Social interactions can alter gene expression in the brain

By Diana Yates
Life Sciences Editor

Our DNA determines a lot about who we are and how we play with others, but recent studies of social animals (birds and bees, among others) show that the interaction between genes and behavior is more of a two-way street than most of us realize.

This is a new idea to neuroscience, but one that is gaining strength, said UI entomology and neuroscience professor Gene Robinson, lead author of a review on the subject this month in the journal Science. Stanford University biology professor Russell Fernald asserts that in the field of developmental biology and neuroscience professor David Clayton are co-authors.

Genes in the brain are malleable, turning on or off in response to internal and external cues. While genetic variation influences brain function and social behavior, the authors write, social information also alters gene expression in the brain to influence behavior.

Thanks to the newly sequenced genomes of several social animals, including honey bees and zebra finches, and new technologies such as microarrays (which allow researchers to glimpse the activity of thousands of genes at a time), neuroscientists are gradually coming to understand that “there is a dynamic relationship between genes and behavior,” Robinson said. “Behavior is not etched in the DNA.”

A critical insight came in 1992—a study of songbirds led by David Clayton. He and his colleagues found that expression of a specific gene increases in the forebrain of a zebra finch at maturity just after it hears a new song from a male of the same species. This gene, eyeI, codes for a protein that itself regulates the expression of other genes.

The finding was not unprecedented; previous studies had shown that genes switch on and off when an animal is trained to perform a task in the laboratory, Robinson said. But when Clayton’s team found this change in gene expression in response to a social signal—a song from a potential competitor, some thing the bird would likely hear in nature—it drew attention to how powerfully social interactions can alter gene expression in the brain.

“The more significant to a bird than hearing another bird singing?” Clayton said. “This is going on at all levels of our auditory cortex and association cortex, so this is pretty high-level stuff going on in the brain. And this was happening in more or less real time by very naturalistic stimuli.”

Reading Clayton’s 1992 paper “was a eureka moment for me,” Robinson said.

“This just brought it out into the social world, saying that this occurred in animals that have to make a living in the real world and pay attention to a lot of nuanced stimuli,” he said. “So I think that was really a very important step in our understanding.”

In his own work, Robinson has used microarrays to study this phenomenon on a larger scale and has found that literally thousands of genes turn on or off in the honey bee brain in response to social stimuli. One such gene, called for (for foraging), was originally discovered in fruit flies by Marla Sokolowski at the University of Toronto. Flies that carry different versions of for show different types of foraging behavior. Each version gives a behavioral advantage in certain environmental conditions.

Robinson knew that honey bee workers start out working in the hive as nurses and only later graduate to the role of foragers. Perhaps, he reasoned, the differences in for that are etched in the DNA in flies, this same

SEE BIRDS AND BEES, PAGE 9

Nursing program enrollment grows as demand increases

By Sharita Forrest
Assistant Editor

Projections from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics indicate that all 50 states will be feeling the pain of the shortage of nurses by 2015, in part as a result of older nurses retiring and the aging of the Baby Boom generation straining the health care system.

The UIC College of Nursing on the UI’s Urbana campus increased the number of seats in its pre-licensure bachelor’s degree program from 48 to 56 last year, and plans to add another eight seats next year, according to Sandra Drozdz Burke, associate director of the Central Illinois Regional Program on the Urbana campus. The program on the Urbana campus is one of the regional sites—along with Rockford and Moline/Quad Cities—for the UI’s College of Nursing, based at the Chicago campus.

“We don’t have any problem filling our seats,” Burke said. “We have to turn a lot of qualified applicants away.”

Typically, there are about 800 applicants competing for admission to the pre-licensure bachelor of science in nursing programs, which admit 125 transfer students at the junior level every fall and 48 graduate students to an accelerated program at UI.

Students who complete the GEP are eligible to take the licensure exam and often opt to take the doctorate of nursing practice program.

Now 34 years old, the Urbana program recently was combined with the regional program serving the Peoria area. In addition to the BSN, the Central Illinois Regional Program offers a master’s degree, a doctorate of nursing practice degree that began in 2007, and supportive courses for the PhD in philosophy degree. Many of the graduate courses are offered online or through videoconferencing. The master’s programs, offered at all campuses, have an enrollment of 572 students, about 115 of them from the Central Illinois Regional Program.

The graduate programs offer numerous specialties, including nurse practitioner programs in acute care, adult/geriatric care and mental health.

Students in the Urbana BSN program attend classes on the Urbana campus and gain clinical experience through practice at health-care facilities and programs in the area. The program also encourages community service, and nursing students teach.

SEE NURSING, PAGE 3

Training nurses Sandor Drozditz Burke is associate director of the Central Illinois Regional Program for the UI’s College of Nursing, which is based at the Chicago campus. Burke took over leadership of the College of Nursing at the Urbana campus in July. In addition to clinical practice at health-care agencies, student nurses perform a variety of community service projects, including teaching health education to schools and volunteering for the Annual Signature Chef Auction fundraiser for the March of Dimes in Urbana.
Trustees discuss separate accreditation of Global Campus

By Sharifa Forrest

At its Nov. 13 meeting in Springfield, the UI Board of Trustees approved Ruth Watkins, vice provost and a professor of speech and hearing science at Urbana, as the Harry E. Preble Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences effective Jan. 1; Extending White's employment contract through June 30, 2011, with no other changes to the terms of his employment; and should be sent to the editor at least 10 days before publication.

The Urbana-Champaign Senate's decision to not support a statement from the Senate Executive Committee that expressed cautionary support for separate accreditation at the senate's Nov. 3 meeting reflected responses to have questions and comments on the plans' guiding principles, White said. While there are 12 programs that offer student enrollment next year, the 2/3 of the programs are focused on the sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics. The plans' guiding principles, White said, that in addition to the science programs, the plans are designed to focus on the success of transfer students at Illinois.

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Watkins earned her doctorate in speech-language pathology from the University of Northern Iowa in 1985, her master’s in child language development from the University of Kansas in 1987, and her doctorate in child language from the University of Kansas in 1993.

Watkins began her academic career as an assistant professor and program director of the Department of Texas at Dallas Callier Center for Communication Disorders, where she served from 1989 to 1993.

In 2000, Watkins became the dean of speech-language pathology at the College of Applied Life Sciences before becoming associate provost with a focus on undergraduate education and academic affairs in 2003.

Watkins received an Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award for both the department of speech and hearing science and the College of Applied Life Sciences in 1998. In 2003, she was named a fellow of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.
On the Job: Chet Zych

Chet Zych, associate director and certification officer at the Council on Teacher Education, is a “life timer.” With the exception of two years in the Army and three years in Chicago, Zych (pronounced Zitch) has worked on campus virtually all of his life. He started as an 8-year-old strawberry picker on the South Farms in 1954, and after working a few more summers there during his teens (his father was a Ull professor of horticulture), he spent two summers working for the Illinois Natural History Survey. He also worked in food service at the Illini Union, and then as a records officer first in the Office of Admissions and Records and then in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. He managed a bookstore in Chicago before returning to the university in 1981 as a records officer for the council and has “been here ever since,” he says.

