

Newsletter

Gifted Program Retrospective: *Teachers Look Back at Own Experiences*

By Colleen Willard-Holt, Wilfrid Laurier University

NOTE: Colleen Willard-Holt's Gifted Child Quarterly (2008, volume 52, issue 4, pp. 313-325) article, "You Could Be Doing Brain Surgery": Gifted Girls becoming Teachers, sought to understand the reasons why gifted females chose teaching as a career. One aspect, the effects of gifted programs and services is discussed in the following piece, which presents text and analysis not found in the GCQ article. Her findings and insight provide a better understanding of students' feelings about gifted education programs and services.

In "You Could Be Doing Brain Surgery": Gifted Girls Becoming Teachers (2008), the gifted women I interviewed discussed the implicit messages they received from educators about the career choices. During the interviews, I asked the participants to speak to their own experiences in gifted programs as children and adolescents. Their experiences, the benefits derived from gifted education programming, and some of the negative recollections they shared provide interesting insights, particularly because they are filtered through the lenses of teachers. Here I share two

cautionary notes from the participants' experiences, followed by of the memorable and beneficial activities they related.

Experiences during the Identification Process

Several participants mentioned that the gifted program identification process had been traumatic for them. Bridget stated, "I know I was pulled into a room and I had to take a test...I knew at the time that it was the school psychologist. I knew that word. Oh my gosh, I'm being taken to this room." Linda's experience was even more upsetting:

They tested me really early. It was in the summer between my kindergarten and first grade year. All I remember was it was really hot and they wanted to stuff me in a little closet with somebody I didn't know and I was very irate because nobody would tell me what this test was for, only that it was really important. So I decided that it wasn't as important as they thought and I tried to answer everything exactly the opposite of what the instructor or psychology told me to do. I ended up in LD for about two weeks, and then



they quickly decided that wasn't really the place for me, and my second grade teacher fought and fought and fought to have me retested, and I guess they retested me in fourth or fifth grade...

Stacy's experience was equally bizarre:

"When I was in third grade I was 18 months younger than the oldest kid in the class, and they held me back because I was only seven, so I was tested and found to be gifted. But they did put me back in second grade and then

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Retrospective

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as I got older I was in all the gifted classes...The only thing that it did was hurt me psychologically."

In order to protect the feelings of children who are tested and don't qualify for gifted programs, parents and teachers sometimes conceal the reason for the testing. The lesson from these gifted women is that children as young as first grade would benefit more from frank discussion of the reason for the testing, along the lines of, "We have noticed that you learn things quickly. We want you to take this test to help us figure out the best way to help you learn."

Treatment by Teachers, Other Children

After being placed in the gifted program, not all experiences were positive. Several participants mentioned that being pulled out caused problems for them. Bridget recalled, "I didn't like being pulled out... When the teacher came into my classroom and said it's time to leave I just hated it... I was worried about what everyone else thought about what we were doing over there... We weren't supposed to talk about it with the rest of the students and we never got to show them what we were doing and so maybe I would have felt more comfortable if they knew what I was doing."

Bridget's qualms came to life in some of the things that happened to Heather, "I remember specifically in fifth grade and we were taken out of our class every Wednesday...we were in this classroom with this other teacher all day long, and I hated it because on that day of the week nobody wanted to play with you outside. Everybody teased you because you were so smart."

As Grace put it, "Sometimes when you do well people aren't so very gracious about it." This is a somewhat common occurrence. In a pullout situation, it can sometimes be ameliorated by talking to the rest of the class about different learning needs being met in different ways, augmented with discussion among the gifted students themselves about how to deal with classmates who are less than "gracious."

More bothersome are the reactions of the teachers:

I remember particularly right after I got labeled as gifted...they used to get really irate with us? 'Oh yeah, that's right, you have to leave this afternoon – you're gifted.' One teacher didn't really care for that and wouldn't give us the assignments for the afternoon. – Linda

It was good to be with my peers, but sometimes it was annoying to seemingly get 'rewarded' for success in school with more homework. – Sharon

Unfortunately, we have some teachers who felt that if you're in a level five class they didn't need to teach you, you can figure this out by yourself...They put a lot of pressure on me to perform. – Kelly

One would hope that teachers' understandings of gifted students and their needs would be more enlightened some 10 years later. Punishing gifted students by withholding information, giving extra work, or putting undue pressure on them borders on educational malpractice. Few teachers are likely to treat students with other exceptionalities in the same way. This inequity needs to be pointed out to the teacher or if that is ineffective, to the principal and higher administration.

Memorable Experiences in Gifted Programs

Overall, seven participants praised their elementary programs, while three praised their middle school or high school programs. On the other hand, two participants had negative comments about their elementary programs, while six criticized their middle school or high school programs. A few participants dropped out of the gifted program in middle school. Seven mentioned



that the gifted program ceased to exist from fifth grade until they were able to take AP or honors courses in high school, which were, of course, open to high-achieving students who were not necessarily gifted. Nearly all participants who had participated in an elementary program had good memories of the activities they had done. Several mentioned brainteasers and logic problems. Following are some more specific activities remembered over a decade later:

It was mostly creativity. Extensions. For example, if we were learning about a war in social studies class, we would do some type of production about the war in gifted class. So there was always a relation to what we were learning about, but it was always some type of creative extension... – Bridget

From kindergarten to third grade we did a lot of fun stuff. It was an enrichment program and we got to learn foreign languages, we got to go on field trips to museums and all these extra places, and it was a lot of fun and I really got a lot out of it. We did experiments all the time and hands-on activities like that. – Pam

I loved it. Those are basically the main memories I have of elementary school.



Author Biography

Colleen Willard-Holt was associate professor of education and Director of Initial teacher Certification Programs at Penn State – Harrisburg when this research was conducted. Currently, Willard-Holt is Dean of the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. She has been a teacher, coordinator, researcher and trainer of teachers and administrators in the area of gifted education for more than 25 years.

