By Mike Holenthali
Assistant Editor

Barbara J. Wilson, the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, will serve as chancellor of the Urbana campus while leaders conduct a nationwide search to replace former Chancellor Phyllis M. Wise.

Wilson’s appointment as acting chancellor was made official at the Aug. 12 special meeting of the U. of I. Board of Trustees’ Executive Committee. She would become interim chancellor with board approval Sept. 10 and serve until a new permanent chancellor takes office.

“As an educator first and foremost, she understands the intersections among the disciplines and can fully represent a comprehensive, magnificent campus,” said President Timothy L. Killeen.

“I am deeply grateful for her willingness to serve her talents as acting chancellor,” Killeen said.

Wilson said she will continue her role as dean and will not be a candidate in the search for a permanent chancellor. She said the search will be guided by a committee of “internal and external stakeholders,” and that he is in the process of choosing its members.

Following the executive committee meeting, Wilson said she was surprised to get the call to serve as chancellor, but she accepted because she is committed to helping move the campus forward. She said her leadership style would be one of openness and collaboration.

“I am a very collaborative person,” she said. “Anyone who knows me knows that’s my reputation. I know the campus quite well, and I want to consult with everyone. We have many important goals to accomplish.”

Wilson said she will continue to support the new engineering-focused college of medicine on campus and will make the search for its dean a priority. She said she already was familiar with the mechanisms in motion after having served on the chancellor’s college of medicine task force.

Wilson said she is confident that changes proposed by Killeen will have an overall positive effect on faculty recruitment and retention.

The U. of I. Master Naturalist program is seeking adults who have a passion for the outdoors to serve as volunteers statewide. Apply now.

Las dean Barbara J. Wilson named acting chancellor

“It’s a constant piece of work,” she said. “Our faculty is hanging in there and they are excited about the future.”

“Times are changing, and I look forward to Interim Chancellor Wilson’s leadership this coming year,” said Roy Campbell, outgoing chairman of the Senate Executive Committee. “I fully support President Killeen and his guidance in defining the future for our university system. Shared governance has guided us through many difficulties in the past. Shared governance and faculty participation in academic decision-making will continue to serve us in the future.”

Wilson became the Harry E. Prebys Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in 2014 after having served since 2009 in the Office of the Provost. Her service there included two years as the executive vice provost for faculty and academic affairs, providing campus leadership on strategic and financial planning.

Before joining the Urbana campus in 2000, Wilson was a faculty member at the University of California at Santa Barbara for 12 years. A professor of communication, her academic research focuses on the social and psychological effects of media, especially on youth. Wilson is an elected Senate CHANCELLOR.

Las print issue as Inside Illinois moves to online-only format

By Doris Dahl
Editor

With the transition of Inside Illinois to an online-only format in the next few weeks, I admit I’m having a bit of an identity crisis. What will I tell people “do”? For the past two decades, I’ve simply said, “I’m the editor of the faculty-staff newspaper at the University of Illinois.”

Laying out a print newspaper has been a labor of love, and I admit I’ll miss it. But while the paper is going away, the news will be more vibrant than ever. Inside Illinois lives on—just in a different format.

And that format will enable us to deliver campus news to our readers in a much more sustainable and cost-effective news resource. And that is pretty exciting.

New website

My colleagues have been busy designing a new website that we plan to premiere around Sept. 1. Starting Sept. 3 and on each Thursday thereafter, every faculty and staff member (and other subscribers) will receive an email highlighting new campus features and the week’s top news. Our website will be updated frequently, so you’ll want to return often. We also will send out email alerts when we have breaking news.

Faculty and staff members will be automatically subscribed to the email. Others (including retirees, alumni and students) may subscribe/unsubscribe by filling in a simple online form (see box at left). A zda email address is not required.

We are moving to a .info site so that we may continue to sell advertising. Once all of our old content is moved over, there will be a redirect from our previous site, so you will be able to find us. Or you can just wait for that first email.

Online ads

Hopefully your unit has received our new advertising rate card. If not, you can go online and download a rate card and a contract. The information is available at go.illinois.edu/iiads.