A graduate of University High School and the UI, Zych holds a bachelor’s degree in Spanish with a Latin American studies minor.

What is the Council on Teacher Education?

Each campus has a Council on Teacher Education office – it’s in the statutes for the university. We have 32 teacher education programs on this campus right now, and they’re scattered across six colleges and two schools. Most people think that everything is in the College of Education, but that’s not the case. We’re a campuswide body even though we’re semi-directed by the College of Education.

What does the council do?

The council has purview over all of the teacher education programs on campus; the council itself is composed of the deans of the colleges that offer preschool through 12th-grade certification programs. The main thing we do is serve as liaison with the Illinois State Board of Education to ensure that the university’s programs are in compliance with all the state’s rules and regulations for teacher certification. We also process all the applications for certification for all of our candidates.

You’re the certification officer for the Urbana campus. What does that mean?

The Illinois State Board of Education requires that every campus that offers education programs on campus; the council itself is composed of the deans of the colleges that offer preschool through 12th-grade certification programs.

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You’re the certification officer for the Urbana campus. What does that mean?

The Illinois State Board of Education requires that every campus that offers teacher preparation programs designates someone as a certification officer. As certification officer, I’m responsible for making sure that every student who we recommend for certification has, in fact, met all of the requirements of the program that the state approved for certification.

I also have to monitor everything that’s going on in Springfield. That entails informing faculty members about what new legislation means for us, and how we need to revise our programs to comply.

Our standard line around here is, ‘Certification requirements are subject to change without notice,’ because you never know what the Legislature is going to do.

So, you’ve seen the files of everyone who’s been certified as a teacher here since 1981?

Yes. A few years ago, we estimated that I had certified over 10,000 students to become teachers. We do about 500 certifications per year, and that includes school principals, superintendents, school social workers and speech pathologists, among others.

For your first job with the university, how much did you get paid picking strawberries?

It was something like 5 cents a quart. We started out getting paid by the quart, but eventually I got to be too fast, so I was put on an hourly wage. Back then, in order to pick strawberries, you had to sign a card that said you never had been and never would be a member of the Communist Party.

Really? Why?

It was during the Cold War, and McCarthyism still cast a shadow. I thought that was really interesting, at 8 years old, having to sign a loyalty card for something as innocuous as picking strawberries.

What do you like to do off the job?

I read a lot. I’ve always had a tremendous passion for books, which explains my stint as a bookstore manager. I’m a political junkie who’s glued to CNN. I also enjoy live theater and movies.

My granddaughter is about to turn 9 months old, so that’s a new and wonderful element in my life.

By Phil Ciciora, News Editor

NURSING. CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

health education to elementary school children. We’ve worked on several other service projects. Admission to the BSN program is competitive, with the grade-point average of students admitted every year exceeding the minimum GPAs required – 2.75 in all college-level work and 2.00 in all natural science courses. To transfer into the program, students must have 57 prerequisite credits, including General Education courses as well as eight to 10 semester hours in human anatomy and physiology, general chemistry and organic biochemistry and other science courses.

The RN program prepares students to take the National Council Licensure Examination-Registered Nurse. This year, our students’ pass rate for the NCLEX-RN was 97 percent,” Burke said. “The national average is 88 percent.”

The program’s strengths are many, Burke said, but include a strong support base of outstanding faculty members, a science-based curriculum that fosters critical thinking and leadership, and a learning environment that allows faculty members to get to know their students and helps students progress in a methodical way.

“Students who graduate are strong RNs but also believe in nursing. They epitomize nursing professionalism. They are leaders in nursing and in health care in general. It is so rewarding for us to have a small part in that,” said Burke, who is a registered nurse, an advanced practice registered nurse and holds a doctorate in nursing science. Burke was on the UI’s faculty from 1995-2005, then returned to the Urbana nursing program in July as associate director.

Burke has been recognized by the American Diabetes Association for her work as an educator and as a fundraiser. “Diabetes is a fascinating condition with unbelievable rewards,” said Burke, who worked for 15 years as a nurse at the American Diabetes Association’s children’s camp. “Diabetes requires a great deal of patient and family education, empowerment and support. Patients with chronic illnesses appreciate everything we do to help them work toward their goals. Their success is our success.”

ILINOIS UCED STEM EDUCATION COLLABORATIVE

www.ed.uiuc.edu/stem

The College of Education will work with the colleges of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences; Applied Health Sciences; Engineering; Liberal Arts and Sciences; Veterinary Medicine; and the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at Illinois to increase the number and quality of STEM teachers who graduate from Illinois, provide high-quality professional development for new and experienced STEM teachers, improve access and retention in undergraduate STEM programs, especially for underrepresented groups, and to nurture and promote meaningful and productive connections among academic disciplines, according to DeStefano.

ON THE WEB

Illinois launches I-STEM

By Phil Ciciora, News Editor

The launch of Sputnik in 1957 served as a wake-up call for Eisenhower-era America to train more scientists and engineers. UI officials hope their new I-STEM Education Collaborative has the same effect.

Beginning this month, the Illi-

nois STEM Education Collabora-

tive (I-STEM) seeks to increase the number and quality of science, technology, education and math teachers who graduate from the Urbana campus, along with im-

proving student recruitment and retention rates in science and tech-

nology-affiliated programs, espe-

cially for women and minorities.

Science, technology, education and math – the four subjects that make up the “STEM” acronym – are four areas of education that the state of Illinois and the country must dramatically improve in if the United States is to stay competi-

tive in an increasingly technol-

gical global market. According to Richard Herman, the chancellor of the Urbana campus, “So little time in school has been more important for a soci-

ty to have a shared and common knowledge in math, science and technology.” Herman said. “In our technology-rich world, with global compe-

tition, core skills in these areas are the price of admission to full participation in nearly every phase of life. I can think of no other institution better prepared to lead the way in redefining how we transform the teaching, learning and practice of science and math than the University of Illinois.”

Scientific innovation has produced nearly all U.S. economic growth in the last 50 years. Over the next five years, 1.25 million new jobs in science and engineering will be created, and in the next decade, 17 of the 20 fastest-growing occupations will be in health care and technology-related fields.

They satisfy demand for those occupations, U.S. schools will need nearly a quarter of a million new science and math teachers for middle and high schools, especially for underrepresented groups. They’ll have their work cut out for them.

According to the “Nation’s Report Card,” a report published by the National Center for Education Statistics, fewer than one-third of the 8th-grade students performed at or above a level deemed “proficient” in mathem-

atics.

“We hope to bring to bear the strength of STEM disciplines and teaching and learning sciences on the Illinois campus to dramatically improve the quality of STEM education here,” said Lizanne DeStefano, Fox Family Professor and director of the Illinois STEM Education Collaborative, which seeks to increase the number and quality of science, technology, education and math teachers who graduate from the Urbana campus, along with improving student recruitment and retention rates in science and technology-affiliated programs.

I-STEM is a $20 million, five-year commitment that allows faculty members to get academic disciplines, according to DeStefano.