Even as early as second grade I remember what we did: we made fossils, we created cookbooks. In fourth grade we did a huge mythology unit and we created a Greek newspaper – an we had to do ads and we had to write stories and things like that. We did an Ellis Island unit that was awesome. We actually did a dramatization of going through Ellis Island. And our teacher was one of the guards there and he stole all my money and I couldn't do anything about it. Then I got deported and it was like...I mean it actually had people in tears over it, and really sunk in, really what it was about. – Lisa

In the sixth grade program...they actually took the kids out and they did different stuff such as photography, field experiences, they went out and they camped, and just basically learned different things about the land, how to live off the land, and different aspects of our ecosystem. – Patti

I think I got some things out of the [gifted pullout]. One of the things that I know that I got out of it was that every year we did some kind of like mini project where we actually went to the library and looked things up and that was something that didn't happen in my regular classrooms. So I feel like I had some experience there like going into middle school that I wouldn't have had if I wouldn't have been in that program. – Kelly

Initially, I really, really liked it through the elementary grades. I remember building mouse habitats, and just doing strange little projects that nobody else got to do. Doing projects on...I did one on Sally Ride and I learned sign language and presented it to the class as a whole. – Grace

While these activities had appealed to the other participants, Linda related her frustration at activities that were not individualized to her needs:

I remember doing sessions on architecture and underwater archeology and all this stuff, and that was not at all what my interest was in and it was really frustrating to have to sit through that because that's what everybody else was doing...It was challenging, but it wasn't interesting. It had some good points. It did get me into...advanced math and science...

While she didn't recall the specifics of the elementary gifted classes, Stacy did comment on the quality of her work within the program:

Actually that's when I did my best work. I don't really remember a lot, though, unfortunately, but I do remember that that's when I did my best work. If you went back to my report cards when I was just in average classes they were like C's and D's, but then when I got into higher level classes they were like A's and B's.

The vast majority of participants were very positive about their elementary gifted programs. Several also were very complimentary about their middle and high school programs:

I had AP English, AP American history, AP Spanish, and AP world cultures...I liked them a lot. I thought they were very challenging. – Katherine

I was in several honors classes and took AP English. I enjoyed it. It gave me an opportunity to try new things and experience a higher academic level than I was experiencing in regular classes. – Jen

In addition, Jo and Carol described the lasting impact of their high school programs on their collegiate studies:

Well, I was in advanced English from eighth grade to 11th grade, and then I was put in Advanced Placement for 12th grade. To tell you the truth, I loved it and everybody else hated it. But I loved it because it was basically intense writing study and it was also intense around literature background and vocabulary, so it really prepared me not only for the SATs, but also to write papers for pretty much anything. It gave me a good background with sentence structure, and

essay writing and composition writing, paragraph structure, you know, the usual stuff that gets covered a little slower in the other classes. We did a paper every week. And it really helped me. They always got ripped apart by the teachers, but in the end I took freshman composition and I did really well. – Jo

My class was the first ever AP calculus in my high school and there were only 13 of us that took it out of a class of over 300. It was a wonderful opportunity and it helped me obtain an A in my first college calculus course. – Carol

In summary, the benefits of gifted programs discussed by the participants overwhelmingly outweighed the detrimental aspects. The problematic issues with identification and poor treatment by classmates and teachers could be mostly avoided with future students if teachers communicated clearly about the purpose of testing, and if they made other children and teacher aware of the importance of all programs designed to meet individual needs, including those of gifted students. The recollections of gifted programs shared by the participants illustrate how good programs have continuing effects long after the students have moved on. The participants clearly understood the benefits of the programs to their future studies. More importantly, they recalled not only specific concepts they had learned, but also the joy in learning that the programs had engendered.

Notes: Some of these data were previously published in Willard-Holt, C. (2004). Looking back: The good, the bad, and the ugly about gifted programming. *Gifted Education Press Quarterly*, 18(1), 9-12. This article is reprinted with permission from the National Association for the Gifted. It first appeared in the Fall 2008 issue of *Teaching for High Potential*.



Editor's Note

It's a new year, and with it comes the opportunity for reflection. What worked last year? What could I adapt to make this better, different, more interesting this year? Whether you are a resolution maker or not, this issue is designed to have something to pique your interest.

We have a retrospective look at gifted young women and their memories of the gifted programming of their youth in *Gifted Program Retrospective: Teachers Look Back At Own*

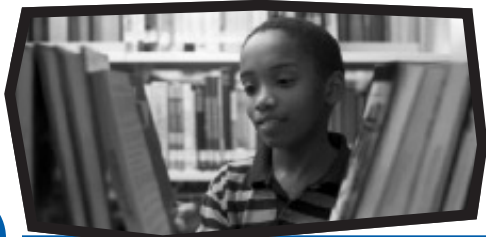


Experiences by Colleen Willard-Holt of Wilfrid Laurier University. An article by Bob Schultz of the University of Toledo questions the use of *The Accelerated Reading Program for gifted students in Motivation or Mis-Application: The Accelerated Reader Program and Gifted Learners*. In addition, Alex Pagnani from the University of Georgia gives some great rationales and strategies for using science fiction and fantasy in the classroom in his article, *Fantasy and Science Fiction: New Worlds for Gifted Minds!*

This issue presents the Virginia Nicholas Greene Distinguished Student Award winner, Justine Elliot. We also recognize our VAG Outstanding Teachers of the Year and the Virginia Leader of the Year as well as those from the state of Virginia who received recognition at the National Association for Gifted Children conference in St. Louis. Don't forget to check out the pictorial coverage of the VAG Conference!

There's plenty here to keep you turning pages this issue, but as always, I'd love your input. Send your submissions to me at sferguson@mbc.edu.

Stephanie K. Ferguson



Letter from the Executive Director

We are using email as a means to get information to you quicker. Please help us keep our email addresses up-to-date. If your email address has changed or if you haven't received an email from us since January 1, please email us your new email address. Your name and email address are all we need. We want to be able to let you know about opportunities and resources – email is the best way for us to do this. If in doubt, send an email to vagifted@comcast.net.



The Regulations have been signed by the Governor and will be posted to the Virginia Town Hall Register on February 1, 2010. They will have to remain on the Register for 30 days, without protest, before they become effective. Should they be protested, they will go back to the Board of Education for further review.

The Board of Education (BOE) approved the Standards of Quality (SOQ) in October 2009. The next step is for the General Assembly (GA) to approve them. The GA can make changes before they approve them so the BOE approved version may or may not be the final version accepted by the GA. Delegate Tata's bill HB 558 Standards of Quality; Changes in Provisions, addresses the changes recommended by the BOE.

