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# Research College of Education

## Utah State University

# UpDATE

OFFICE OF RESEARCH SERVICES MARCH 2003

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### College of Education Scholar/ Researcher of the Year Awardee

Congratulations to William J. Strong who was named COE Scholar/Researcher of the Year for 2003-04 by the COE Research Council. Dr. Strong is a professor of secondary education and director of the Utah Writing Project, a statewide network of K-12 teachers. His research interests center on secondary English education, content area reading and writing, and scaffolded language development activities for a wide range of students, including English language learners. Recently he has begun to explore the uses of narrative knowledge in teacher development work.

### Youth and Families with Promise Grant

The FY 2003 Congressional earmark for the innovative and highly acclaimed Youth and Families with Promise program (Family and Human Development/Consumer Sciences Department) has been funded at \$600,000.

### Salzberg Awarded Grant for Training and Development in Special Education

*Charles Salzberg is a professor of special education and psychology. His research interests include special education teacher preparation, personnel shortages in special education and related services, students with disabilities in higher education, and transition of students from secondary education to adult life, especially to post secondary education. Dr. Salzberg also contributes to policy development in special education.*

Charles Salzberg was recently awarded a training and development grant for \$1,000,000 over three years. The goals of this ambitious project are to: 1. Establish a National Partner Network of colleges and universities that will implement training for faculty and TAs at their own institutions using the project's curriculum (the ASD curriculum); 2. Develop, evaluate, and disseminate a specialized version (cont. p. 2)

### A Message from the Associate Dean

The Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation, featured in this issue of Research UpDATE, offers educational opportunities for teachers, supervisors, support personnel, and rehabilitation counselors who work with exceptional children or adults with disabilities. The Department is one of the nation's most productive research, development, and innovative training departments. It is the leading department in the nation in distance education for rehabilitation counseling. The undergraduate training program provides students with firsthand experiences teaching pupils with disabilities through practica. The master's degree programs in Special Education provide an advanced level of preparation for professionals who work with children, youth, and adults with disabilities. The Ph.D. program prepares leadership personnel for positions in research, teacher training, program development, policymaking, and administration. Faculty in the Department contribute significantly to the research efforts of the College, having been awarded grants totaling nearly \$2 million this past year.

Carol Strong, Associate Dean for Research

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### Addressing the Critical and Chronic Shortage of Special Education Personnel

*Ronda Menlove is an extension assistant professor and director of the mild/moderate special education distance education program. She works collaboratively with local school districts and the Utah State Office of Education to prepare well qualified special educators. Her research interests include special education personnel preparation via distance education, special education personnel shortages and attrition, the individualized education program process, and special education policies and procedures and legal issues.*

The shortages of qualified special education personnel in the United States and in Utah are critical and chronic, and in some locations growing in spite of increased funding and efforts to train and retain special educators. The Utah State Office of Education, Special Education Services Unit has funded Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation faculty members, Ronda Menlove and Charles Salzberg, to conduct research studies to better understand the reasons for the critical shortages of Utah special education personnel including special education teach-

ers, speech and language pathologists, and school psychologists. School districts have been surveyed for the past five years to determine the number of special education professionals leaving their positions and the reasons why they leave.

In addition to the studies of special educator attrition, two other studies have been conducted. One study focused on the largest group of special educators who might have been encouraged to stay—special education teachers who transferred to regular education teaching positions. These teachers were surveyed to ascertain what influenced them to leave special education teaching and what might have enticed them to stay. The study also looked at their satisfaction with regular education teaching. As a companion study, all Utah special education teachers with more than ten years of teaching experience were surveyed to learn more about the strategies that helped these teachers remain in the field. Information from the studies is being used to track shortages of special education personnel, to develop interventions to address the critical shortages, and to evaluate the impact of interventions used by local school districts to retain special educators.

Salzberg Grant continued. of the training program for faculty and TAs in laboratory science disciplines in two delivery formats: (a) group, face-to-face training and (b) individual use, web-based training (for access to off-campus faculty who cannot or prefer not to attend group sessions, and for easier access for some faculty with disabilities); 3. Develop, evaluate and disseminate a specialized version of the training program in field science disciplines for both group and individual training (distance education) formats; and 4. Systematically disseminate the ASD faculty/TA training curriculum beyond the initial partner school network to other colleges and universities throughout the U.S.

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COE Research Council: Jim Dorward • Nick Eastmond • Rich Gordin • Grace Huerta • Randy Jones • Richard Roberts • Julie Smart • Carol Strong • Karl White

## Project IMPACT: A Unique Distance Education Offering

*Robert Morgan is an associate professor of special education and rehabilitation. Research and teaching interests include transition from school to adult life, severe disabilities, paraprofessional training, and behavior analysis. Applied experience includes work in special day schools for students with behavior disorders and in preschool and K-12 classrooms for students with severe, multiple disabilities, and adult service providers.*

Project IMPACT, a personnel preparation project in the Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation headed by Robert Morgan, has offered a unique distance education format and produced some novel results as well. Special education paraprofessionals at four sites (Turbotville, PA; New Castle, DE; Rexburg, ID, and Brigham City, UT) participate in a weekly, live, internet-based video/audio broadcast. An instructor located on the USU campus presents material and interacts with participants across the sites. Each site logs onto a web site to receive the course broadcast. The curriculum for the paraprofessional training course, *Enhancing Skills of Paraeducators*, was developed at USU, and includes video exercises, which are digitized and streamed using Windows Media Streaming technology. Participants watch school-based video scenes that show a problem to be solved, discuss with other local participants how to solve the problem, then share with participants at other sites their proposed solution. The result of this course format has been the development of a national community of learners.

Project IMPACT has produced some novel results. For example, participants in Turbotville wear USU sweatshirts to class. Participants compete with other sites in game formats in order to win pizza delivered by local food franchises. Groups at each site present information on selected topics to other sites. The project has brought groups together who otherwise would never have acknowledged each other.

National training of paraprofessionals is timely given recent passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which includes Title I. The NCLB Act states that, under direct supervision of a teacher, a Title I paraprofessional must receive training and meet more rigorous standards of quality. Thus, the courses provide a component of training leading to required qualifications of paraprofessionals.

As it enters its final year of funding, Project IMPACT has established relationships among participants working in school districts across the U.S. and has improved the knowledge and skills of special educators. The technology represents one new avenue for delivering courses. It may also provide a vehicle for future venues, such as connecting guest speakers with audiences for workshops or conferences, assembling professionals from different sites for meetings, or allowing teachers to consult with experts on particular topics.