ON THE WEB

Illinois STEM Education Collaborative

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Staff members recognized for service, retirement

Missionary work, travel is passion for Tom Nation

By Sharita Forrest
Assistant Editor

Before you ride an elephant, “Take Dramamine.” That was Tom Nation’s advice to anyone contemplating travel by pachyderm. Nation, who retired from the Purchasing Division on Aug. 31, and his wife, Linda, took an elephant ride on one of the three trips they’ve made to Thailand, where they do missionary work, conducting Bible classes and church services. The Nations travel to the city of Chiang Mai, then to the seven villages in the hill country that are served by Able and Ruth Sairattanyu, who are missionaries and friends of the Nations. The Nations also help support 10-year-old Je-ra-da, one of 25 children at the orphanage the Sairattanyus run, where Je-ra-da and the other children receive schooling, religious training and vocational training working at the catfish hatchery, chicken farm and orchard operated by the orphanage.

During the Nations’ previous trips, Tom helped a preacher who runs a mill in the village mill rice, even though neither of them could speak each other’s language. The villagers speak a tribal language, not Thai, although the Nations have learned some Thai from cassette tapes and a book that they bought at a used book sale at the Champaign Public Library.

The Nations became acquainted with their friends when the Sairattanyus visited a Tuscola church to talk about their mission work and recruit church members to help. Not knowing Thai or the tribal language used by the villagers might have been daunting to some people, but not to the Nations. “If you let fear override you, you miss out on so much later,” Linda said.

When they return to Thailand in January, the Nations are looking forward to seeing a boy whose birth they witnessed during their last trip. A nurse and her daughter who accompanied them last January delivered the baby in a bamboo hut and pulled a thread out of a woman’s dress to tie off the umbilical cord.

Prior to their missionary work in Thailand, the Nations lent their helping hands to other missions, having worked on Indian St. Nation, the hill country that are served by Able and Ruth Sairattanyu.

In stitches

Pam Cler displays a portrait of an angel that she stitched. Since retiring on Oct. 1, Cler has been busy traveling, reading and researching her family’s lineage. This year, she also helped with the YMCA’s Dumpy and Run sale, an event co-sponsored by her unit, International Student and Scholar Services, that she had been too busy to attend while working. Cler retired with 33 years of service, and spent nearly all of it in the same campus unit.

On the web

A Web site for the Staff Service Recognition Program is available through the Staff Resources home page. Retirees and service honorees are listed alphabetically by name, department or number of years served.

Missionary work, travel is passion for Tom Nation

By Sharita Forrest
Assistant Editor

“I’m loving every minute of it,” Pam Cler said about retirement. “I had been there in my head for about three years, so I was ready for it when it happened.”

Cler retired from International Student and Scholar Services in 2007 with 33 years of service, having spent all but nine months of her career in the same unit. Cler joined the UI’s staff in December 1974 in a clerical position in the College of Education’s Placement Office, then moved nine months later to the Foreign Students and Staff Affairs Office, as the office was called then, as a receptionist. Over the years, Cler worked her way upward in a variety of support positions before retiring as an administrative aide on Oct. 1, 2007. In her last position, Cler worked with the unit’s finances – budgeting, purchasing and human resources transactions – in addition to assisting with administering the scholarships and personnel searches.

The unit and her work appealed to her because the International Office was different every day, Cler said. “We worked with students from more than 100 different countries,” helping students with their academics as well as with immigration issues, their finances and personal matters, “the whole gamut of issues that the students may have encountered while they’re here.”

While a student at Armstrong High School, Cler, a native of Penfield, spent six weeks in Spain absorbing Spanish culture and history, an experience that “helped me understand the students here.” Since that time, Cler has visited Spain twice more, as well as England and Denmark. She would like to visit Asia and Australia someday and return to Europe to do genealogical research on her ancestors, who immigrated from Ireland, Germany and France during the 1800s.

“I’ve found from what little research I’ve done so far that it can be addictive,” Cler said. “You start digging for one thing and end up an hour or two later on some other branch. There’s so much information to see...
For Sappenfield, retirement revolves around family

Within a month last spring, Betty Sappenfield celebrated her gold-erned wedding anniversary with her husband, Delmar, and her retirement after more than 20 years on the UI’s staff.

“I’ve never been bored a day in my life,” said Sappenfield, a vivacious mother of four and grandmother of 10 whose days revolve around family activities — coordinating care for Delmar, who, along with Delmar, is an avid Illini fan and season-ticket holder for football and basketball.

Family is the nucleus of Sappenfield’s life, and she is eagerly anticipating the upcoming holiday season and a visit from their son who lives in Dallas. “I look forward to doing some Christmas shopping and baking my cookies and making candy in the day-time,” instead of squeezing it in, sometimes into the wee hours, around her work schedule, Sappenfield said. “I love to cook and make up recipes.”

No doubt her former co-workers will feel the absence of Sappenfield. “I can do that.”

Cler has maintained other ties with colleagues at the UI in 1990, spent his career in the Purchasing Division, reaching the rank of purchasing officer IV before he retired. “The people were good to work with,” he said, when asked what had kept him in the same department for 17 years.

A native of the Springfield area, Nation earned a bachelor’s degree in agricultural industries from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale in 1973 and worked as a parts manager for a farm implement dealer and for a farm implement dealer and for a farm implement dealer before he joined the UI’s staff. The Nations are the parents of Kristine, 29, who is a nurse at Civ- vers Clinic, and Courtney, 23, who works for Community Care Systems Inc. in Villa Park, an in-home health-care provider.

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NEW faces 2008

Barry R. Pittendrigh, the C.W. Kearsn, C.L. Metcalf and W.P. Flint Endowed Chair in Insect Toxicology, department of entomology in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

Education: Ph.D. (entomology), University of Wisconsin at Madison; M.S. (entomology), Purdue University; B.Sc. (biology), University of Regina, Canada.

Research Interests: Molecular basis of resistance to xenobiotics. He has made significant accomplishments in three areas of insect toxicology: metabolic resistance to insecticides, resistance-management in agricultural-production systems in underdeveloped countries, and the relatively new field of insect toxicogenomics.

At Illinois: Pittendrigh is teaching an advanced topics seminar for graduate students in host-plant resistance and genetically modified crops and in spring 2009 will teach pesticide toxicology for graduate students and advanced undergraduates.

“Bringing Pittendrigh to our campus means that the UI will be home to two key insect genome projects (louse and honey bee genomes),” said May Berenbaum, head of the department of entomology. “As director of the Pediculus humanus (head and body louse) genome project, he has overseen the sequencing and annotation of this genome. As well, he is involved in coordinating the interpretation of microbial genomes associated with lice, including both pathogens and endosymbionts.

“Pittendrigh also is deeply involved in the cutting edge of outreach introducing genomic biology to the general public (including high school students) and complements our department’s ongoing efforts to promote insect appreciation in particular and science appreciation in general to the public at large.”

Wen-Tso Liu, associate professor of civil and environmental engineering in the College of Engineering

Education: Ph.D. (urban engineering), University of Tokyo; M.Eng. (environmental engineering), University of California at Berkeley; M.Sc. (environmental sciences), Rutgers University; B.S. (civil engineering), National Technological University of Taipei, Taiwan.

