



# The Evaluation Center News

Newsletter of The Evaluation Center at Western Michigan University

October 2006

## From the Director . . .



The Center continues to thrive, and we especially are enjoying and appreciating our growing relationship with the University's new (3 years old) interdisciplinary doctoral program in evaluation. The students bring a sense of optimism (always good for staid evaluators), enthusiasm, and productivity. Their involvement and questions help us keep our focus on the theory and practice of evaluation. In short, housing the doctoral program is good for the Center.

The Center continues to produce many evaluations and has maintained a steady flow of ideas and information to serve evaluation theory and practice. I've traveled more this past year than in most years; especially, I have traveled abroad a bit. I've been especially gratified to find that wherever I travel people are using our Center's Web site. Consistently, folks indicate that our evaluation resources are valuable tools for them. These tools are used in evaluation planning, evaluation training, and in varied ways that we did not consider when the tools were developed. I hope that if you use them you will drop us a note to let us know what works well for you, what could be improved, and what you would like to see added. Michael Scriven has just updated our glossary. I think you will enjoy browsing the glossary, even if you know all the words.

Certainly, our charter school evaluation work, led by Gary Miron, has been a highly visible and proud part of our productivity. His work continues to receive widespread attention and critical acclaim; it's fun to see him referenced in *New York Times* articles. If you want to learn about

charter school evaluations, we are the place to visit in person or electronically.

As many of you know, I am slated to retire at the end of June 2007. As a result, I expect that this is my last newsletter note to you. I continue to appreciate the opportunities to learn and contribute that serving in the Center has provided me. I consider it a blessing to work and converse with Center members on a daily basis. Though virtually all members have contributed in special ways, I want to note two for whom I am especially thankful: Dan Stufflebeam and Sally Veeder. Next June 30, if all goes as planned, the three of us will be retiring from the University together.

Dan invited me to the Center nearly 16 years ago. It doesn't seem possible that so much time has passed, but I am truly thankful that I have had the opportunity to work and learn with him. In many ways he has mentored and continues to mentor me.

When I first visited the Center and considered whether to take a position here, I spent nearly half a day with Sally. I was struck then with her knowledge and skill and her ability to organize and conduct the work of the Center. She, probably more than Dan, was responsible for my saying yes to come and work here. I have continued to appreciate her work and enjoy the opportunity to work with her across these many years. She has been the glue that holds the Center together.

We look forward to this coming year and hope that you will take time to drop us a note or give us a call.

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## Project Highlights (FY 2005-06)

The Center's external awards for fiscal year 2005-06 totaled \$1.3 million). Continuing from the previous fiscal year were these projects:

- Evaluation of NSF's Advanced Technological Education program
- Evaluation of several projects for Kamehameha Schools in Hawaii
- Evaluation of the Delaware charter school initiative
- Evaluation of the High/Scope Ready Schools assessment instrument
- Evaluation of the 21st Century Learning Community Centers program for Kalamazoo Community in Schools Foundation
- Evaluation of the NSF-funded Milwaukee Mathematics Partnership
- Evaluation of the No Disposable Kids program for Starr Commonwealth and Kalamazoo Public Schools
- Evaluation of the University of Montana's Partnership for Comprehensive Equity
- Evaluation of the Parent Information Resource Center for Bay-Arenac Intermediate School District
- Evaluation of Rapides Foundations' Systemic Initiative in Education in central Louisiana
- Evaluation of the CDC's Swift Worksite Assessment and Translation methodology

The Center acquired seven new projects between July 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006:

**Education for the Arts.** Dr. Michael Scriven is the principal investigator for the evaluation of Education for the Arts, a Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency program funded by the Gilmore Foundation intended to enhance K-12 arts education throughout Kalamazoo County. Dr. Robert Stake, a leading evaluator and author of a book on evaluating arts programs in the schools, has contributed significantly to the evaluation.