Editorial content

You also will see a few changes editorially. We plan to have more features on the interesting people on our campus. We also are going to split our On the Job column between academic professionals and civil service employees because we felt academic professionals were underrepresented in the paper.

Additionally, Eweek will be transferred over to Inside Illinois, so you will now receive it on Thursday in the Inside Illinois ONLINE.

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Inside Illinois Online: news.illinois.edu/ii/ • To Subscribe: go.illinois.edu/iiSubscribe
Leadership changes dominate news, Wise returns to faculty

T
he appointment of Barbara J. Wil-
est as acting chancellor capped off a week of rapid-fire news concern-
ing U. of I. leadership. On Aug. 6, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign has never flagged. Her vision and advocacy for a new college of medicine represents a major contribution and an answer for a lasting need.

The next day, Killeen announced that an ongoing internal investigation had found there was no real change in the related emails she was keeping on a per-
sonal email account that should have been included in an Illinois Freedom of Informa-
tion Act request.

The university’s position on FOIA and emails is that employees may use personal email accounts for university busi-
ness and communicate on university-related issues, but those emails must be produced if requested.

Killeen said Wise, under a negotiated settlement, would be a paid retention incen-
tive for four years served and retain a ten-
ured faculty appointment. She also was re-
signed as the head of Illinois Online.

But the agreement was voted down at the Aug. 12 Executive Committee meeting, with board chair Edward L. McMillan and trust-
ees Karen Hasara and James D. Montgomery vot-
 ing to not accept Wise’s resignation. Killeen then reasigned Wise to serve as a special adviser to the president, and the board chair inaug-
 urated a formal dismissal proceeding.

Wise subsequently submitted a new res-
ignation letter to Killeen and McMillan on Aug. 13, announcing her intention to resign the administrative chancellor post and re-
turn to the faculty immediately. Her inten-
tions were acknowledged and the employ-
ment action was lifted, McMillan informed her.

Killeen said it was neither his nor the board’s intention to dispense Wise, but he remained adamant that transparency and accountability would be pillars of his administration.

McMillan said the practice of giving ad-
mis-  

ministrative retention incentive payments, like the $400,000 initially offered to Wise, would immediately stop. Killeen asked the board on Aug. 12 to remove from his own contract a similar $225,000 retention payment.

“T here’s been a shift from retention in-
centives toward performance incentives,” Killeen said. “The best retention incentive is the privilege of working at the University of Illinois.”

Killeen said other initiatives could still be proposed to ensure administrator accountability.

“I think the whole culture is going to change,” he said. “We’re getting through some tricky things, but we’re getting through. We’re getting this ship right.”

The president remained optimistic in forward-looking comments delivered to our readers to take the online version with us.

We must, of course, learn from the lessons of our past,” he said. “Our recent challenges also serve as an opportunity — a chance to re-examine our policies and pro-
cesses, and redesign ourselves to the guid-
ing principles of integrity, transparency, service and excellence that built this great university. It is a time to move forward.”

Prominent biologist named leader of Prairie Research Institute

R. Linn Belford, a highly regarded researcher with a proven track record working in a large, complex organization,” said Peter R. Linn Belford, a professor at the Missouri University of Science and Technology and an expert in environmental science, he has been a member of the fac-
ulty at Missouri since 1984. He completed undergraduate work at the University of Missouri and received a master’s degree in wildlife biology and a Ph.D. in animal ecol-
omy from Iowa State University.

“The surveys that comprise the institute have a rich history of excellence in conduct-
ing and applying science to serve the people of Illinois,” Ryan said. “I am excited to join with the extraordinary professionals of the institute in continuing, expanding and en-
hancing the work.”

Ryan will replace Brian Anderson, who served as interim executive director after the departure of founding executive direc-
tor William Shults.

“We are grateful to Brian for his capa-
dible stewardship of the institute during the past year, and to Bill for his leadership in bringing the institute into the university and in setting it on such a solid foundation,” Schiffer said.

The Prairie Research Institute was estab-
lished in 2008 at the U. I. and is the home of the Illinois State Archaeological Survey, Illinois State Geo-
logical Survey, Illinois Natural History Sur-
vey, Illinois State Water Survey and Illinois Sustainable Technology Center.