Research Interests: Molecular microbiology and microbial aspects of water and wastewater treatment processes, environmental biotechnology and nanotechnology to develop cutting edge devices and sensors for monitoring biological contaminants in environments.

Teaching experience: Liu has taught undergraduate and graduate courses in environmental microbiology, wastewater biotechnology and current topics in environmental biotechnology. To better design, improve and optimize treatment processes in the long run, he collaborates closely with process-based researchers to study water and wastewater treatment processes with emphasis on microbial diversity, community structure, function and interaction.

“In Environmental Engineering and Science we currently have faculty members that focus on water and wastewater treatment processes, and on microbial physiology in natural and engineered systems,” said Charlie Werth, professor of civil and environmental engineering and leader of the EE&S area. “Wen-Tso brings a unique strength in molecular microbiology, especially as it relates to water and wastewater processes, and in the application of molecular microbiology to the development of new biological sensors.”

On the Web

Wen-Tso Liu
www.cee.uiuc.edu/Faculty/wtliu.htm

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Project helps foster children affected by parents’ meth issues

By Sharita Forrest
Assistant Editor
A narrative- and relationship-based intervention implemented by child-welfare professionals in Illinois has helped foster children in the rural Midwest begin recovering from the traumatic experiences associated with their parents’ misuse and/or manufacture of methamphetamine by recruiting people in the children’s communities to help them to talk about and better understand the problems that so profoundly affected their lives.

Over the past two decades, rural Illinois has provided fertile ground for the proliferation of meth. During 1997, Illinois police seized 24 clandestine meth labs, but during 2005, the number of meth lab seizures by Illinois State Police swelled to 1,200, placing Illinois second in the nation, after Missouri.

The research project started four or five years ago when two master’s of social work students, child-welfare professionals from the Charleston (Illinois) field office of Department of Children and Family Services began noticing an influx of children into the foster-care system because of their parents’ meth addiction,” said Wendy Haight, a UI professor of social work. “These children appeared to have more severe mental health and behavioral problems than other children coming into foster care. Child-welfare professionals needed to know more about these children so that they could develop strategies to help them.”

A transdisciplinary team of professionals led by Haight and Teresa Ostler, also a professor of social work at the UI, psychiatrist James Black; and social worker Linda Kingery explored the impact of methamphetamine addiction on children and their families in seven Illinois counties from 2003-2006.

The researchers interviewed addicted mothers, community professionals such as educators, child-welfare workers and substance abuse counselors, and foster parents as well as 29 children who were in foster care because of their parents’ meth addiction, and spent more than 90 hours shadowing professionals working with the families.

But treating and caring for these foster children posed significant challenges. Some of the children had lived isolated lives and had little contact with people outside their immediate families or their parents’ acquaintances in the rural drug subculture prior to entering foster care; some had been physically or sexually abused, neglected or exposed to domestic violence or homelessness; some children had been taught to misuse marijuana or alcohol as young as age 11; and others had been accomplices in parental criminal activity, coerced into stealing precursors to manufacture meth or into using guns to protect their parents’ labs.

Some children were reared in environments immersed in substance abuse, violence and criminality that extended back several generations, but felt particularly stigmatized by their parents’ use of meth. And the dynamics of denial, distortion and secrecy common to families permeated by substance abuse – where children may be taught to actively resist interventions or lie to teachers, social workers and other outsiders – made it difficult for some children to talk about their experiences and feelings. Understanding the sociocultural context of the children’s family lives was critical to developing effective interventions, the researchers believed. “If you understand the context that children come from, you can view the problems that they have in foster care in a predictable way – problems obeying rules or asking permission to go places may reflect socialization issues rather than defiance,” Haight said. Children unused to supervision or regular mealtimes and bedtimes may experience “culture shock” in their foster homes.

While more than half the children displayed behavioral problems and psychological symptoms – such as anger, grief, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder – the byproducts of trauma by talking about their life experiences through a process called Life Story Intervention, and helped them identify another adult with whom they could develop an ongoing, supportive relationship thereafter.

Haight and her co-authors discuss the study in a new book, “Children of Methamphetamine-Involved Families: The Case of Rural Illinois” (Oxford University Press, 2009). The researchers plan to build upon those findings with their current work to develop an intervention for rural Illinois that capitalizes on its strengths, such as the sense of community, and takes into accounts its challenges, such as the lack of mental health services for foster children.

Despite the sometimes-harrowing stories of lives ravaged by addiction, Haight said: “This wasn’t a horrifying project to do; it was very inspiring in some ways. We had the privilege of seeing a DCFS field office that was effective in helping children and their families, parents working hard to get well because they love their children and want a healthy family life, children who are managing to function well in spite of considerable challenges. They are worthy of our respect.“
The controversial No Child Left Behind law has forced teachers in low-income school districts to craft a curriculum that marginalizes writing at the expense of teaching to the test, resulting in educators who feel straitjacketed by a high-stakes test, according to a UI education professor who has studied the issue.

Sarah J. McCarthey, a professor of language and literacy in the College of Education, has studied the impact of the 7-year-old law on teachers’ writing instruction in both high- and low-income schools. She discovered that teachers, especially those in low-income schools, are increasingly jettisoning writing from their language arts block in favor of reading comprehension, one of the subjects along with mathematics used to benchmark a school’s progress through an annual battery of federally mandated tests administered by the states. The federal government then uses the test score data to either reward states with federal education funds or to impose punitive measures.

McCarthey, who published her findings, “The Impact of No Child Left Behind on Teachers’ Writing Instruction,” in the October issue of Written Communication, said that because the federal government uses only math and reading scores to measure a school’s progress, there’s little incentive for schools to teach students non-tested subjects such as writing, music, art and science.

“Writing instruction has been neglected at the expense of teaching to the test,” McCarthey said, noting that from a pedagogical standpoint, that strategy is somewhat counterintuitive, considering that reading and writing are complementary cognitive activities.

“Being able to write well can make a student a better reader,” she said. “But only teaching reading isn’t going to make that student a better writer.”

The effect on writing instruction has hit underperforming lower-income schools the hardest. In those schools, teachers often had pre-packaged teaching materials foisted upon them by their district, McCarthey said.

“Because they were deemed an underperforming school based on the test results, the curriculum, Page 13

A gene essential to the growth and development of most organ systems in the body also is vital to female, but not male, sexual development.

The study, from researchers at the UI and the University of Texas, appears in Human Molecular Genetics. The findings lend support to a controversial hypothesis about mammalian sexual development.

In the beginning – in terms of their sexual organs – all embryos look alike, said Illinois veterinary biosciences professor Humphrey Yao, who led the study.

“They have a common primordium, the foundation for both testis and ovary,” he said. “Only at a certain stage of development does this primordium start to follow a different path.”

In the early days of research into sexual development, it was thought that all females had two X chromosomes, all males had an X and a Y, and that the Y made all the difference. Unless it had a Y chromosome, an embryo developed ovaries and became female, more or less by default, scientists thought.

But in the 1990s, researchers in the UI and the University of Texas, ported this month.