**EvenStart.** Dr. Pamela Zeller is leading the evaluation of EvenStart, a family literacy program of Bay-Arenac ISD funded by the Michigan Department of Education Office of Early Childhood Education and Family Services.

**Confidential Close Call Reporting System.** Dr. Carl Hanssen, Dr. Liesel Ritchie, and Barbara Wygant are providing supplementary evaluation services to New Vectors for this Federal Railroad Administration project. Their efforts include a comprehensive literature review and implementation evaluation at four major rail yards.

**Healthier Communities.** Led by Dr. Liesel Ritchie, this project is a needs assessment for the Sarah Bush Lincoln

Health System in Illinois to determine interest in and possible use of an interactive health education facility for their Healthier Communities Initiative.

**Heifer Project International.** Dr. Michael Scriven led a team made up of Center staff and IDPE students in evaluating Heifer projects in Albania, Nepal, and Thailand.

**Kamehameha Schools** (2 projects). Dr. Gary Miron is leading an evaluation of summer school programs on the Big Island and Maui. Chris Coryn is leading a study to identify in which public schools Hawaiian students have the highest achievement.

**Tsunami Hazards.** Building on similar studies conducted in Washington, Hawaii, New Zealand, and Thailand, this study is examining factors that influence people to prepare, or sometimes not prepare, for tsunamis. Dr. Liesel Ritchie is part of the research team led by faculty from the University of Hawaii and Mississippi State University.

## Staff Updates



**Patricia Farrell** joined The Evaluation Center as a senior research associate in September. She has a Ph.D. in Higher, Adult, and Lifelong Learning from Michigan State University. She comes to the Center after spending a year teaching evaluation at the University of New Mexico. She is working on the Center's evaluation of Delaware charter schools.



Doctoral student **Chris Coryn** is now a research associate at the Center, leading the Center's study of native Hawaiian student achievement for Kamehameha Schools. He is writing his dissertation on the evaluation of research and will be among the first graduates of WMU's innovative interdisciplinary Ph.D. program in evaluation.

Dr. Carl Hanssen left regular employment with the Center to develop his own consulting business. However, he remains an important collaborator and is continuing his role in the Center's evaluation work for the CDC.

Dr. Carolyn Sullins took a position in WMU's Kercher Center for Social Research to lead their evaluation of Kalamazoo Wraps, a program to enhance mental health services for children in Kalamazoo.

Joan Farland retired from the Center in June, joining her husband, Dale, who retired from the Center last year.

## Project Spotlight: Evaluation of the Rapides Foundation's Systemic Initiative in Education

Western Michigan University's Evaluation Center has been hired to evaluate the effectiveness of a sweeping education initiative supporting Central Louisiana school districts.

The Evaluation Center is conducting an analysis of the Systemic Initiative in Education in cooperation with the Gordon A. Cain Center at Louisiana State University. The evaluation began last fall and will continue through September 2010, a year after the systemic initiative has been completed.

The Rapides Foundation, which sponsors the initiative, hired the Center to assist in the evaluation. In 2004, the foundation unveiled the Systemic Initiative in Education, a \$10 million investment over the next five years in schools within nine parishes in Central Louisiana.

### The Rapides Foundation Service Area



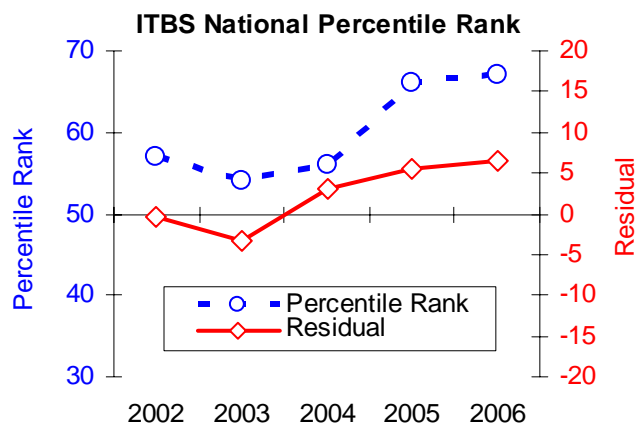
Dr. Gary Miron, Evaluation Center chief of staff, serves as director of the Louisiana evaluation effort. Other key staff from the Center are Anne Cullen, who serves as project manager, and Dr. Liesel Ritchie. The team from The Evaluation Center will be responsible for surveying teachers and administrators as well as analyzing student achievement data, while the team from LSU largely will be responsible for site visits to schools.