As executive director, Ryan will provide leadership, direction and overall administra-
tion for the surveys, pro-


cuting excellence in research and ensuring that the institute fulfills its legislative re-

nsibilities to provide objective and relevant scientific advice to Illinois state government, munici-

palities and businesses.

“The institute’s role of ‘service through science’ is vital to the state’s economy and the quality of life of its citizens, and I am honored to have the opportunity to lead such an important part of the university’s mission,” Ryan said.

Mark Ryan

insideillinois@illinois.edu

I’ll just have to get used to saying, “I’m a three-degree alumna of...”

I look forward to working with the...
Gordon Oyer for years has had a casual interest in Thomas Merton, the 20th-century Trappist monk known for his popular philosophical writings and penchant for living in hermitage.

Wanting to know more, he wrote a book about Merton. Oyer is a U. of I. accounting alumnus and serves as a senior financial analyst in the Office of Business and Financial Services since 1985.

His book, "Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest," published last year by Cascade Books, focuses specifically on the 1964 "peacemaker retreat" at a Kentucky monastery hosted by philosopher Thomas Merton. Oyer said many of the topics the religious leaders focused on then are still being debated today.

"60's, Oyer said, "and some of Merton's comments on nonviolent protest were in- formed by his writings on Islam.

"It would have been a huge develop- ment to have a thousand pages of documents, including participants' accounts of that meeting, address- es the issues of the day — and shows the importance of the church's role in advocating for the downtrodden.

"The theology of love must seek to deal realistically with the evil and injustice in the world, and not merely to compromise with them." — Thomas Merton

Author, author Gordon Oyer, a senior financial analyst in the Office of Business and Financial Services since 1985, recently wrote the book "Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest," which focuses on the 1964 "peacemaker retreat" at a Kentucky monastery hosted by philosopher Thomas Merton. Oyer said many of the topics the religious leaders focused on then are still being debated today.

"As part of the Caterpillar team, it's a privilege to work on electric drives as part of my day job and also serve on the Indus- trial Advisory Board for the P.O.E.T.S. project," says Brian Lammers, a technical manager who also manages Caterpillar's involvement with the program.

"This is an opportunity to help grow world-class engineers in our own backyard, and drive collective innovation through a valuable federal and academic partner- ship. We look forward to sharing industry knowledge with these great researchers to help explain how these technologies could be most useful.

The National Science Foundation began supporting Engineering Research Centers like P.O.E.T.S. in 1985, to create and sus- tain integrated interdisciplinary research environments that advance foundational engineering knowledge, enable technology and engineered systems, and prepare U.S. 

U. of I. to lead center for power optimization in mobile electronics

By Milhe Huleinthal Assistant Editor

E at the enemy for people de- signing cars, construction ma- chinery, aircraft and mobile electronics. When electrical systems do more work, they get hotter. When they get too hot, they operate inefficiently, fail or even melt.

A new, $18.5 million Engineering Research Center at the University of Illinois will work to pack more power into less space for elec- trical systems. The center is funded by the National Science Foundation.

Called P.O.E.T.S., the Power Optimiza- tion for Electro-Thermal Systems center will attack as a single system the thermal and electrical challenges surrounding mo- bile electronics and vehicle design. Part- ners from around the world will build new technologies like three-dimensional ther- mal circuitry for cooling, next-generation power converters and algorithms for co- ordinating the technologies for increased efficiency.

"The participants' discussions challenged one another's long-held assumptions as well as the modern-day church and its mission.

They will look at those technologies from the perspective of more than a thousand pages of documents, including participants' accounts of that meeting, that address the issues of the day — and shows the importance of the church's role in advocating for the downtrodden.

"A lot of the questions they were ask- ing then are still relevant today," Oyer said. "It think it speaks to the power of crossing boundaries, especially religious boundaries. That's the most important lesson to me is the need to just start talking together." The group, a then-rare coupling of Prot- estant and Catholic (they even found- denominal rules by sharing the Eucha- rist together), explored the Scriptures-based call to nonviolence, the significance of privilege, technology's dehumanizing ca- pability and a host of other social challenges that exist still today. They also knew from experience how the modern-day church was a barrier to such advocacy, and could even be the source of conflict.