They realized that the mechanisms underlying sexual development are more complex than previously thought. This led to a new theory, called the “Z” hypothesis, which proposed that testes development was actually the default pathway. According to this theory, an unknown gene or process, called “Z,” could disrupt this pathway and lead to the development of ovaries.

The “Z” hypothesis explained why SRY appeared essential for testes development. When it is present, SRY suppresses “Z” and allows the default option (development of testes) to occur.

This theory was complex and ambiguous, however, leading some to reject it.

Yao and graduate student Chia-Feng Liu wanted to investigate a particular player in the cast of molecules known to be involved in transforming the primordium into testis or ovary. This molecule, beta-catenin, is an important regulator of cell proliferation and differentiation.

When it functions as a transcription factor, it turns on genes and proteins without affecting the activity of other genes. Without beta-catenin, which is expressed in many organs and tissues, an embryo will not survive.

Yao and Liu knew that other proteins also were critical to the development of ovaries in particular. Mice that lacked the genes for a signaling, known as Wnt, or another secreted protein, called R-spondin1, experienced a partial female-to-male sex reversal. They formed ovaries, but with male characteristics, such as blood-vascular structures like those in testes.

Humans with mutations in their Wnt4 and R-spondin1 genes had similar malformations of the sex organs.

Other studies had indicated that beta-catenin was important to the action of Wnt4 and R-spondin1 in various tissues. But no studies had found direct genetic proof that beta-catenin was involved in regulating how the ovaries developed.

To determine whether beta-catenin had a role in forming the ovaries, the researchers developed a mouse embryo in which the beta-catenin gene could be shut off at the earliest stage of development of the ovaries, a stage at which the ovary is still functioning in other organs.

“To our surprise, the ovaries still failed to form,” Yao said. But male sexual structures also appeared, creating an amalgamation of male and female sexual structures that looked very much like those produced when the Wnt or R-spondin1 genes were mutated or missing.
Quality, quantity lacking in children’s educational TV

ON THE WEB


By Craig Chamberlain
Social Sciences

Commercial broadcasters are doing the "bare minimum and not much more," according to UI communication professor Barbara Wilson, one of two lead researchers on a study released Nov. 12 by the organization Children Now.

The study was presented at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

According to the study, one in eight TV shows (13 percent) labeled by broadcasters as educational/informational programming for children was rated as "highly educational," and about one in four (23 percent) was rated "uniquely educational.

The study also found that most broadcast stations (59 percent) offered only the mandatory educational/informational (E/I) programming, as required by federal legislation, and only 3 percent of stations offered more than four hours.

Three-quarters of stations confined all of their E/I programming to weekends, and more than a quarter of programs were rated as high in depictions of either physical or social aggression, according to researchers.

"As parents, I think we have a right to expect that if commercial channels are using the public airwaves, they’re supplying something good for kids. That’s what the Children’s Television Act mandates. But I don’t think the spirit of the policy is being followed here," says Wilson, who also heads the department of communication at Illinois.

Not only is the overall quality of programming a concern, Wilson said, but so is the balance between three types of educational lessons: social-emotional (self-esteem, personal feelings, relationships), cognitive (degree of physical and social aggression), and health.

Only a third of the E/I programs broadcast on commercial television taught an academic lesson and only 3 percent of educational/informational programs required three hours per week of such programming.

Three-quarters of stations confined all of their E/I programming to weekends, and more than a quarter of programs were rated as high in depictions of either physical or social aggression, according to researchers. Wilson said she was confident of the study results because of reliability measures of the student coders, who each worked individually in a media lab. She said the researchers planned to submit the study for publication in a peer-reviewed journal.

Even though the study is critical of the mix and content of E/I programming offered by commercial broadcasters, "we’re not saying that E/I programming is bad," Wilson said. "I don’t want to lose sight of the fact that there is a lot of programming targeted to children that is far worse."

"When a show has an E/I label on it, parents should be able to expect high-quality content most, if not all, of the time," she said.

Wilson thinks commercial broadcasters should consider creative ways to make more programs that teach a broader range of lessons, in entertainment, says "Why should the higher quality shows be mostly on PBS," she asked. "We ought to be able to expect the same level of quality across the board."

Children Now is a non-partisan research and advocacy organization, based in Oakland, Calif., that focuses on issues of health care, education and media.

The study was presented at a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C.

"An appreciation of the idea that differences in gene expression can occur over vastly different time scales helps understand some of the complex relationships among genes, brain and behavior," Robinson said.

"The picture that is emerging from these and other studies suggests that social factors, in the form of chemical signals called pheromones, can affect behavior," Robinson said.

"An organism’s genes, its environment, the social information it receives, all these things interact," said Clayton. "Experience is constantly changing in the level of the DNA and twiddling the dials and the knobs."
Parents’ role key in child becoming accomplished musician

By Melissa Mitchell
Arts Editor

Don’t fret. Some useful, practical knowledge to assist with such decision-making may be plucked from the research of Gary McPherson, the Zimmerman Professor of Music Education at the UI. McPherson, whose work focuses on why and how some young music-learners develop into accomplished musicians while others do not, believes parents play a key role in determining the outcome.

“The parents’ role is absolutely crucial, and the emotional climate in the home is very important,” said McPherson, whose research specialties include psychological aspects of musical behavior and giftedness and talent in music.

“We’ve found that parents of successful kids tend to provide support and encouragement for them during the early stages of musical learning and that this takes off as the children become hooked on music and more independent with their music learning,” he said.

“In contrast, children who give up playing tend to come from homes where there is little parental involvement during the early stages, but greater amounts of parental pressure to practice during the teenage years, when it is obvious that motivation is waning and when the parents try to make a last ditch effort to keep the child learning.”

The overarching message for parents is, he said, “Never, ever give up.”

Among the many misconceptions associated with learning music, the most problematic is “the commonly held view among the general population that musicians are born not made,” he said. “Most research shows the opposite.”

McPherson’s own extensive longitudinal study with colleague Jane Davidson, focusing on 160 children learning instruments, supports that conclusion. The continuing study, the first and most substantial of its kind, has documented the musical development and practices of 160 Australian schoolchildren since 1997.

Among other outcomes, McPherson said, the research indicates that “it is almost impossible to predict which children – in the first couple of years of learning – will eventually turn out to be the most successful musicians.”

“The key factor again is parents,” he said. “Parents who provide early encouragement and gentle ongoing support, are far more likely to see their child succeed with music.”

And, he said, contrary to what some might think, those students who have excelled aren’t necessarily from musical families.

“Many of the most successful learners in our studies have come from families where neither mum nor dad had any musical experience whatsoever,” McPherson said. “But in the early stages of learning these children had opportunities for intense praise, such as when they played to a delighted grandma or when their parents made it clear to them that they could do something they couldn’t. They had loads of opportunities to feel special.”

“One of the main problems we see in music learning is that very early, after the child begins playing, parents begin to make judgments of whether they believe their child does or does not have what it takes to succeed musical,” he said. “So, if a child doesn’t seem to be making progress right from the start or has periods where he or she isn’t practicing, it’s not uncommon for parents to reduce the level of their involvement and support or even stop issuing gentle reminders to practice altogether.”