Some of the headlines about budget cuts in education and especially gifted education are alarming. It is very important for each of you to let your school boards and boards of supervisors and city councils know how important gifted education is in meeting the needs of your students/children. VAG board members visited members of the General Assembly in January to advocate for quality education for all, especially our gifted learners.

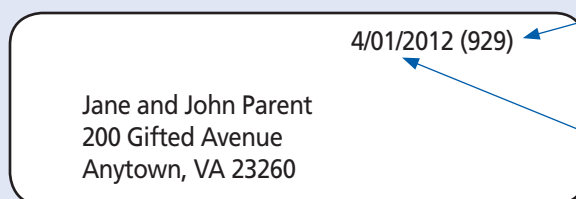
Members of the VAG board will visit members of Congress in March to advocate on behalf of the gifted education community to increase federal support for gifted and talented learners. We will again ask for funding of the Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act.

Liz Nelson

New Website for DOE

The Virginia Department of education has a redesigned website – old bookmarks may not work. Go to <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/index.shtml>. To find information about gifted education or Governor's Schools, click on the main topic of 'Instruction,' located on the left-side tool bar. Once on the 'Instruction' main page, you will need to scroll down until the right-side tool bar reflects the category 'Specialized Instruction.' Under that title you will see both Gifted Education and Governor's Schools. This new site has basically the same information as the old site, except there is now a section under the gifted education page for 'Outside Resources.'

Check Your Address Label



Membership
Number

Renewal
Date

Nicolas Green Distinguished Student Award Winner

The winner of the 2009 Nicholas Green Distinguished Student Award is **Justine Elliott**, now a seventh grade student at Providence Middle School in Richmond, Va. Justine has shown herself to be an altruistic leader in her school. Congratulations to Justine on winning the 2009 Nicholas Green Distinguished Student Award. We have no doubt that you will be leading the way for many years to come!

Excerpted from the recommendation letter of Kathy Ashbrook, Pre-K Teacher, Providence Elementary School

Justine was chosen by her fifth grade teacher to assist my pre-k students on the bus and to escort them to class. Justine gladly accepted the responsibility. In fact, she did much more than that. She took a special interest in each and every child in my class. Justine volunteered to give up her recess time so that she could help out with my students. She is a natural born teacher and leader. Justine would help out in many ways. Sometimes she would work one-on-one with children to reinforce letter or number recognition or on other skills. Other times she would assist me win demonstrating different concepts to

my students. Justine always amazed me with her compassion for the little ones. She always wanted to help in any way that she could. Each holiday, Justine would hand-make something special for each and every child in my room.

Justine is an extraordinary human being. She always puts others ahead of herself. In a world filled with so many takers, Justine is a giver. She is not only giving of material items, but she also gives of herself and her time.

A paraphrased excerpt from Justine Elliott's application ...

Being A Leader

When I entered fifth grade, I made a commitment to help out with the new preschool class. My responsibilities started each day on the bus ride to school. The preschoolers riding my bus would jump on and share the same seat as me. My job was to make sure they were safe, sitting down and behaving. When we arrived at school, we would all hop off the bus and head for their classroom. I had a special



Justine Elliott

way of keeping them together so that I wouldn't lose any of them. They would hold on to each other's backpack handles, and we would make a train. Easy enough! Once we got to their room, I helped them unpack their things and then off to class

I would go. Instead of going to recess that year, I chose to volunteer my time every day to help with these children because my bus duties just didn't feel like enough. I quickly got attached to these little students and wanted to help out as much as possible.

There was one little boy in the class that I took a special interest in. He had autism and didn't socialize easily with others. He and I connected! I loved his special hugs and smile! It really touched my heart when I saw him say his colors, write his name and say the alphabet. I know those were big challenges for him. I was allowed to participate in and attend their preschool graduation ceremony. I was given the job of handing out programs to all of the parents and was very proud of each student as they were individually recognized. I hear that these little students are doing well in school. Even though I can't be with them, I will always remember them and I hope they will always remember me. I know that this experience will help make me a better teacher and leader someday.

Dates and Deadlines

The VAG Newsletter is published four times each year. Deadlines for items are November 15, February 15, May 15 and August 15. Send articles or photographs to VAG Newsletter Editor, P. O. Box 26212, Richmond, VA 23260-6212 or e-mail sferguson@mbc.edu. Black and white or color prints can be used, but will not be returned to you.

VAG Membership Application

Name _____ Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Fax No. _____
Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ E-mail _____

Check as appropriate:

____ Parent _____ (Name of school division your child/children attend)
____ Professional _____ (Name of school division where you are employed)
____ 1 Year \$20.00 ____ 2 Years \$35.00 ____ New Member ____ Renewal – Membership No. _____

Outstanding Teacher of the Gifted Award Winners

The Virginia Association for the Gifted awarded its eleventh annual Outstanding Teacher of the Gifted Awards at the 13th Virginia Conference on Gifted Education in October. The individuals were recognized for their contribution to the gifted education programs in their regions.

The following are excerpts from the candidates' packets and letters of recommendation submitted to VAG in support of their nominations.

Region I: Shannon Hayes Chesterfield County Public Schools

"Upon reading her application materials, I am sure you will recognize Mrs. Hayes' enthusiasm, expertise, dedication, and commitment to the learning and development of gifted students. Shannon is a powerful teacher and facilitator. On a daily basis, she inspires and engages students in meaningful curricular experiences that deepen students' understanding of concepts and skills. Mrs. Hayes sees teaching as creative expression and skillfully guides each student down unique pathways of learning and into excellence. Mrs. Hayes willingly supports her teammates with collaboration and leadership. She exemplifies high standards for herself, students, and colleagues. As a passionate advocate or gifted learners and all who work with them, Mrs. Hayes is an excellent candidate for this honor."

"Mrs. Hayes has the ability to inspire her eighth grade students. She values students' points-of-view, challenges their assumptions, makes learning relevant and personal, and builds lessons around big ideas. With professionalism and good



Shannon Hayes

nature, she delivers the curriculum in a rigorous and student-centered manner. She takes special interest in every child, recognizes their unique gifts, and treats them as though they share her last name. She does not take "I don't know" for an answer, refuses to accept excuses for incomplete homework or questions left unanswered. She accepts responsibility for her students' performance by questioning and challenging teaching routines when they prove ineffective. She embraces her obligation for student success and well-being with heartfelt commitment."