Miron calls the initiative "a bold and comprehensive effort to improve student achievement through professional development and leadership development." He notes the initiative provides resources for districts to develop and nurture new instructional approaches to produce high student achievement.

According to Ritchie, the effort includes a particular emphasis on building and strengthening professional learning communities in the participating schools. The

foundation's goal, she notes, is to promote school improvement by producing highly intellectual and challenging work for students, as well as developing a district culture that supports high achievement.

In recent years, the Center has been developing a number of unique and innovative techniques for analyzing student achievement and capturing value added. For the Rapides project, the evaluation team is comparing actual student performance to how students are predicted to perform given demographic and background characteristics—a method referred to as *residual gain analysis*. They also chart student achievement compared with national norms. An example of how this information is displayed graphically is presented below:



In looking at the charts, it is most important to follow the solid red line. It illustrates the residual or difference between how a district or school scored and how it was predicted to score based on statewide regression analyses. If the red line is above the middle point, then the residual is positive and the school is doing better than predicted.

The blue dashed line simply illustrates the mean percentile rank for the district or school. If the blue line is above the middle point, the district is performing above the national average on this test. If the blue line goes below the middle point, then it is performing below national average.

The results from this residual gain analysis can be charted out to illustrate growth. Also, this method yields a solid outcome measure (i.e., average annual change in residuals) that will be used to evaluate the impact of the systemic initiative.

**For more information about this project, please visit [www.wmich.edu/evalctr/rapides/](http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/rapides/)**

## Publications

**Gary Miron's** article, "Evaluating Charter Schools: Issues and Obstacles" was published in the fall/winter issue of *Urban Education*. Dr. Miron has three book chapters forthcoming—in the *Handbook of Research on the Politics of Education*, *Battleground Schools: An Encyclopedia of Conflict and Controversy*, and *Handbook of Research in Education Finance and Policy*. His review of *Playing to Type? Mapping the Charter School Landscape* was published on Arizona State University's Education Policy Studies Laboratory Web site.

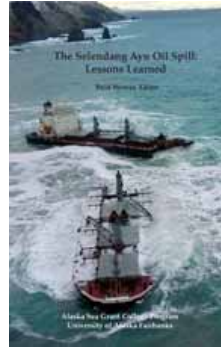
**Daniel Stufflebeam** and **Lori Wingate** published an article on the use of self-assessment in evaluation training in the *American Journal of Evaluation*.

**Arlen Gullickson** and **Carl Hanssen** published an article in *New Directions in Evaluation*, based on their work in evaluating NSF's Advanced Technological Education program.

**Chris Coryn**, **Carl Hanssen**, and **Carolyn Sullins** each had book reviews published in the *American Journal of Evaluation*. Coryn reviewed *Practical Program Evaluation* by Huey Chen. Hanssen reviewed *Evaluation Strategies for Communicating and Reporting* by Rosalie Torres,

Hallie Preskill, and Mary Piontek. Sullins reviewed *Exploring Evaluator Role and Identity*, edited by Katherine Ryan and Thomas Schwandt.

**Arlen Gullickson's** article, "Student Evaluation Standards: A Paradigm Shift for the Evaluation of Students," appeared in *Prospects: Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*.