Providing further evidence to support the theory that musicians are made, not born, McPherson points to Mozart.

The UI professor believes the composer – regarded by many through the centuries as the ultimate child prodigy because of his prowess on violin and keyboard – developed into a great musician largely as a result of his environment.

“If you think about Mozart, at the time, children didn’t travel much,” he said. “But by an early age, Mozart had traveled to about 80 towns, performed for royalty and undertaken literally thousands of hours of practice – something that is unheard of even today. He also had a father who was willing to spend hours each day teaching his very young son, which meant that by the age of 8 or 9, Mozart had probably accumulated as much learning and practice as many students who are entering specialist music courses in today’s universities. He’d just packed it into a much shorter amount of time.”

Likewise, McPherson believes 11-year-old wunderkind-pianist Tiffany Poon, whom he has known and observed for more than four years, has blossomed as an artist through similar circumstances.

Poon, who performed recently at the UI’s Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, demonstrated an interest in learning to play the piano at age 5. MUSIC; Page 11
Nanoparticles stimulate twin state in lipid membranes

By James E. Kloepel
Physical Sciences Editor

Like water and ice cubes mixed in a glass, a group of organic compounds called lipids can coexist as liquid and solid in membranes. This patchiness in phospholipid membranes is fundamental to their use as biomolecules and biosensors.

Using charged nanoparticles, UI researchers have found a new way to stimulate patchiness in phospholipid membranes.

“We are seeing a previously unsuspected responsiveness in phospholipid membranes,” said Steve Granick, a Founder Professor of Engineering at the UI. “What we thought was possible only with the specificity of certain proteins, we now see can happen with simple, charged nanoparticles.”

Lipids are the building blocks of cell membranes. In earlier work, Granick and graduate student Liang Zhang found a way to stabilize sensitive lipid membranes by attaching charged nanoparticles to the membrane surface.

Now, Granick, Zhang, graduate research assistant Bo Wang and research scientist Sung Chul Bae show that a phospholipid membrane can coexist in two phases – solid and liquid – according to what binds to it. This inherent patchiness presents an additional mechanism for changing the stiffness of phospholipid membranes.

The researchers report their work in a paper to be published next week in the online Early Edition of the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Using fluorescence and calorimetry methods, the researchers studied interactions between charged nanoparticles and membranes formed from single-component lipids. Because the membrane was composed of one sole lipid type, the traditional explanation for spatial patchiness – an uneven distribution of different lipids – was eliminated.

While a variety of nanoparticles was used, the most common type was polystyrene spheres about 20 nanometers in diameter (a nanometer is 1 billionth of a meter). Where the nanoparticles attached to the membrane, the membrane responded by changing phase.

“The electric charge acted as a switch,” Granick said. “Nanoparticles with a negative charge switched membranes from liquid to solid. Nanoparticles with a positive charge switched the membranes from solid to liquid.”

Phase changes occurred in patches of membranes where phospholipid molecules swiveled after binding to charged nanoparticles. This binding-induced behavior, where the same lipid can coexist in two different phases, offers a new mechanism for modulating stiffness in membranes.

In future work, the researchers plan to study the effects of smaller, charged nanoparticles; the effects of charged nanoparticles on living cells; and novel ways to stabilize lipid membranes for targeted drug delivery.

“These experiments are helping us better understand both the structure of phospholipid membranes and the potential biological effects of exposure to nanoparticles found in our normal, everyday environment,” Granick said.

Granick also is a professor of materials science and engineering, of chemistry, of chemical and biomolecular engineering, and of physics, and he is a researcher at the university’s Frederick Seitz Materials Research Laboratory and at the Beckman Institute.

The U.S. Department of Energy funded the work.
Research partnership honored

By Diana Yates
Life Sciences Editor

The landmark $500 million biofuels research partnership that created the Energy Biosciences Institute has been named a “Deal of Distinction” by the Licensing Executives Society, an organization of U.S. and Canadian technology transfer professionals.

The annual awards, announced Oct. 22 to honor the “complex art” of technology licensing, recognize agreements that are clearly written and “permit intellectual property transfer at fair value,” thereby speeding the flow of research from the laboratory to the marketplace, where it can benefit society.

The Energy Biosciences Institute—a partnership between the U.I. University of California at Berkeley, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory and the energy company BP—draws upon many scientific disciplines to find clean, renewable energy sources and lessen the impact of fossil fuels on global warming. The institute focuses on the use of perennial crops, such as Miscanthus and switchgrass, and includes a 340-acre energy farm at the U.I., where many of the practical innovations in developing and handling these crops are being pioneered.

EBI Deputy Director Steve Long, a professor of crop sciences and affiliate of the Institute for Genomic Biology at the U.I., said one of BP’s requirements in their call for proposals was that these programs had to be integrated.

“Argonists, economists, engineers, environmentalists and agronomists,” said Long, “are working together on the same problem, so we are looking at the whole production chain, and innovations at each step.”

The results were so unexpected that the researchers repeated the experiment in embryos in the early stages of testes development.

“When we looked at the testes without beta-catenin,” Yao said, “they developed just fine.”

The researchers conducted the experiment again and again to test their findings.

“The results were so unexpected that the researchers repeated the experiment in embryos in the early stages of testes development,” said Yao. “How does the cell know to respond to mutations of beta-catenin? When we looked at the testes without beta-catenin,” Yao said, “they developed just fine.”

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“When we looked at the testes without beta-catenin,” Yao said, “they developed just fine.”

The researchers conducted the experiment again and again to test their findings.

“When we looked at the results in the tests, I couldn’t believe it. How could such an important gene like beta-catenin function differently in males and females?” Yao said.

When beta-catenin acts as a transcription factor it goes into the nucleus of the cell to interact with the DNA. The process will connect those in the industry to “some of the nation’s leading scientists, engineers and health professionals. The exchange will also foster deeper connectivity between science and entertainment.”

Illinois entomology professor and department head May Berenbaum is on the advisory committee of The Exchange, and Illinois entomology professor and neuroscientist program director Rob Dittmer participated in an inaugural event for the initiative on Nov. 19 in Los Angeles.

Berenbaum, who said he is eager to participate in the project, said he hopes that this leads to “ペ例如ers of science and scientists in the mass media.”

“This is the most positive development for perceptions of science in the movies in decades,” Berenbaum said. “I wouldn’t be surprised if mad scientists ultimately become an endangered species.”

“Dana’s just a superb musician and representative of all the things that Jon (Faddis) does, in terms of quality and musicianship,” said Richard Dunscomb, chairman of the Chicago-based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

“One of the things I want to do is to see how the band’s experience in playing hard and in terms of quality and musicianship,” said Richard Dunscomb, chairman of the Chicago-based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.

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“Dana’s just a superb musician and representative of all the things that Jon (Faddis) does, in terms of quality and musicianship,” said Richard Dunscomb, chairman of the Chicago-based Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians.
Sohail Hashmi, associate professor of international relations in the UI’s Willard Straight Hall, will give the annual Fall Lecture in Religion, “When the Far Enemy Became the Near Enemy: The Changing Place of the United States in Jihad Discourse,” beginning at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 4 on the third floor of the Illini Union. The lecture, sponsored by the UI department of religion, is free and open to the public.