"In my six years as an identified gifted student, I have run into a handful of teachers who have stood apart from the rest of the teaching population so clearly in my mind and really excel at teaching students and communicating their knowledge to a class of kids. I would definitely consider Mrs. Hayes to be one of these unique individuals. In her class we incorporate skits and songs and games to go over curriculum and reiterate what we have learned. For example, after reading the self-help book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, the class was split into groups and assigned one of the seven habits. The group then performed an art form of their choice (e.g., skit, poetry, song, dance) to exemplify the assigned habit. This was a creative exercise to review and reinforce what we had read, and I am sure that I will remember each habit long after my middle school years. Everything in Mrs. Hayes' class – from learning SAT vocabulary in the form of a song to grammar exercises – is interactive, creative and original. Mrs. Hayes always brings her great, dynamic personality into the classroom so we can get the optimal experience from her class."

Region II: Carolyn Stamm Virginia Beach City Public Schools

"Carolyn Stamm is a catalyst for change. Her work to inspire and coach

the teachers at her school has impacted teachers and students in remarkable ways. Ms. Stamm models and creates differentiated lessons always searching for what is the best practice in any given situation. Her impact is evident throughout her school as she implements opportunities for performance tasks, seminars, and other appropriate strategies. She provides support to teachers at every opportunity. Her impact on students and teachers cannot be underestimated."

"Ms. Stamm has an engaging personality that inspires not only students. Her love of learning and enthusiasm for the task at hand is evident through her positive participation with the students. She creates leading, higher-level thinking questions



Carolyn Stamm

that engage and excite students into searching for real world and innovative solutions. She does not sit idle and watch the students work, but rather, delves into the tasks with them. She creates rigorous yet humorous performance tasks and rubric that promote awareness of real world situations to

which students relate. She works diligently to establish a wonderful rapport with all of the students, regardless of whether they are in the Gifted program or not."

"Not only does Ms. Stamm work tirelessly with the students, she also devotes a great deal of time encouraging teachers. She enriches all teachers' knowledge of the newest methods of engaging students through fun and energetic in-service opportunities. She offers her expertise to not only the gifted cluster teachers, but to any teachers who wish to have her assistance. Her efforts extend beyond her time in the classroom."

"Ms. Stamm is an example of what every teacher should aspire to being – a teacher who teaches children how to think. Teaching children to make meaning from the information available to them is her goal, a goal that she is working very hard for children to learn. She is extremely

knowledgeable about what children need to be challenged; she is the mistress of differentiation; she works around the clock and on weekends to ensure that students and teachers will have high quality assignments; and she is dedicated to having every child exposed to rigorous, engaging work in a supportive and safe environment. What more could a student, a teacher, an administrator want for a gifted resource teacher?"

**Region IV-E: Josi Mani
Fairfax County Public
Schools**

"Ms. Mani has dedicated herself to enhancing the school-wide GT program, the Young Scholars Program, and to the expansion of the use of GT strategies in all classrooms. Because of her leadership, all students are receiving a gifted education."

"Ms. Mani understands the individual needs of students, encourages their talents, and fosters their self-esteem. At the same time, she has had an impact on the general education classroom expectations for all students. She acts as an advocate for gifted children. For example, during the screening process, she is able to ask guiding questions to help teachers report on the talents of the students that may not show their talents in a typical way. She continues to educate herself, out faculty, and the community about Gifted/Talented education. On many occasions, Ms. Mani has participated in staff meetings, school and community events in order to speak on the behalf of GT children. She not only acts as an advocate for gifted children, but also as an advocate for all children. Ms. Mani also encourages creativity and innovation in our staff. She often presents information to our staff to inspire everyone to make positive changes in their classrooms. Because of her gentle demeanor, she is able to initiate new ideas that are received with openness."

"Ms. Mani's work with gifted education does not stop with classroom teachers and classroom programs. She is instrumental in a school-wide culture that looks for and sees the potential in all students. Through in-services on twice exceptional students and gifted learning strategies, she pushes all teachers to stretch student

VAG Winners at NAGC

Virginia was once again represented at the 2009 National Association for Gifted Children (NAGC) awards ceremony in St. Louis, Mo. Congratulations to **Valija Rose** who was awarded the NAGC Doctoral Student Award, which is presented to individuals who exhibit the highest and most consistent degree of scholarship in the gifted education field.



Valija Rose

Valija has 10 years experience as a high school mathematics teacher, serving in both urban and suburban settings. She has taught a range of courses including advanced placement statistics and advanced placement calculus. In 2005, Valija was named Norfolk Public Schools High School Teacher of the Year. Her most recent position was working as a high school gifted resource teacher. Valija holds a bachelor and masters degree in economics from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey and the University of Michigan respectively. Currently she is pursuing a doctoral degree from The College of William and Mary in educational policy, planning, and leadership with a concentration in gifted education.

Congratulations also go to **Dr. Kimberly Chandler** from The College of William and Mary who was awarded the 2009 Curriculum Award sponsored by the Curriculum Division, which seeks to identify and highlight exceptional curriculum developed by educators who are members of NAGC. The K-3 science unit titled "Water Works" engages students in close observation and experimentation on water. The overarching concept of change is reinforced as students notice, react to, reflect on, and discover more about force and change. Students ask questions and design experiments to reinforce their learning. Generalizations about how things change are developed through students' analysis of their findings. Students explore the characteristics of water, discover whether objects sink or float, experiment to make things float, and examine materials and their interactions with water.



Dr. Kimberly Chandler

thinking. Furthermore, she created a school-wide strategy lab in order to encourage teachers to systematically and directly teach students universal thinking strategies. Ms. Mani found funding to purchase strategy games as well as create a 'strategy lab unit' to help teachers in their universal strategy instruction. With her in-services and strategy lab, she aims to reach all students, not just the students identified for gifted services."



Josi Mani

The 13th Virginia Conference on Gifted Education

Advancing the Possibilities



October 22-24, 2009 Williamsburg Marriott, 50 Kingsmill Road, Williamsburg, Virginia



Dr. Cross's presentations were timely and important. Good to have him in Virginia.