**Liesel Ritchie** and Duane Gill's and article, "Social Capital Theory as an Integrating Framework for Technological Disaster Research," was accepted for publication in *Sociological Spectrum*. Also with Duane Gill, Ritchie published "Community Responses to Oil Spills: Lessons to be Learned from Technological Disaster Research, a chapter in *The Selendang Ayu Oil Spill: Lessons Learned* (edited by Reid Brewer).

**Michael Scriven** authored two chapters in the forthcoming *Handbook of Social Science Methodology*, edited by William Outhwaite and Stephen Turner. He also updated his *Key Evaluation Checklist*, which is available from [www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/](http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/).

## Presentations

**Arlen Gullickson**, **Chris Coryn**, **Carl Hanssen**, **Cheryl Ririe-Kurz**, **Gary Miron**, **Liesel Ritchie**, **Michael Scriven**, **Carolyn Sullins**, **Lori Wingate**, **Barbara Wygant**, and **Pamela Zeller** were involved in numerous presentations at the October 2005 American Evaluation Association conference in Toronto, which was held jointly with the Canadian Evaluation Society.

In spring 2006, **Gary Miron** was involved in four sessions at the American Educational Research Association conference held in San Francisco and gave a paper at the Comparative and International Education Society annual meeting in Honolulu.

**Michael Scriven** and **Gary Miron** were invited speakers at the National Research Council's School Level Data Symposium in Washington, DC, in December. Dr. Scriven also led the "Evaluation Boot Camp" workshop at the Michigan Association for Evaluation meeting in March.

**Liesel Ritchie** gave presentations at the annual meetings of the Southwestern Social Science Association in San Antonio, Southern Sociological Society in New Orleans, Mid-South Sociological Association in Atlanta,

Rural Sociological Society in Tampa, and the 30th Annual Hazards Research and Application Workshop in Boulder, CO. She was also a keynote presenter at the Aleutian Life Forum in Dutch Harbor, AK.

**Arlen Gullickson**, **Pamela Zeller**, **Mary Ramlow**, and **Barbara Wygant** were co-presenters of "Field Testing the Personnel Evaluation Standards" at the Consortium for Research on Education Accountability and Teacher Evaluation National Evaluation Institute in Dallas, TX.

Several staff members have been active in The Evaluation Center's Evaluation Café series, including **Chris Coryn**, **Arlen Gullickson**, **Carl Hanssen**, **Gary Miron**, **Liesel Ritchie**, **Michael Scriven**, **Carolyn Sullins**, and **Barbara Wygant**.

For a schedule and descriptions of upcoming **Evaluation Café** events, visit [evaluation.wmich.edu/evalcafe](http://evaluation.wmich.edu/evalcafe). Photos and slides from previous presentations are also available at this site, and digital streaming video will be available soon.



## Interdisciplinary Ph.D. Developments

by Michael Scriven

During 2005-06 academic year, the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation (IDPE) program was informed that the two remaining one-year graduate assistantship fellowships would not be renewed. Because WMU competes for students with other colleges around the country, this severely reduced the chances of attracting strong applicants into the program. It was also the year for which, when the program was founded three years earlier, we were promised six fellowships if we were doing well, as indeed we were.

This was one of the fallouts from the decline of the automobile industry, on which Michigan is acutely dependent. However, we were able, with much appreciated moral support from the director of The Evaluation Center, to persuade the Irving S. Gilmore Foundation of Kalamazoo to commit to providing two fellowships in return for the recipients' evaluation work on small Gilmore-funded programs. As a bonus, a shift to a new provost at the end of the academic year led to a more supportive approach from that office, meaning the reinstallation of our about-to-vanish fellowships.



The 2006 cohort of IDPE students: Ron Visscher, Todd Hareck, Sheri Hudachek-Lantz, Natasha Jankowski, Mina Zadeh, Michelle Woodhouse-Jackson, and Kristin Richardson

With this help, we were able to recruit seven new students into the largest class in our short history—a highly diversified and talented group (pictured above)—for a total current enrolment of 21, which is by a long way both the fastest-growing doctoral program at WMU and the largest one that costs the University only a single half-time core appointment.