"There was generally agreement that we need to find ways to connect with those (less-fortunate) people," he said.

One of those details was the fact that civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and adviser Bayard Rustin had accepted an invitation to the summit, but had to cancel after being called to Norway to accept the 1964 Nobel Peace Prize. A systems approach to that event would have been a huge develop- ment; had King or one of his representatives attended, he said. "If they had attended, somebody would have written this book long ago. It certainly would have changed the dynamics."

It was particularly striking by Merton's reliance on the works of Louis Massignon, the French Catholic scholar of Islam.

"Massignon protested against the French-Algerian War in the 1950s and 60s," Oyer said, "and some of Merton's comments on nonviolent protest were in- formed by his writings on Islam.

"A lot of it, the information was noth- ing more than cryptic notes," he said. "I got pretty discouraged a few times."

After months of research, including vis- its to the U. of I. Library and trips to Lou- isville, Kentucky, to review papers held by the Thomas Merton Center archives, he re- alized he had gathered enough new infor- mation to write a paper.

"It started out as curiosity, really," he said. "It started to evolve and then it just captivated me. Writing the book really chal- enged the balance of my life."

Oyer said he could not have written the book without having the university as a resource. In addition to the library and the history department, Oyer said he feels fortu- nate his unit has been so supportive. At one point, to pursue his studies and research, he asked for and was granted part-time status.

The book's editing process, outside of technical edits from his publisher, included the review and suggestions of friends and colleagues.

"I have no idea if there is another book, but I'm going to keep writing."
Professor Christopher Benson
on a boy’s murder that sparked a movement

Editor's note: It's been called the "big bang" of the civil rights movement. Sixty years ago this month (Aug. 28), a 14-year-old black Chicago boy was brutally murdered in Mississippi. Emmett Till apparently had said the wrong thing to a white woman and died for it with his life. At the insistence of his mother, his mutilated body was displayed in an open casket, shared by many more photographs in the black press. The murder trial in Mississippi then became an international media event. All of this was the subject of “Death of Innocence” (2003), which Christopher Benson, now a L.1. of professor, co-wrote with Emmett Till’s mother—and which he is now adapting into a screenplay for a planned film. Benson, a professor of journalism and of African American studies, discussed Till’s story and its significance with News Bureau social sciences editor Craig Chamberlain.

That “big bang” quote comes from Jesse Jackson, and some might say it’s his most widely quoted. Is that fair?

It’s apt when you consider the full context of this story. The 1955 lynching of Emmett Till was a point of convergence. African American apathy had been struck down in the Brown v. Board of Education decisions of 1954 and 1955. So there was a new sense in coming of age and was able to reach a wide audience with the impacting images and immediacy of events that began to unfold—starting with this story. Journalist David Halberstam, who covered the trial, would write years later that it was the “first great media event of the age.” Till was a Midwestern American, a young, new-newspaper reporter, who had fought against totalitarian regimes during World War II came to home to voices of “the way of life” in the South through a new critical lens, and their coverage reflected that.

There were the actions of Emmett’s mother, the late Mamie Till-Mobley, a diminutive, apolitical woman who once described herself as too naïve to walk the streets alone. There was also the brutal lynching of her son, stepped up and began making decisions that set everything in motion, forcing a nation to gaze upon the horrible face of race hatred that had been beaten into the once-beautiful face of her child. She opened a casket and opened our eyes to a reality people no longer could ignore.

It is estimated that more than 100,000 people gathered to see the coffin for the first day. It had been largely a legal struggle, an elite project of ideas and complicated issues.

Now the freedom struggle would be seen as a more intimate, human story with universal themes of love, tragic loss and the determined pursuit of justice. Justice denied.

Just over two months after Emmett’s killers were acquitted by an all-white, all-male jury in the Mississippi Delta, Rosa Parks took her seat and refused to move to the back of that bus in Montgomery, Alabama, leading to the historic bus boycott. Parks would say many years later that she had never really thought much about Emmett. Likewise, Coretta Scott King later said that the actions of Emmett’s mother and others who risked their lives testifying in the murder trial inspired those in Montgomery to maintain the year-long boycott, which would propel the mass movement of civil disobedience, and a new national leader— the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

So, there you have it. Emmett Till and the story of the boycott, rather than Bakhtiar’s. Till’s murder was not an isolated event, but part of a long history of African-American struggles and social ills that did not get the same attention.