In his talk, Hashmi will discuss the impact of the war in Iraq on Muslim discussions of jihad.

Hashmi’s areas of specialization include religion and politics, particularly the role of Islam in domestic and international relations; ethics and international relations; particularly the comparative ethics of war and peace; and Middle East politics.

For more information, contact Jonathan Ebel, jebel@illinois.edu.

2008 Beaujolais Nouveau

Dinner celebrates release of French wine

The 2008 Beaujolais Nouveau Celebration will be held in the Illini Union Space Room beginning at 7 p.m. Nov. 24. The event, in its fourth year, will feature a variety of food to celebrate the release of the 2008 Beaujolais Nouveau wine.

A cold buffet will include jumbo shrimp, whole poached salmon, leg of lamb, roast beef, stuffed chicken and turkey, peppered filet, roasted seasonal vegetables vinaigrette, mushrooms a la Grecque, homemade pates, cheeses, fresh fruits and desserts.

Chef Jean-Louis Ledent and students in the UI hospitality management and dietetics programs in the department of science and human nutrition will prepare and present the meal.

A wine expert will be present to discuss the new wine. The annual celebration of the Beaujolais Nouveau release has become one of the most anticipated wine events worldwide. According to French law, the wine cannot be sold until the third Thursday of November, creating a great deal of fanfare when it is released.

The cost of the event is $25 per person with proceeds to benefit the hospitality management program.

Reservations and advance payment are required by Nov. 21. Call 333-6520 or contact Ledent at ledent@illinois.edu for more information or to make a reservation.

Learn a foreign language

Winter 2009 IFILP courses announced

The School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics at the UI will offer an intensive Foreign Language Instruction Program Jan. 5-16.

The program’s courses are open to UI students, faculty and staff members, retirees and the public. Non-UI students under the age of 18 are not eligible to enroll in this session. No academic credit is given for IFILP instruction. Tuition will be $75 for UI students; $100 for UI faculty and staff members and retirees; and $125 for the public. There will be no refunds after the first day of class.

Classes will be from 9 a.m. to noon Jan. 5 through Jan. 16. Classes that do not meet the required enrollment – minimum of 10 participants – by the end of the first day are subject to cancellation.

Language instruction is offered: beginning Arabic; beginning and intermediate Chinese; beginning and intermediate French; beginning, intermediate and advanced German; beginning and intermediate Italian; beginning and intermediate Japanese; beginning and intermediate Portuguese; beginning, intermediate and advanced Spanish; and beginning Swahili.

Classes will be taught by advanced graduate students or faculty members.

The focus is on conversational skills and the content is typically based on the needs of the students in the areas of travel preparation and survival language skills. Each class is limited to 20 participants to provide for an effective learning environment.

Beginning classes are designed for students with no prior experience or formal training in the language, intermediate for those with the equivalent of one year of college-level instruction in the language and advanced for participants with the equivalent of two or more years of college-level instruction in the language.

Registration is due Dec. 5. To register online, go to www.slc.uiuc.edu/ifilp/register. For more information, apply for phone orders. Tickets cost $20 for students and $25 for the general public.

For more information, visit www.star-course.com.

William Robert Allen, 88, died Nov. 8 at Carle Foundation Hospital, Urbana. He worked at the UI for 20 years, retiring in 1987 as an electrician for Operation and Maintenance (now Facilities and Services). Phyllis Boswell, 76, died Nov. 2 at Provencal Covenant Medical Center, Urbana. Boswell worked at the UI for 26 years, retiring in 1979 as a data entry operator. Ronald Clinton, 69, died Nov. 6 at Regency Nursing Home, Springfield. Clinton was a wrestling coach at the UI from 1984 to 1992. Memorials: an educational fund to benefit his grandchildren. Dean C. Nance, 91, died Nov. 15 at his Champaign home. Nance worked for the UI for 30 years, retiring in 1976 as a paint

James Hammond Smith, 83, died Oct. 30 at his home in Clark-Lindsey Village, Urbana. Smith, professor emeritus of physics, taught at the UI for 40 years, retiring in 1991. He served as the physics department’s associate head from 1972 to 1980. His career helped to further the era of high-energy particle physics. Memorials: Habitat for Humanity; the First Presbyterian Church of Champaign; or the UI Foundation/Excellence in Physics.

Elizabeth M. ‘Betty’ Uden, 86, died Nov. 5 at the Hoopeston Community Memori

Phipps Eugene Wise, 75, died, Nov. 12 at Provence Covenant Medical Center, Urbana. Wise was a plumber for O&M for 18 years, retiring in 1995. Memorials: Paralyzed Veterans of America, 80 Eighteenth Street, NW, Washington, DC 20006-3517; or to the Smile Train, 41 Madison Avenue, 8th Floor, New York, NY 10016.
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CALENDAR

Thursday, Nov. 20, 2008

10 a.m., Room B, Illini Union
Instructor Knowledge: Instructional Technologies and Educational Services

Coffee Hour: Zambia. 7:30 p.m. Cosmopolitan Club, 307 E. John St., Champaign, Cosmopolitan Club

Saturday, Nov. 22

7 p.m. 406 Illini Union
“Let Us Help You ACE That Test”

Instructional Kitchen in the Family with demonstrations, techniques.

10 a.m. lunch. Beckman Institute Café

1 p.m. lunch. UI Ice Arena. 3-5 p.m. 428 Armory.

Library Tours

Self-guided of main and undergraduate libraries: go to Information Desk (second floor, main library) or Information Services Desk (undergrad library)

Meat Salesroom

102 Meat Sciences Lab. 1:30 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. For more information, call 333-3904.

Robert Alrort Park

Open 8 a.m. to dusk daily. “Allerton Legacy” exhibit at Visitor Center. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. For more information, call 333-3287 or visit www.continuinguiuc.edu/allerton

Sputnik Museum

Tour by appointment. With a three-week lead time. Call 265-0747.

Museum hours: Noon-5 p.m. Tuesday. 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Friday. 12 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday. Noon-5 p.m. Sunday. Free admission.

Yoga at Krannert Art Museum

Fridays at noon.

organizations

Association of Academic Professionals

www.iaa.org il/AboutIL/locil/AdvisoryBoard

Book Collectors’ Club – The Illini Club

3 p.m. First Wednesday of every month. Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 436 Main Library. More info: 333-3777 or www.library.illinois.edu/librarygroups

Council of Academic Professional Meetings

1:30 p.m. First Thursday of the month. Location varies. More info: www.caf.uiuc.edu or mjrell@uiuc.edu

UIUC Falun Dafa Practice Program

1:30-5:30 p.m. each Sunday

Illinois University, More info: 537-111

French Department: Pause Café

6 p.m. Thursdays, Espresso Royale, 117 W. Oregon St., Urbana

Illinois Folk Dance Society

8:10 p.m. Tuesday and some Saturdays. Illinois Union. Beginners welcome. 388-5666

Italian Table

Italian conversation Mondays at noon, Intermezzo Café, KCPW

Lifetime Fitness Program

6:30 a.m.-6:50 p.m. Monday-Friday CRCL, 1102 W. Gregory Drive, Urbana. Kinesthesia and Community Health, 333-2756

Normal Person’s Book Discussion Group

1 p.m. 317 Illinois Union. Read “Living Che: A Novel” by Ana Menendez for Dec. 4. More info: 335-3167 or www.illinois.edu/bookclub

PC User Group

For schedule, www.uiuc.edu/~wpng

Secretariat

1-3 p.m. Wednesday. 3rd Monday. 3 p.m. Thursday. More info: 333-3101

The Deutsche Konversationsgruppe

3:30 p.m. Wednesday. The Bread Company, 706 S. Goodwin Ave., Urbana

The Illinois Club

Open to male and female faculty and student members and guests. For more info: www.thedeutschekc.org

VOICE

Poznań and fiction reading.

