



**S T U D Y I N G
G I F T E D S T U D**

Illustration by Greg Delanyne



DR. ANNE N. RINN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY AT WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY, GREW UP AS A GIFTED CHILD, ENTERING THE HONORS PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON. NOW, SHE'S LOOKING FOR WAYS TO MAKE THE EDUCATION OF GIFTED CHILDREN EVEN BETTER.

She traces the roots of her interest in studying the development of gifted children to her first college psychology class. "There was one small paragraph in our intro to psychology class on gifted students," she said. "I've been interested in it ever since." The Center for Gifted Studies at WKU defines a gifted student as one who is identified as possessing demonstrated or potential ability to perform at an exceptionally high level in general intellectual aptitude, specific academic aptitude, creative or divergent thinking, psychosocial or leadership skills, or in the visual or performing arts.

Dr. Rinn participated in honors programs in high school and college, programs that helped her develop into the person she is. "I wanted to understand what about gifted programs made such an impact," she said. "I want to help others find that same impact."

The honors program at Houston is similar to the one offered at WKU. Honors students live together, take classes together, and have a building dedicated to their needs. The classes and the experience offer a challenge and a chance to bond with other students looking for those same challenges. "As an honors student, you get to delve into things and think critically," she said.

At WKU, Rinn is working on a longitudinal study of gifted students attending the summer program for Verbally and Mathematically Precocious Youth (VAMPY) offered through WKU's Center for Gifted Studies. Dr. Rinn is studying the effects of attending summer camps on several academic and social development issues. She is trying to determine if the camps help the gifted children develop better social skills, as well as academic skills. Gifted children can be ostracized and can feel left out in normal high school programs.



Dr. Anne Rinn

Dr. Rinn began collecting data in the summer of 2005 and will finish in the summer of 2009. She is using surveys to collect data on how the children feel about themselves in academic settings and social settings, their emotional health, and their goals in life. "We want to see how these change," she said.

The students may feel that they can achieve higher goals once they complete the summer program, she said, adding, "The children involved in the study are excited about it. They don't mind filling out the large packet of information."

Rinn is also observing the students by teaching a class on psychology during the program. "It's really neat to study the same kids I'm working with," she said.

The psychology professor is working with multiple undergraduate students and graduate students on the study and says she learned much more from working as a research assistant during her undergraduate studies than she did in class. She wants to make sure that her students

have the opportunity to work as research assistants as well.

"My lab is open if undergraduates want to work in it," she said. "It's fun to work with them and watch them learn." Dr. Rinn's students are actively involved in all phases of her research including data collection, analysis, and writing papers. "They're doing it all very capably," she said.

has given me many opportunities to present my research once it is finished."

Jessica Rumsey, a senior from Cross Plains, Tennessee, helps Dr. Rinn collect and enter data. Rumsey, along with other assistants, prepared a manuscript for publication and presentation at conferences in the spring. "I have learned how to be a

class. "I really became interested in her research because I have a passion for working with children and adolescents," Leclere said. "When she asked me if I wanted to do research with her, I was so excited." Leclere has been actively involved in writing the literature review for the study, taking past studies and relating them to the current study.



Photo by LaDonna Harmon

Kelly Jamieson (left), a senior at Xavier University, and **Candace Gross** (right), a Senior at Northwestern College in Iowa, were two of 14 students accepted to the Research Experience for Undergraduates Program. Over 250 students across the nation applied.

Lindy Settle, a second year graduate student from Goodlettsville, Tennessee, has worked closely with Dr. Rinn during her two years of graduate education at WKU. "She has given me a lot of opportunities to be involved," Settle said. "She has allowed me to have a very active involvement in her research. The experience I have gained from this has been excellent and she is a pleasure to work under."

Settle served as a teaching assistant for Dr. Rinn during VAMPY in summer 2005. "She is an

Melinda Lalonde, a senior from Boisbriand, Quebec, Canada, had Dr. Rinn as a professor for an Internet class in the summer of 2005. "At the end of the class, I asked her if she needed help on her research so that I could gain research experience," Lalonde said. "Instead of doing research for her, we agreed that I would be working on my senior honors thesis and she would be my thesis director. I definitely have learned how to do a professional thesis with her guidance, and she

better writer, and I have learned about gifted individuals and how to help them effectively," Rumsey said.

Dr. Rinn is Rumsey's academic advisor, and is helping Rumsey plan her future beyond graduation. "I also consider her to be a close friend," Rumsey said. "She is someone you can go to when you have problems or just need to talk. She does not pass judgment."

Gina Leclere, a senior from Tell City, Indiana, met Dr. Rinn when Leclere took her Gifted and Creative

excellent teacher and the students responded to her with a lot of enthusiasm and admiration. They were so excited when they learned that her primary area of interest was students like them."

Settle said she learned that reasons for research can be complicated. "The reasoning behind one's research can seem objective and scientific, which is good, but the motivation to research something can be personal," Settle said. "For Dr. Rinn, I think it is personal. She really cares about gifted students." ■