Besides the historical timing, what made this case different?

Clearly, Emmett’s age made him stand out among the more than 5,000 reported lynchings over eight decades before and since. Recognizing, of course, the brutality of it all horrified people. Emmett had been tortured over the course of several hours before his body was dumped in the Tallahatchie River with a 75-pound gin fan tied to his neck with barbed wire. The photographs of his mutilated remains in Jet magazine caused a shock wave.

This was not the usual and expected response. A lynching is a power play at enforcing social structure, and reinforcing the degradation of the “other.” Often, the families of victims would bury their dead in shame and fade quietly into the landscape of oppression. Historically, in cases of the spectacle lynching, the white rioters were on the loose, not the black victims with photographs as evidence of their dominance, their power over the black people. The photos were used as a trove and warning.

This case broke with that pattern, largely because Emmett’s mother and those who rallied around her took ownership of the narrative. They flipped the script. They took control of the images as an act of empowerment, rather than degradation. The photos formed the text of a new narrative, challenging people to action. In a sit-in for a generation of young African-Americans, his story became their story. In fact, I’ve heard a number of activist scholars say that they became involved in the movement because of Emmett Till.

Taxation expert Richard L. Kaplan
on Social Security at 80

Editor's note: Richard L. Kaplan, the Peer and Sarah Pedersen Professor of Law at Illinois, is an internationally recognized expert on U.S. tax policy, elder law and retirement issues. In an interview with News Bureau business and law editor Phil Ciciora, Kaplan discusses the various proposals to reform Social Security on its 80th anniversary.

With! With! With!

In any case, only about 6 percent of the America’s population is of African-American heritage. It is not likely to happen anytime soon.

There is no reason to extend the 2033 shortfall in retirement benefits beyond 2033, even if no changes are made at all. Because the likely changes are some form of cost-saving or a benefit reduction, the political problem is that you’re asking current members of Congress to vote on a solution to a problem that won’t even manifest itself for another 18 years. That’s a tough sell.

In fact, a related problem is much more urgent. The problem is that Social Security Disability insurance will run short next year. The number of beneficiaries will be reduced unless something is done before then. Thus, the prospect of addressing the 2033 shortfall in retirement benefits is not likely to happen anytime soon.

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a tax on upper-income workers, which the present Congress is not likely to enact.

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By Jodi Heckel

Arts and Humanities Editor

Krannert Art Museum will exhibit a wide variety of works from its permanent collection – many of which have not been displayed publicly in a long time – as the museum opens its new season Aug. 27.

Four exhibitions will open that evening, including a solo exhibition by acclaimed fiber artist Nnenna Okore, current work by U. of I. faculty members, and two collection-based shows. A public reception will begin at 6 p.m.

Chicago-based fiber artist Nnenna Okore will present a solo exhibition, “Nkata: An Installation by Nnenna Okore,” a center memory; physical attachments such as personal collections of objects to the doing things done by museums. “I’m really interested to learn from view- ers’ responses after seeing many different types of works from the permanent collection installed together. People will make all kinds of connections that we haven’t yet,” said Fessett, who embedded himself with motorcycle gang in the 1960s, documenting the style of the Chicago Outlaws; and vibrant, colorful video art by contemporary French artist Isabelle Corrano.

The work on display includes a resin cast of a woman by Frank Gallo; images of a woman by Hans Bellmer, a German surrealist, who made dolls of disparate parts in strange combinations and photographed them in various poses; photos by Danny Lyon, a self-taught photojournalist who embedded himself with motorcycle gangs in the 1960s, documenting the style of the Chicago Outlaws; and vibrant, colorful video art by contemporary French artist Isabelle Corrano.

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By Jodi Heckel
Arts and Sciences Editor

The end of this month will mark the 10-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated New Orleans.