This is a wonderful conference. Keep up the good work.

As always, I liked the hands-on activities - Something I can take back and use immediately.



Helped me to see that somebody is thinking about our gifted students...



Many worthwhile sessions.



I am so inspired!

I can't wait

to take these ideas back to my students and teachers.

Vendors were great.

I really enjoyed learning about practical ways to incorporate differentiation.



Virginia Leader of the Year Award

The Leader of the Year Award is presented to an individual at any level (parent, teacher, coordinator, administrator, legislator, other) whose exemplary leadership and outstanding contribution to gifted education has affected Virginia's children, teachers, schools, programs, and/or policies.

The 2009 Leader of the Year Award is **Margaret Gilhooley**, Supervisor of Gifted Services in Arlington Public Schools. The following are excerpts from letters of recommendation from the packet submitted in support of her nomination.



Margaret Gilhooley

“Leadership in gifted education at the regional, commonwealth, and national levels has been a mainstay of Ms. Gilhooley’s experience. For the last two years, which have been very busy for leadership in gifted education in Virginia given the proposed changes in gifted regulations, she has served as the Vice Chair of the Virginia Consortium on Gifted Education. She was also very involved at the outset, in piloting procedures for two major national projects: Primary Source Learning, an initiative of the Library of Congress, and Poetry Out Loud, a joint initiative of the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation. Her participation in, and support for, these endeavors continues well beyond the pilot phase. Though these specific examples may seem isolated and lack much in common, they are similar in that Ms. Gilhooley has approached each of them with the purpose, perspective, and vision of maximizing opportunities for gifted children and provision of essential supports for staff who teach them. Further examples of Ms. Gilhooley’s promotion of expanded opportunities and support for gifted students include her formulating and organizing the Superintendent’s Seminar, a summer experience for Arlington students nominated, but not selected, for attendance at one of the summer residential governor’s schools and Arlington’s biennial Parent Institute, a parent education forum to provide parents of gifted students with necessary information and skills for supporting their gifted children. She is the consummate child advocate and leader in gifted education.”

“Ms. Gilhooley supports a myriad of opportunities for our students within the school day and as extracurricular options. Because of Margaret’s leadership, we have emphasized and encouraged the inclusion of diverse learners in advanced classes at the secondary level. Over time, we have seen a marked increase in our second language and minority students participating in advanced classes; as well as an increase in their identification for gifted services. She has purposefully created partnerships between the Gifted Services staff and the Minority Achievement staff and the English as a Second Language staff. On many occasions, she has provided joint training with these departments and the gifted resource teachers to assure that we understand the characteristics of these special populations and the particular strategies to best serve them in the classroom. This joint training has also served to create relationships among us for future collaborations – certainly a positive outcome of Ms. Gilhooley’s efforts. Additionally, Ms. Gilhooley has made sure that the gifted resource teachers receive training about twice exceptional students so that we stay current in the field of gifted education as it relates to the special education child. This is another example of her wide ranging vision in the work that we do with gifted kids. We have definitely seen an increase in special education learners who are in need of gifted services and it is crucial that we keep up with the research that is available in that arena. She extensively reads and studies the educational literature and makes sure that all training provided to her staff is of the highest quality and based on current research. This is a trait of hers that makes her a leader above so many others. Her knowledge of the field of gifted education and so many other areas – general education, law, literature, art, horticulture, technology, just to name a few – is astounding. She, too, has many gifts.

Motivation or Mis-Application: *The Accelerated Reader*® Program and Gifted Learners

By Bob Schultz, University of Toledo

The Program

The Accelerated Reader® (AR) is a computer-based, reading management and motivational system designed to supplement the existing elementary classroom reading program. The program encourages students to read and improve comprehension by using a goal and incentive system. AR (1998) offers more than 75,000 quizzes on fiction and nonfiction books from publishers around the world.

The most commonly used AR program in schools is a series of grade equivalency leveled quizzes associated with trade books available in the school or public library. Points are allocated based on student quiz scores with the intent of providing motivational awards or prizes upon completion of school-determined benchmark scores for reading completion and comprehension.

Mis-Application

Unfortunately, few schools initiate AR as it was developed and researched. In many cases, schools purchase and use AR as a means of validating reader ability based on grade equivalency growth as measured by periodic Standardized Test for Assessment of Reading® (STAR) applications. Students are required to complete a certain number of points per grading period (as established by teachers or a grade-level committee) and usually receive a number grade associated with completion of this task.

This in-practice implementation of the AR program has not been studied, and may actually undermine the existing research support associated with the primary intent of AR being a motivational and supplementary tool for a more detailed reading curriculum. This mis-application of a motivational tool has a negative impact on high-ability readers and gifted/talented learners.

In my work with gifted and talented learners, there have been many instances where parents have complained that their voracious reading child had “shut down” or stopped reading after taking part in AR programs at schools. Upon further investi-

gation, gifted learners share some interesting comments:

“I hate reading. I used to like to read for fun, but now reading is nothing but forced. I have to earn points each quarter or my grade is lowered. There are lots of times I just take the tests in the morning to see if I can guess enough right to pass.”
– fourth grade boy, Ohio.

“Isn’t reading supposed to be something you do for fun on your own after you learn how to read? I have to pick from a narrow set of books, most of which are not interesting to me.”
– second grade girl, Illinois

And in other situations, school-savvy gifted students have found ways to work around the AR requirements. On forthright student shared:

“We’ve devised a nice system. We each pick one book worth the most points we can get. We read it take the test and then discuss the test questions and answers amongst ourselves.”
– sixth grade girl, South Carolina

Is this cheating? Or, is this a way that gifted students have learned to cope with a “motivational program” that provides little in the way of motivation and more in the way of programmed reading rather than pleasure reading.

Watts (2004) presents additional support to the contention that AR deters and degrades advanced learners’ motivation to read. Watts found that seventh-grade students scoring highly on the STAR tests

consistently complained about the limited options available to them for reading and the requirement for completing quizzes over reading as a way to earn a grade.

Obviously, there needs to be research done that specifically addresses the unique needs of advanced readers and their experiences with the AR program. I encourage you to start looking closely at the impact that a research-supported motivational program can have when the research does not consider the gifted and talented learner. The research statistics might be there in general, but when considering the gifted population of readers and their advanced abilities, the target has not been even recognized on the research map.

