

PATHFINDERS MONTHLY

Newsletter of the Office of Grants and Program Review March 2007: Academic Program Review Special Edition

Dr. Kay Cowan Wins Grant to Enhance Vocabulary Instruction across Disciplines

For years researchers have emphasized the link between vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension, and the federal government, under the *No Child Left Behind Act*, has offered support for explicit vocabulary instruction in the early grades. Unfortunately, federal support for such instruction currently stops at the primary level, and today's middle school students must face the challenges of reading without this valuable instructional support. In order to equip area middle school teachers with the tools and strategies they need to offer explicit and meaningful literacy instruction, **Dr. Kay Cowan**, Assistant Professor in the Teacher Preparation Academy, has developed an innovative workshop, "Vocabulary: A Critical Component of Comprehension." Dr. Cowan received \$72,000 from the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's Improving Teacher Quality Grant Program

to implement this workshop for thirty middle grades teachers from Bledsoe, Grundy, Sequatchie, Hamilton, Marion, and Bradley County school systems. Through this workshop, Dr. Cowan will provide area teachers with proven strategies to enhance students' vocabulary development and reading comprehension across academic disciplines.

Participating teachers will attend a one-day workshop in April as well as a week-long workshop in June. Workshop sessions will emphasize hands-on activities focused on exploring and extending skills related to semantic mapping, the integration of vocabulary with other content knowledge, and the ability to make visual connections and break words apart to determine meaning. Dr. Cowan will also instruct participating teachers in the use of arts-based literacy strategies, vocabulary software programs, and internet sites that will

enable them to make connections across disciplines.

To ensure the project's success, Dr. Cowan has engaged colleagues from the Teacher Preparation Academy as well as faculty from the College of Arts & Sciences. Dr. Linda Johnston, Associate Professor in the Teacher Preparation Academy, and Dr. Valerie Rutledge, Professor and Head of the Teacher Preparation Academy, will teach sessions in the workshop. Dr. Henry Spratt, Professor of Biological and Environmental Sciences, and Ms. Meg Kiessling, Instructor of Mathematics, will provide related background information about concepts and vocabulary in science and mathematics.

Participating teachers will receive instructional materials, interactive software, and supplies valued at \$1,300 per participant. In addition to these significant classroom resources, workshop participants will have the

opportunity to receive up to three hours of graduate credit in literacy instruction. They will also have access to ongoing online support from UTC faculty through Blackboard

after the new school year begins.

Dr. Cowan's efforts in developing and implementing this innovative and much-needed workshop will enhance

student performance across disciplines and bolster UTC's reputation as an important partner in K-12 education.

PROGRAM REVIEW

The following departments recently hosted external reviewers as part of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission's five-year academic program review process. After analyzing a self-study completed by the department faculty, each external reviewer conducted a site visit to gather additional information about the department's curriculum, students, and faculty.

English Department

The reviewer for the English department applauded the strong curricula of both the graduate and undergraduate programs of study and was especially impressed with the curricular enhancements that have been enacted since the previous program review. The reviewer noted the collegial atmosphere in the department, citing the new reading lounge and the department-sponsored guest lecture series as evidence of the English department's commitment to providing opportunities for meaningful interactions among faculty and students. The reviewer also commended the faculty's exemplary efforts to engage in one-on-one research with students despite the demands of scholarship, service, and full teaching loads.

Biological and Environmental Sciences Department

The reviewer for the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences assessed UTC's programs in biology, undergraduate and graduate environmental science, and medical technology. The reviewer was especially impressed with the curricula of these programs, noting a strong emphasis on hands-on, investigative laboratories and field experiences. The reviewer lauded the department's community partnerships, which have guaranteed students access to the Citico CSO Facility for aquatic biology research as well as the Cash Canyon House, the Wildlife Rehabilitation Center, and the Volunteer Army Ammunition Plant (VAAP) site for field studies. The reviewer also commended the department's outstanding record in securing external grant funding to support teaching and research, noting that this external support has enabled faculty and students to continue to engage in valuable research endeavors.