Robert Olshansky, a U. of I. professor, head of the department of urban and regional planning and an expert in post-disaster recovery, closely followed the rebuilding efforts in New Orleans in the first few years following the hurricane.

Olshansky co-wrote “Clear as Mud: Planning for the Rebuild of New Orleans,” a book published in 2010, just before the five-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. The book outlined the obstacles the city faced in rebuilding, the progress it made in the first few years following the hurricane and the lingering uncertainty about the city’s safety.

“I was really interested in understanding the planning process and all the ways decisions were being made about going about rebuilding. It was pretty messy for a while,” he said. “I think the end result was there were some changes in government in New Orleans.”

As the 10th anniversary of the storm approaches, Olshansky said his perception is there is a lot more transparency and public involvement in government and how decisions are made since the natural disaster.

Olshansky said one of the simplest measures of the recovery is how many people came back to live in the city following the hurricane. But that’s not an easy thing to address.

“A lot more came back than I ever thought possible, about 80 percent. But that hides the fact of who they are,” he said.

Many lower-income residents went elsewhere and found jobs and housing, and they don’t intend to come back. Others left after the hurricane and want to return to New Orleans but are unable to, Olshansky said. Still others stayed in the city and are worse off than before Katrina.

Another way of looking at the recovery, Olshansky said, is to ask when the city is no longer in recovery, but just dealing with the issues common to any urban area. A simple way of defining the end of recovery is when the flow of federal money for disaster relief ends. There is still some money coming in, and some initiatives aimed at helping make people whole, even 10 years later, Olshansky said.

Most of the main priorities identified in recovery planning are done or in the process of being completed, he said.

But the most important developments to Olshansky was an intangible piece—open discussion by residents. “Neighborhoods got together and talked,” he said. “My perception is the decision system is more open than it was before.”

Olshansky said, “There continues to be an open process on how to spend their scarce resources.”

There also have been exchanges with other governments on disaster recovery and planning. Olshansky helped set up meetings between officials in New Orleans and Kobe, Japan, for Japanese officials to share what they learned from their recovery efforts following the 1994 earthquake in Kobe. The Japanese city provided a model of urban post-disaster recovery, Olshansky said.

Since Katrina, New Orleans officials have offered advice on dealing with the Federal Emergency Management Agency to people in Iowa following 2008 flooding, and they’ve worked with the Haitian government following the 2010 earthquake.

National-level policy changes in Katrina’s aftermath were applied when Hurricane Sandy struck the East Coast in 2012.

“They were small, bureaucratic kinds of things, but they were cumulatively important,” Olshansky said.

Although there have been improvements in handling disaster recovery, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and FEMA can be more responsive, he said.

“They’re big bureaucracies, and big bureaucracies—even ones designed to work after disasters—don’t work well,” he said.

Several years after Katrina, Olshansky came to appreciate the generosity of the $10 billion Road Home housing program funded by HUD. However, it is reviled in New Orleans “because it was so painfully bureaucratic,” he said. “There were ways in which it could have been less centralized. It was one big, centralized bureaucracy, and it created lots of problems.”

Another problem with Road Home is the formula used by the program was disadvantageous to lower-income homeowners, which has made it difficult for many of them to rebuild, Olshansky said.

One of the most important things he’s seen in disaster recovery efforts is the benefit of taking time to plan so residents get what they really want.

“One of the lessons I’ve learned from several of these events is to not be hasty. Politicians get really scared, because the people are out there with torches and pitchforks. They want their houses rebuilt now,” he said.

Going slowly with planning is better, but it requires a lot of public involvement in terms of meetings and communication. It is “painful and expensive,” Olshansky said. “It takes a lot of intention and planning. It needs to be really transparent, and citizens must be part of the process.”

He and the other planning experts who studied Katrina’s post-disaster recovery agree the jury is still out on how effective the recovery has been, and they need to look at it in-depth.

“The planning process was so complex in the first three years,” Olshansky said. “How it has played out over time in the sense of outcomes, what lessons can we draw as planners—we can’t quite say right now. This is something we still need to look at.”