What are your experiences and thoughts about the AR program in schools? Have you considered the impact this program might have on advanced readers? Have you wondered how much impact “pay for pages” has on kids’ developing sense of pleasure reading? I welcome your comments in the hopes we can advocate more effectively for programs more suited for students of high ability.

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Dr. Robert A. Schultz earned his Ph.D. from Kent State University. Dr. Schultz teaches courses in gifted education, curriculum theory, qualitative research and middle grades philosophy, methods and practice. His work addresses the social and emotional needs of gifted individuals including teacher education, individualization, and program evaluation, design and delivery enhancing opportunities for critical learning engagement in and beyond classrooms. He may be contacted at Robert.Schultz@utoledo.edu.



Fantasy and Science Fiction: New Worlds for Gifted Minds!

by Alexander R. Pagnani, University of Georgia

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How many of the following are you familiar with: *Harry Potter*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Hobbit*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Eragon*, *Star Trek*, and *Star Wars*? As an educator of the gifted, odds are that you have encountered most, if not all of these literary titles while glancing across your students' desks in recent years. Long assumed to be favorites of the gifted, fantasy and science fiction literature now account for 10% of fiction book sales nationwide (Hartwell, 1996, p. 304). And researchers estimate that nearly half of the highly gifted enjoy these genres (Lovecky, 1994). This revelation is nothing new however, considering that Terman noticed a link between giftedness and interest in scientific stories or folk tales in the 1940's (Link, 1984, p. 16), and the *Torrance Test of Creative Thinking* awards extra points to students who integrate fantastic elements into their pictorial answers (Torrance, 1974). Research literature is also flooded with anecdotal reports of gifted children clinging to their favorite fantasy and science fiction titles, such as Gross' (2000) description of a gifted child who taught himself to read by age three, completed C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series by four, and fought at the age of five to reclaim his copy of *The Hobbit* from a kindergarten teacher who confiscated it over worries that it might give him nightmares.

What is it about these stories that so captivates the minds of our gifted students? One possible explanation originates in Dabrowski's theory of overexcitabilities; part of which claims that gifted individuals experience higher levels of intellectual, imaginal, and emotional stimulation (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984) all found in heavy doses in fantasy and science fiction novels. If this is the case, what lessons can educators of the gifted apply to their own teaching styles and classrooms as a result?



Dabrowski's Theory

Polish psychologist Kazimierz Dabrowski (1902-1980) survived two world wars and 18 months in communist imprisonment, feats that led him to question the influential differences between moral and immoral individuals. After decades of psychological evaluations with gifted children, he devised a theory linking advanced moral/emotional growth potential to the appearance of "overexcitabilities" (or literally translated "supersensitivities") within five domains: psychomotor, sensual, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984).

According to Dabrowski's theory, these overexcitabilities not only hint at advanced moral/emotional growth capacity, but also exist in higher proportion among gifted individuals. Three of these, intellectual, imaginal, and emotional, have been shown to occur in high rates within gifted populations and also may help to explain the reported links between gifted children and fantasy/science fiction literature (Piechowski & Colangelo, 1984). Lengthy novels, multi-book series, moral quandaries, complex character back-stories, scientific discussion, and real-world historical references are commonly occurring elements of these genres.

Imaginatively, these non-reality based fiction genres create entire worlds

to explore, far beyond the experiences of daily life. It is not uncommon, for instance, for these novels to include multi-page maps to help readers visualize the fictional continents, planets, or galaxies where the tale unfolds.

Emotionally, intense dramas of character tension, struggles of good versus evil and meaningful questions as to humanity's place in the universe dominate these stories. Invested readers may feel bittersweet joy if a hero sacrifices himself to save his friends, or feel stunned and relieved when time travel results in the character's rescue. If gifted children possess an increased capacity for intellectual, imaginal, and emotional potential, it is no wonder why they find enjoyment in these remarkable genres. Fantasy and science fiction each stretch readers' creativity as they encounter the unusual and unexpected. This conclusion begs two pertinent questions: (a) What lessons can classroom teachers take from such an understanding? and (b) How can they best direct these interests for positive academic and affective results?

Embrace Creative Depth

If imaginal creativity captivates our gifted students, educators should develop performance tasks commensurate to their interests and abilities. Students who read science fiction might enjoy

About the Author

At the time of this article's original publication, *Alex Pagnani* was an educational psychology doctoral student at the University of Georgia where he specialized in gifted education. His recent academic interests have included the reading preferences of gifted males, the use of biography in affective discussion, the role of humor in gifted education, and the father-son relationships of eminent men. He attributes his lifelong passion for reading to fantasy and science fiction, which hooked him early and has yet to let go.

being given the geological and atmospheric details of a fictional planet and apply science to design organisms that could flourish there. Students who enjoy fantasy and classical mythology might similarly enjoy the challenge of identifying five modern cultural values and composing original fables illustrating these ideas.

Fantasy and science fiction reward creativity and imagination, and educators should strive to do the same. Classroom projects should not just involve creative aspects, they should require them. The “mile wide and surface deep” criticism of modern education provides a serious challenge. Teachers should respond by encouraging students to dig deeply and show their full potential, using every ounce of creativity they possess.

Aim to Motivate

Cognitive science teaches us that students are best equipped to master knowledge in which they demonstrate an interest (Caine & Caine, 1995), yet how many educators administer interest inventories before beginning to teach classroom lessons? If we hop to engage out students’ minds on a deep and meaningful level, it would be wise to teach to their interests in a manner they do not often receive in traditional classrooms. Doing so draws on prior knowledge, increases the complexity of their conceptual understandings, and encourages students to take a leading role in their own educational process. The classic adage ‘Give a man a fish...’ encapsulates this value perfectly, and if educators seek to empower students to direct their own learning processes they would be wise to heed its lessons.

Some gifted students may be motivated by more by mystery than science fiction

or by music rather than fantasy. If so, ask them to write a short mystery or musical to be performed for the class revolving around a recent lesson. In addition to positive effects on motivation, linking classroom studies to personal interests will also help your students with long-term recall as well (Naceur & Schiefele, 2005).