Bike Ride tour

www.psv.uiuc.edu. Information about staff employment is online at www.uiuc.edu/dept/hr_JOBS

healthy community

www.uiuc.edu/goto/careers

CAREERS AND EMPLOYMENT AT THE UI • www.uiuc.edu/goto/uijobs

African American Cultural Center

“Multiple Merwins”

Monday, Noon-Centre Art Museum Galleries. Events for the entire family with demonstrations, hands-on art projects, dance, music and storytelling. Art and Design and Krannert Museum levels.

“Healthy College Cooking.”

A series of Friday after performances.

10 a.m. lunch. Illini Union Ballroom

11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Monday-Friday. Colonial Room. For reservations, 333-3090. Walk-ins welcome.

Japan House

For a group tour: 244-9934. Email: Krannert.scholars@gmail.com

Kranert Art Museum

10 a.m. noon-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. 2-5 p.m. Sunday. Free admission; $3 donation suggested.

Kranert Art Museum

“A Report of a Tour.”

Tuesday, May 31. 10 a.m. noon-5 p.m. Krannert Art Museum.

The First and Donald Education Center: 10 a.m.-noon and 1-5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday. 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Palace Café: 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Monday-Friday. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday. Office hours: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

Kranert Center for the Performing Arts

Interlude: Open at 4 p.m. most Thursday and Friday evenings. Close at 7 p.m. on non-performance nights and after the performance on show nights.

Kranert Center for the Performing Arts

Excellence

The hotels and properties are responsible for assisting academic faculty and teaching assistants in improving instruction. The staff teaches and advises on a wide variety of instructional issues. For more information, visit www.te.uic.edu

English as a Second Language Course

7:30-8:30 p.m. LDI Institute Building, 402 S. Lincoln Ave., Urbana. Wednesdays on Thursdays. Faculty/Staff Assistance.

job market

CAREERS AND EMPLOYMENT AT THE UI • www.uiuc.edu/goto/uijobs

ACADEMIC HUMAN RESOURCES

Suite 420, 807 S. Wright St., MC-320 • 333-6747

Listings of academic professional and faculty member positions can be reviewed during regular business hours or online.

For faculty, academic professional and other academic positions: www.uiuc.edu/goto/aidejobs

STAFF HUMAN RESOURCES

52 E. Gregory Drive, MC-562 • 333-3101

Information about staff employment is online at www.pso.uiuc.edu

Paper employment applications or paper civil service exam requests are no longer accepted. To complete a paper application and to submit an exam request, visit the online Employment Website: www.uiuc.edu/goto/civilservicetests

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Democratic Party control could ban mandatory arbitration

By Jan Dennis
Business & Law Editor

Democratic Party control in Washington could restore lawsuits as an option for workers and consumers now forced to settle disputes through mandatory arbitration that gives employers and businesses an unfair edge, a UI labor law expert says.

Michael LeRoy predicts a bill sponsored by Democrats that would bar companies from imposing arbitration will likely be approved next year when Democrats take over the White House and add to their majorities in Congress.

The measure, introduced last year but stalled by the prospect of a Bush administration veto, would halt a shift that has grown since a 1991 U.S. Supreme Court ruling allowing firms to require arbitration rather than courts to resolve disputes, he said.

“The bottom line is you shouldn’t be forced into arbitration,” LeRoy said. “It doesn’t seem like a hallmark of a democratic society to say that as a condition of employment that you must forego a constitutional right.”

LeRoy says his research shows that arbitration as the only outlet to settle disputes is flawed, giving companies an unfair advantage in cases that can range from workplace sexual harassment or unjust dismissal claims to customers who challenge credit-card bills.

One study found that state appellate courts confirmed 86.7 percent of employer wins in job-related disputes, compared with just 56.4 percent of cases in which arbitrators sided with employees.

The lopsided results suggest a double standard, LeRoy said, likely stemming from corporate-friendly state laws that have led to “snowballing futility” for the estimated 20 percent of U.S. workers whose only legal resource is arbitration.

Another study found that federal courts overturned only 4 percent of arbitrator rulings in employment discrimination cases, compared with 13 percent of similar cases decided by courts rather than arbitrators.

“I doubt that judges are three times more error prone than private arbitrators,” said LeRoy, a professor of law and of labor and employment relations. “The problem is that the standard for reviewing mistakes by judges and juries is much broader than the test for reviewing an arbitrator’s ruling.”

He says his research also revealed other areas where arbitration favors companies, such as contracts that ban punitive damages or lawyers’ fees when employees or consumers prevail.

“Attorney fees can be in the hundreds of thousands of dollars,” LeRoy said. “I can point to a case from my research where a woman won $90,000 and had to pay more than that for an attorney. So what did she get by challenging the action?”

Arbitration would remain an option to settle disputes, but would be voluntary rather than mandatory under the proposed Arbitration Fairness Act, sponsored by Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., and Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga.

Workers and consumers could opt for court or arbitration, deciding based on the facts of the dispute at hand rather than accepting a blanket contract when they hire in or sign up for a credit card, bank account or another service, LeRoy said.

Arbitration might be the best option for some disputes, such as low-stakes claims or a potentially embarrassing sexual harassment case that both sides prefer to shield from the public eye, he said. In other cases, he said, courts are a better outlet, offering potentially heftier awards and a chance for a hearing by jury instead of a lone arbitrator.

“The bill that’s pending is not anti-arbitration,” LeRoy said. “What’s happening with mandatory arbitration is it’s become an indiscernible use of an otherwise very good resolution process.”

The bill generally has been backed by Democrats and opposed by Republicans, who fear lawsuits that could make U.S. corporations less competitive in a global economy.

But he says the measure could muster more bipartisan support in the wake of a financial meltdown that has put the nation’s credit industry under increased scrutiny.

“The idea that a credit-card issuer can mandate its own private justice system that is shielded from public view is going to be difficult for any politician to defend these days,” LeRoy said. “It would be hard to say, ‘Let’s keep that system alive,’ especially when the government is using taxpayer money to bail out financial institutions that are issuing the credit cards.”

Pending bill

Michael LeRoy, a professor of law and of labor and employment relations, says Democratic Party control in Washington could restore lawsuits as an option for workers and consumers now forced to settle disputes through mandatory arbitration that gives employers and businesses an unfair edge.