subsequent years REACH anticipates enrolling up to 25 students annually.

"I think we'll have a waiting list," Harper said. "This is really a certificate/diploma that will have value and facilitate career development on an ongoing basis. We're working with 30 to 40 major employers throughout the entire state for our job mentoring placements."

In addition to providing new opportunities for young people, Harper emphasized that the REACH program will permit research opportunities and developing new teaching practices.

"The College of Education sees an important role in facilitating this program because it needs to have a place in the education and professional training of students in education and others forms of professional practice," Harper said.

Harper said the plan is to keep REACH accessible and tuition affordable. There is also a scholarship fund. The deadline to register for fall 2008 is March 1, 2008.

For more information, visit <http://www.education.uiowa.edu/reach/> or call 319-384-2127.

The UI acknowledges the UI Foundation as the preferred channel for private contributions that benefit all areas of the university. For more information, visit the foundation's Web site at www.uiowafoundation.org.

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