Encourage Affective Discussion

Educators and counselors have found that discussion of affective issues can often be drawn from popular literature and films. This lends particular credence to claims by Black (2003) that fantasy and science fiction literature can be “a valuable tool for meeting the need to (engage gifted imaginations, (b) help the gifted to understand better their personal needs and conflicts, and (c) provide them the tools to reason through deeper meanings of the universe” (p. 47).

Educators of the gifted should use these books and films as stepping stones to deeper discussion, relating the textual or cinematic moments to the actual social and emotional experiences of gifted children. Fantasy and science fiction routinely pose questions related to identity, talent, morality, and peer relations. Teacher should not shy away from exploring these topics. For example, a teacher may wish to discuss Harry Potter with her class as a means of subtly initiating a discussion on individuality and “feeling differently,” or might choose to use Luke Skywalker as an example of a hero who never gave up or surrendered to adversity. Using popular stories and imagery as a starting point for serious conversation often relieves pressure and makes students feel interested and relaxed, and is a great way to foster meaningful classroom discussions.

Keep a Broad Perspective

The Greeks had Odysseus, the Romans had Aenius, and the Anglo-Saxons had King Arthur. What mythological figures to our modern day American students have to teach them the values of right and wrong? Although he has been an American icon for nearly 70 years, we hardly seem to give Batman the credit he’s due! Although I do not recommend reading comic books to your gifted students, the lesson within holds true: educational opportunities often lie in unexpected places.

Traditionalists may scoff at the notion of finding academic and emotional value in Batman tales, but could a creative instructor find opportunities to link such stories to actual educational objectives? The answer is almost surely yes. Through keeping a broad educational perspective, everyday experiences can become hidden treasures for the creative teacher in search of new instructional approaches. With this understanding, teachers of the gifted should renew their dedication to using whatever means necessary to ensure productive classroom learning. If your students are fans of science fiction, archeology, jazz music, or fantasy, each provides a unique and enriched opportunity in which meaningful learning can take place. Valuing these opportunities not only affirms the worth of the subjects themselves, but also communicates to students that their personal interests are valid and worthwhile. Regardless of age, that is a message we would all be glad to hear.

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Yearning For Great Books

by Matt Shaffer, senior, Davenport College
at Yale University



As the senior class of Yale College prepares for its final semester and reflects on the Bright College Years so swiftly gliding by, I have heard one phrase repeated with surprising frequency: “I wish I had done Directed Studies.” It’s a statement that doesn’t accord with the stereotype of Yale seniors as either careerists shaking hands toward Wall Street or activists uninterested in the intellectual foundations of their slogans.

Directed Studies is a full year, freshmen-only Great Books program. The very short, very intense introduction to the Western Canon consists of three courses per semester – one in Literature, Philosophy, and History & Political Thought each. All students together attend lectures by professors like Harold Bloom, Dave Kastan, Donald Kagan, Charles Hill, and others less famous but equally revered by their students. Afterward, students break out into smaller discussion seminars.

The program has a reputation for being demanding, and a quick look at the syllabus shows why. The spring semester in Literature alone includes *Don Quixote*, *War and Peace*, *Swann in Love*, *Paradise Lost*, *Faust*, and more. The fall semester in History and Political Thought covers Thucydides’ and Herodotus’ histories, *The Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, Livy, Tacitus and Augustine! And both are just one out of three for the semester.

The syllabi change slightly each year, but the most significant canonical works stay. Chronologically, the Literature, Philosophy, and History and Political Thought courses take students from Homer to Eliot and Stevens, from Plato to Nietzsche, and from Thucydides and Arendt.

Some have criticized the program as being overambitious. This spring, for example, students are expected to cover Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in two weeks, all while reading Goethe, Flaubert, Burke and the *Federalist Paper* for their other classes (and probably, as freshmen, doing a daily foreign language class as well). No doubt, freshmen will not leave the program experts in Kantian epistemology. But they will have the broader framework necessary for further inquiry. The sudden immersion in history’s most influential texts makes breaking in to any other field easier and

more productive. And many will have fallen in love with some author or some period in intellectual history. A spark will be lit and the remainder of their studies will be better for it.

Despite the difficult and heavy workload, students flock to the program, which must turn away applicants every year. Strong friendships are formed among the students who are sharing the life-changing thrill of reading history’s greatest books. At freshman parties, amid Dionysian mirth and slurred speech, one will often hear a group of freshmen debating: “...America today is like what Thucydides said about Athens after Corcyra – words have lost their meaning...” “...in the digital era, we’re losing the art of speech – the written, digital word is no substitute; it’s all in the Phaedrus...” “...just wait until you get to Nietzsche next semester...” All this goes on until dawn arrives, with her rose red fingers, and the conversations yield to sleep.”

Less studious freshmen might roll their eyes at the scene, but they don’t know what they’re missing. Plato claims that the best friendships are based on a shared love of truth. Directed Studies students regularly prove him right.

The Directed Studies program often feeds into the Humanities Major, a course of study similarly broad, and similarly centered around close readings of canonical texts. But many students discover their particular talents for and love of History or Classics or English, and move to those majors. Or some go off and do Biology and medical school, glad they took the time for an introduction to the liberal arts.

Yale University is, no doubt, at times stifling in its political correctness. But the survival and flourishing of Directed Studies should show us how many college students desire real education and how much hope there is for the Great Books. It also proves that students and administrators who care about political correctness have nothing to fear from programs like it.

Two years ago, a group of progressive-minded Directed Studies students started a discussion group on the side called

“Diversified Studies,” to discuss feminist and multicultural issues related to the texts. Some may be inclined to roll their eyes at this, thinking we already have enough of that. But the “Diversified Studies” students started their conversation within the context of the Great Books, and about the Great Books. They never campaigned against Directed Studies’ existence, they never claimed that the books was irrelevant or pernicious. They went to class, did well, expressed their appreciation for the program, and, on the side, took a progressive, critical perspective on the works. The students cared about political correctness, but saw no conflict between that and taking DS seriously, and studying the canon deeply. It almost gives one hope.

Directed Studies’ students are not without a sense of irony. The program is often humorously referred to as “Dead White Male Studies.” And yet that is only irony, not a sneering dismissal or a political slogan. The students are earnest in their studies.