As an evaluator, however, I have to explain that the first of these statistics is misleading, since it's based on using *proportional* increase in size as the indicator, which gives us a big advantage due to (i) starting from zero students four years ago and hence (ii) not losing any students to

graduation for the first three years! The second figure is also misleading because the small investment of WMU in the program could not produce a doctoral program without the help of extensive support from The Evaluation Center, which provides it with both housing and infrastructure/staff support, and where many of its students and its director work part-time.

The proportional growth of the IDPE enrollment won't look nearly so good next year, since summer 2007 will see the first group of our students graduating! At the moment, it seems virtually certain that three and possibly four students, almost all of the first year entries, will complete their theses this spring. It is very encouraging to see that all three are writing theses that will, in my view, make major contributions to the fields in which they are working. In other words, to translate that vague statement, I expect those theses and the articles they spin off to be cited in the future as representing a turning point in the research in those fields. These fields are (i) international aid evaluation (Thomaz Chianca); (ii) the evaluation of research and R&D (Chris Coryn); and (iii) the evaluation done by the offices of state legislative analysts, a crucial aid to state legislation in nearly every state in the union (John Risley). This kind of achievement is what we undertook to do when we defined the program's mission as that of training "thought-leaders in evaluation."



[evaluation.wmich.edu/jmde](http://evaluation.wmich.edu/jmde)

Another notable program achievement is the creation of the **Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation**, an online journal that you can find at the Center's Web site. Two of our first cohort of students, Coryn and Schroeter, are the hard-

working associate editors of it; and all students have contributed some work to it, without recompense. All five issues are still online and total just under 1,000 pages. More than 19,000 hits on the journal's site have been recorded to date, and it is read in more than 20 countries. The mission of the journal was to bring information about what is going on in the world of evaluation to people throughout that world, especially those who cannot afford the high cost of books, paper journals, and conventions. Each issue contains both refereed articles and reviews of current evaluation activities in several countries, usually contributed by correspondents in those countries, and several leading journals and/or books.

**For more information about the Interdisciplinary Ph.D. in Evaluation at WMU, please visit [www.wmich.edu/evalctr/phd](http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/phd)**

## Developments in Disaster Evaluation

The devastating impact of recent disasters has led to greater scrutiny of disaster response at all levels, compelling evaluators from around the world to focus on disaster preparedness, relief, mitigation, and reconstruction efforts that can impact the lives and livelihoods of countless people. The recent creation of the Disaster and Emergency Management Evaluation Topical Interest Group within the American Evaluation Association reflects the growing need for and interest in evaluating disaster preparation, response, and resilience. This group, chaired by Dr. Liesel Ritchie, can play a significant role in facilitating communication among those involved in this critical arena.

Dr. Ritchie's work in disaster evaluation includes participation with a National Science Foundation-funded team of researchers from the U.S., New Zealand, and Australia that is studying the underlying factors that influence people to prepare, or not prepare, for tsunamis. This includes understanding the complexity of factors that influence responses to different warnings of tsunamis. The study includes surveys of communities in seven states and territories (Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, North Carolina, Puerto Rico, and Washington).

Dr. Ritchie is leading the effort to collect data from 1,500 adults living on Kodiak Island, Alaska. This study's goal is to obtain information that will help reduce the risk to property and life from future tsunamis in coastal communities of the U.S. and its territories. The study is strongly linked to tsunami outreach performed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Tsunami Warning Center. The findings will enhance interventions designed to increase the probability that the public undertakes essential protective action to reduce risk from future tsunamis.



*Liesel Ritchie on Kodiak Island, Alaska*

Dr. Michael Scriven's editorial, "The Evaluation of Disasters," in the *Journal of MultiDisciplinary Evaluation* (#3) will also be of interest to those concerned with this topic.

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