Katrina 10 years later: More citizens involved in decisions

Post-Katrina Robert Olshansky, a U. of I. urban and regional planning professor and expert in post-disaster recovery planning said one positive outcome of the rebuilding process in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina 10 years ago is greater citizen involvement in how decisions are made for the city.

Ads removed for online version
Fitness linked to thinner gray matter, better math skills in kids

By Diana Yates
Life Sciences Editor

New study reveals that 9- and 10-year-old children who are aerobically active have significantly thinner gray matter than their “lower-fit” peers. Thinning of the outermost layer of brain cells in the cerebral cortex is associated with better mathematics achievement.

“Gray-matter loss during child development is part of healthy maturation,” said2 Charles Hillman. “Gray-matter thinning is associated with better reasoning and thinking skills, Chaddock-Heyman, who led the research said U. of I. postdoctoral researcher Laura Chaddock-Heyman, who led the research with U. of I. Beckman Institute for Science and Technology director Art Kramer and dozens of other colleagues. Hillman is the sculpting of a fully formed, healthy brain that is pruning away unnecessary connections and strengthening useful connections.”

Previous studies have shown that gray-matter thinning is associated with better reasoning and thinking skills, Chaddock-Heyman said. This was true for the first time, that aerobic fitness may play a role in this cortical thinning, she said. “In particular, we find that boys and girls 9- and 10-year-olds show a decrease in gray-matter thickness in some areas known to change with development, specifically in the frontal, temporal, and occipital lobes of the brain.”

The analysis included 48 children, all of whom had completed a maximal oxygen-uptake fitness test on a treadmill. Half of the children (the higher-fit kids) were at or above the 70th percentile for aerobic fitness, and half (the lower-fit kids) were at or below the 30th percentile. The researchers imaged the children’s brains using MRI, and tested their math, reading and spelling skills using the Wide Range Achievement Test-3, which correlates closely with academic achievement in these fields.

The team found differences in math skills and cortical brain structure between the higher-fit and lower-fit children. In particular, thinner gray matter corresponded to better math performance in the higher-fit kids. No significant fitness-associated differences in reading or spelling aptitude were detected.

“These findings arrive at an important time. Physical activity opportunities during the school day are being reduced or eliminated in response to mandates for increased academic time,” Hillman said. “Given that rates of physical inactivity are rising, there is an increased need to promote physical activity. Schools are the best institutions to implement health behavior practices, due to the number of children they reach on a daily basis.”

“An important next step in this research is to establish a causal relationship between brain changes, changes in physical fitness and changes in cognition and school achievement – something we are currently doing with a longitudinal study of children participating in a physical activity training program,” Kramer said.

The National Institute on Aging, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases at the National Institutes of Health supported this research. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture at the U.S. Department of Agriculture also provided funding.

KAM, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

Japan House

Festival celebrates Japanese culture

Japan House will host its first Matsuri festival, celebrating Japanese culture, at the end of the month. The event is free and open to the public.

“Matsuri” is the Japanese word for festival. Matsuri will serve as a kickoff for the semester, a welcome for international students and a way for the community to learn more about Japanese culture. It will be from 3 to 7 p.m. Aug. 30 at Japan House.

The festival will feature performances by Ho Etsu Taiko, a Chicago-based taiko drum group. Masaji Terasawa, known as “The Candyman,” will demonstrate Amezaiku, the artistry of Japanese candy.

A potter will make tea bowls, and children will have the opportunity to make their own bowls. James Bier, who designed the gardens at Japan House, will give tours of the gardens. And shiatsu massage will be available.

Other entertainment includes martial arts demonstrations, a fashion show with costumes based on anime (Japanese animation) characters, bonsai and Ikebana (flower arranging) demonstrations, and a tea ceremony.

Vocelli said Japan House is trying to reach people who are interested in Japanese culture. The festival will feature food with a Japanese or Asian flavor, including a savory Japanese pancake with cabbage and bacon, a sashimi platter, and a green tea-flavored cupcake.

Japan House also will sponsor a visit by Seiran Chiba, a Japanese calligrapher, the week prior to Matsuri. Chiba won’t be at Matsuri but will be at the Urbana Sweet Corn Festival, Aug. 28 and Aug. 29.