The Great Books, as these Directed Studies students regularly learn, do not impose a single perspective on their readers, but, rather, provide the intellectual foundation for any discussion, enriching and informing people of all backgrounds and worldviews. A disproportionate percentage of Directed Studies’ students join the Yale Political Union, and it always satisfying to see even the hard leftists quoting Thucydides, Burke and Paul, even the conservatives fluent in Marx and Rousseau, at the weekly debates.

There is one point that might appear superficial but is hard to miss. Quite simply, the students of Directed Studies and the Humanities appear very happy. They acquire confidence from their intellectual breadth, and feel joy in contemplating Shakespeare’s world-play and Nietzsche’s aphorisms. They show a love of college and learning that I do not see from the students brooding over econometric regressions or deconstruction. Directed Studies and Humanities students are more apt to devote

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great time to their studies because they enjoy it for its own sake. Yale professors, too, proclaim their enjoyment in teaching Directed Studies – even though, in the modern university, teaching mere undergraduates about mere canonical works without providing original research will do little to advance their careers.

College undergraduates should appreciate a liberal arts education, after all. Young people including college students, it has been my observation, are interested in love. They would like Plato's Symposium, Shakespeare's Sonnets and Freud's letters to his wife, if only they were expected to read them. If they are not, they won't know what they're missing. And if the one literature course they are compelled to take is about theory, class or race, they'll never fall in love with literature.

On an autobiographical note, I started my freshman year doing Biomedical Engineering major. I hadn't consciously rejected the liberal arts, I just had no knowledge of what they were. It had never occurred to me why somebody would want to study something impractical, old, and written in a foreign language – until I saw how happy my directed peers were, and how impressive their conversations were. I then decided to give those classes a try. I switched to a Humanities major shortly thereafter, and have been very, very happy since, whereas many of my peers see their studies as a tedious obligation.

Part of the reason students (like me, initially) don't pursue traditional liberal arts education is that they simply don't know why they might want to. High schools don't offer classes in philosophy of education or intellectual history, nor do they teach literature in a way to spark students' love. Nobody doubts the value of the sciences or the utility of the social sciences. But freshmen aren't so sure about the liberal arts. As such, the duty should fall to university administrators to ensure that freshmen at least give it a try and can find classes about literature that aren't actually about politics. Perhaps college orientation programs should spend more time talking about education and less about politics, too.

Because of my narrow pragmatism and freshman-year ignorance, I missed my chance to do the program. Though I've tried my best to make up for it, I'm sure that, when I leave Yale behind one semester from now, I will have one great regret: "I wish I had done Directed Studies."

A VAG Innovative Grant Update **Ravenous Readers' Clubs**

by Karen Jones, Gifted Resource Teacher Craig County Public Schools

One of the characteristics of gifted learners is a voracious appetite for literature. At our small elementary school, many of our gifted students quickly consume every title in our library, leaving their teachers to ask, "What do I do with this child now?" Some teachers struggle with providing gifted students with opportunities to interact with what they have read in meaningful ways. One way we have tried to address these problems at our school is through the use of book discussion groups.

About six years ago, I started book clubs for gifted students in our upper elementary and middle schools. When I started these groups, my goals were to expose students to good, thought-provoking literature, and allow them to respond to it in a safe, comfortable environment. These groups have been very successful, as evidenced by the number of students participating, as well as the firestorm of activity in the library as the students search for the next book in the series, or other books by the same author.

I applied for the Innovative Ideas grant with the hope of being able to expand the book club program to include students in grades one through four. The goals of these "Ravenous Readers Clubs" would be to 1) renew students' enthusiasm for the written word, 2) increase students' motivation to share their literary experiences with others, and 3) refine students' abilities to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate what they read.

With the grant money provided by the VAG, I was able to purchase ten sets of novels and teaching guides suitable for use with first through fourth graders. The novels I purchased included: *Ming Lo Moves the Mountain*, *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, *The Chocolate Touch*, *Matilda*, and other books on Bertie Kingore's list of "Gifted Kids, Gifted Characters, and Great Books."

Our first Ravenous Readers' Clubs began meeting at the end of March. At each meeting, the students held lively discussions of the novel they were reading and eagerly engaged each other in lively debates. As a teacher, I was thrilled to see the students' enthusiasm for the written word come alive. The students became completely enthralled as they shared with one another their favorite/least favorite or most exciting/upsetting part of the novel. I witnessed the students' confidence levels growing as they tackled tough questions and issues and received feedback from a supportive group of peers.

The enthusiasm students showed during our weekly meetings carried over into the regular classroom as well. Teachers reported much excitement as the students "couldn't wait" to read their novels and share what they were reading with their teachers and classmates. The first graders often got in trouble in the hallway because they were so eager to discuss their book, they couldn't wait until they got into the classroom. Parents stopped me in the hallway to say how much their children enjoyed the book clubs and to ask when the next one would begin.

In addition to discussing the novels, the students also completed a variety of thinking activities such as character webs and story comparisons. The fourth grade Ravenous Readers' Club was exposed to various types of poetry through their study of *Love That Dog*. The third graders learned Italian vocabulary in *Granny Torrelli Makes Soup*. The second grade club read the story of "King Midas" and compared it to *The Chocolate Touch*, and in *Chocolate Moose for Dinner*, first graders explored figurative language.

Based on my observations and the feedback I received from the students, their parents, and their teachers, I would say the Ravenous Readers' Clubs were a big success. I look forward to sharing in the students' enthusiasm in next year's Ravenous Readers' Clubs.

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From a VAG Scholarship Recipient

I would like to thank you for the scholarship for the George Mason Institute of Forensics (GMIF). The camp was excellent, and I had a very enjoyable time. The instructors include coaches of national champions, and even students that were rated in the top 30 in the nation, including the national champion in my category. It was also fun to get the chance to learn with other extempers (our school only has two others). I am hoping that, with my training, I will be able to put Virginia on the map of the forensics world. Again, I thank you for helping me to become a better forensicator. – J. Ledbetter

Ballot: Slate of Officers for 2010-2012

New officers will begin the transition at the April meeting. Pam Flaherty will become past-president and Carol Horn will become President.

Please mark your ballot and return it by March 15, 2010, to:

Elections Committee
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The following slate is presented for your approval:		Yes	No
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