

**Chairs' Corner -- December 2010**  
**Tom Stritikus and the UW College of Education**

TO: UW Foundation, Deans/Chancellors, University Advancement Staff

FROM: Lyn Grinstein, Chair, UW Foundation  
Howard P. Behar, Vice Chair, UW Foundation  
Daniel J. Evans, Immediate Past Chair, UW Foundation

Dear Friends,

We hope you saw, in the *Seattle Times* recently, news of the encouraging rise in graduation rates at Washington colleges and universities. The UW tops the public list, with a 2008 rate (latest available) of 77 percent of students graduating within six years, up from 70 percent in 2002. Among all Washington schools, we come in third, behind Whitman and Gonzaga, tied with Whitworth. Nationally, the average rate for 2008 was only 53 percent. Go Washington!

“Some administrators,” the *Times* reported, “say it’s because the state’s high schools are doing a better job of preparing students for college.” So it may not be a coincidence that the December *Atlantic* ranks Washington fifth in the nation on one measure of high-school achievement: the percentage of 15-year-olds who test at the “advanced proficiency” level in math. (This is based on work by a Stanford researcher in education and economics, Eric Hanushek.)

That’s the good news. The bad news is suggested by the title of the *Atlantic* article: “Your Child Left Behind.” Washington may rank fifth in the U.S. on this particular measure, but the U.S. ranks 31<sup>st</sup> among about 60 countries. Six percent of U.S. students have advanced skills in math, as against 28 percent in first-place Taiwan. (Super-star Singapore, for some reason, is not even included on the chart). If Washington were a country, it would rank 25<sup>th</sup> internationally—8.7 percent of our 15-year-olds test at the advanced level.

And that’s *before* the latest news, which emerged a couple of weeks ago: “Top Test Scores from Shanghai Stun Educators,” said the *New York Times* headline. In China’s first appearance in the international testing sweepstakes (the respected Programme for International Student Assessment of 2009), Shanghai 15-year-olds beat the world in science, reading, and math. On those same tests, the U.S. ranked 23<sup>rd</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, and 31<sup>st</sup> respectively. (It should be noted that China entered *only* students from Shanghai, its most educationally-advanced city.)

Whatever you think of standardized testing, it is hard not to be dismayed by these international comparisons. And of course there is that other persistent achievement gap that bedevils American education, the one between our minority children and the rest.

As you are all aware, dueling diagnoses and prescriptions for American K-12 education are flying thick and fast these days. But even amongst all the argument, there is some consensus: overall teacher quality has to be improved, and American schools of education have not exactly covered themselves with glory.

Enter, undaunted, Tom Stritikus, newly appointed dean of the UW College of Education.

“We have to reinvent what a College of Education is and does,” says Dean Stritikus. “And this school, because of the strength of its faculty, is already close to doing that. I want this to be *the* place, nationally, to create research that transforms education locally. We can be a national model of researchers doing work that is applied, that takes on the thorny issues of scale-up.”

Dean Stritikus grew up as part of a Greek immigrant family in Nebraska. He likes to recall one of his earliest projects in education: teaching his Greek-born father the rules and culture of football, when his father was baffled by the local hoopla over Nebraska’s first-ever defeat of Oklahoma. “Even as a boy,” says Dean Stritikus, “that made me think about issues of difference, adjustment, equity. What does a system, such as schools, need to do to help outsiders navigate?”

After majoring in English at the University of Nebraska, Dean Stritikus spent two years in Teach for America, teaching English as a second language to immigrant children in Baltimore. “I loved it,” he says, “getting to know the kids, the families, the barriers they faced. It honed my interest in these issues, and my sense of the pressing need.” He then did graduate work in education at U.C. Berkeley, earning a Ph.D. focused on language, literacy, and culture. In 2000, he joined the education faculty here, choosing the UW over other opportunities. “I could see,” he says, “that this was a really smart group of people, really committed to serious issues.”

Dean Stritikus took up his new post on September 16, succeeding Pat Wasley, who has returned to the faculty. Arthur Levine—former president of Teachers College Columbia, current president of the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation, and no fan of the educational status quo—called the appointment “a bold and exciting step.” He cited the dean’s “age, vision, and the fact that he is the first Teach for America volunteer to become a dean of education at an American university.” The UW, said Levine, is “a leader in teacher education,” and Dean Stritikus “is one of those rare individuals who understand the future of American education.”

For Dean Stritikus, the future includes a new conception of teacher education, and the UW already has one foot in that future. He describes an evolving teacher-training program in which, already, every professor takes his or her research into UW teacher-ed classrooms and—once a week—into high-needs K-12 classrooms, where UW teaching interns can watch the research being put into practice and then have a chance to talk about it with the professor. “Teaching is a clinical practice,” he says. “Our faculty want

to give people the tools to do what they need to do with kids *in the moment*—and that is extremely intellectually challenging.”

What about calls for more-rigorous admission standards for aspiring teachers? “In some sense, that’s what we do already,” says Dean Stritikus. (The UW teacher-education program requires a bachelor’s degree for entry, and there are only about 230 students in the Master’s in Teaching program.) But he also feels (citing national research) that the quality and content of teacher-training programs matter enormously. “What are the mechanisms to improve the vast majority of teachers in the middle? How do we train teachers about the kinds of places they’re going to work, the contexts they’ll be working in? And for the really good research going on here, how do we see that through to the field and change practice?” Those are the urgent questions for him.

And, more broadly: “What can our contribution be to creating a more ambitious context for teaching and learning?” That seems to us a critical question for this moment in our history, and we wish Dean Stritikus well.

We also wish all of you a very happy holiday season.

Lyn, Howard, and Dan

P.S. The News Tribune recently requested that Interim President Phyllis write an op-ed focusing on UW’s responsibilities as a public institution, and the piece was published on Sunday, Dec. 12. It expresses her thoughts on where she believes the UW is headed, and we are pleased to share it with you. You can read it here:

<http://www.thenewstribune.com/2010/12/12/1461906/the-new-normal-state-public-university.html>

#### Looking Back

- **Contributions July 1, 2010 through November 30, 2010, total \$119,647,843.**
- The **November 2010 Report of Contributions** is attached and contains fundraising details.

#### Looking Ahead

- **Friday, January 28, 2011**, UW Foundation Board of Directors Meeting, 8:30 a.m. coffee; 9:00-11:00 a.m. meeting.
- **Friday, April 29, 2011**, UW Foundation Board of Directors Meeting, 8:30 a.m. coffee; 9:00-11:00 a.m. meeting.
- **Friday, September 9, 2011**, Joint Meeting of UW Foundation Board of Directors and UWAA Board of Trustees, 8:00 a.m. coffee; 8:30-11:30 a.m. meeting.