Institute for Sustainability, Energy and Environment

‘Water at Illinois’ website goes online

Illinois is home to a rich, interactive community of world-renowned scholars who work across disciplines to solve the issues the world faces with its water supply.

The Institute for Sustainability, Energy and Environment has created a new website as an access point for water-related research conducted across campus.

The website “Water at Illinois’” showcases Illinois scholars’ research, education and engagement programs integrated across four main categories: adaptation to a changing climate and extreme weather events; sustainable water, food and energy resources; safe drinking water and public health; and resilient watersheds and ecosystems.

Water at Illinois has individual pages for each scholar, plus a page describing the Water Council that steers them. And the site serves as a “front porch” to various water centers at Illinois, including the state surveys and grant-based centers, as well as to laboratories, facilities and field stations that specialize in water research. It also will be a repository for opportunities in the water field, including grants, educational areas and jobs.

For more information, go to water.illinois.edu.

byline

brief notes

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byline

brief notes
Rogue supernovas likely flung into space by black hole slingshots
By Liz Ahlberg
Physical Sciences Editor

Rogue supernovas that explode all alone in deep space present an astronomical mystery. Where did they come from? How did they get there? The likely answer: a binary black hole slingshot, according to a new study by Ryan Foley, a U. of I. professor of astronomy and physics.

Using data from NASA's Hubble Space Telescope and other telescopes, Foley traced 13 high-velocity exploding stars back to the galaxies they came from to find the peculiar combination of events leading to the stars' lonely deaths. His findings are published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

Foley set out to solve the puzzle of a rare, strange type of supernova found far from any galaxies or star clusters. The supernovas are known as calcium-rich because they produce an unusually large amount of calcium.

“Looking around where the supernovas exploded, there’s nothing there – no trace of star formation, no clusters of old stars, there’s nothing nearby,” Foley said. “So I knew that these things were starting somewhere else and moving long distances before they die.”

Examining the locations and kinematics of the supernovas, he was able to determine that the stars that exploded had been kicked out of their galaxies at very high speeds, millions of years before they exploded.

To understand how the supernovas got so far from their galaxies – up to a half a million light years away – moving at such high speeds, he looked at the galaxies that had produced the stars before ejecting them.

“Whatever put the star system in the state where it’s about to explode is related to the center of the galaxy it came from,” Foley said.

First, he noticed that many of the galaxies were composed only of old stars, which meant that the calcium-rich supernovas had to come from a population of older stars such as white dwarfs. Stars become white dwarfs after they stop producing new energy.

In order to produce the kind of explosions observed, a white dwarf has to drain mass from a companion star. In this case, the two stars are in a binary system where the pair circle one other until tidal forces rip one apart. That material is dumped on the other star, which causes an explosion. Thousands of such supernovas have been found within galaxies, but how did these odd cases end up on solo hypervelocity flights through space?

Looking more closely, Foley then noticed that all of the galaxies that had produced the runaway supernovas showed signs of mergers – two galaxies colliding and rearranging into one big galaxy. That is when all the puzzle pieces fell together for Foley.

“The velocities were incredible, on the order of 4.5 million miles per hour,” Foley said. “There is only one way to get a binary star system moving that fast: a slingshot from a close flyby of a binary supernova back to the galaxies they came from. A plausible scenario for how vagabond stars exploded as supernovas outside the cozy confines of galaxies is a chain of events leading to the stars’ lonely deaths. His findings are published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

Foley hopes that in the future, these types of supernovas can be used to find more binary supermassive black hole systems, which themselves are rare and interesting phenomena that could give insight into gravity, general and special relativity, quasars, dark energy and other mysteries of astronomy and physics. Illinois is already involved in several astronomy surveys that could be scoured for hypervelocity calcium-rich supernovas.

“These supernovas could be the bread crumbs to find our way to these supermassive binary black holes, and we could potentially find them in much higher numbers,” Foley said.

The Hubble Space Telescope is a project of international cooperation between NASA and the European Space Agency. NASA’s Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland, manages the telescope. The Space Telescope Science Institute in Baltimore conducts Hubble science operations and is operated for NASA by the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy in Washington, D.C.