



Photo by Erich Boekelheide

These parapsychology scholars are among 150 elementary and junior high school students participating in one of three workshops offered this summer for gifted pre-teens.

Program caters to 'gifted'

By GINGER BARNES
Of the Emerald

The young faces peering out from under worn baseball caps and lopsided pigtails reveal nothing unusual about this pre-teen classroom.

Not until the instructor begins to speak of flexibility and assumptions, flow charts and electrons, does the observer become aware that these are not ordinary junior high schoolers.

The children in this computer programming class are students at the University this summer, participating in the Second Annual Summer Enrichment Program for Gifted and Talented Students.

They represent the top 3 percent of students in Oregon (although they are accepted from all over the United States) and have an above-average measured intelligence.

Nominated for their outstanding abilities in general intellect, academic achievement, creativity, leadership and the arts, these sixth, seventh and eighth-graders will take part in two weeks of advanced learning and living on campus.

Education professor George Shepherd created the program a little more than two years ago when he felt there was a need for alternative programs for gifted children.

"Some children want to pursue academics in the summer and have only church and sport

campus to turn to," Shepherd says. "I felt the University was a tremendous resource."

To demonstrate the interest and need for his program, Shepherd points out that 96 percent of the students who attended last year's two-week sessions want to come back.

Classes in everything from parapsychology to mime are, according to student evaluations, teaching these children that an exceptional mind is nothing to be ashamed of.

"These evaluations reveal what bugs the kids about regular schools," Shepherd says.

"One kid said, 'I'm not afraid to be smart here.' They are with true intellectual peers for the first time who don't call each other 'show-offs' or 'apple-polishers.'"

Social progress is just as important in the program as academic progress, Shepherd explains. "These kids are normally popular and are leaders, but are isolated intellectually. Here, there is a large mental peer group from all over that they can share with."

Shepherd says he approaches the students with major concepts but lets them use their own insights to draw conclusions.

"We have kids taking calculus who haven't had algebra. We aren't going for geniuses, but are just trying to stimulate their interests so they can deal with concepts — no matter what their background.

"We can provide more individualized instruction here that opposes the 'three R's' of regular schools — ram, remember and regurgitate."

The program accepted 450 of 600 applications received for this summer's three two-week sessions. Efforts are being made to avoid an "elite-type situation," Shepherd says, so gifted children from all families are able to attend.

About 25 students are here on funds raised by private individuals and by foundations such as the Oregon Association of Talented and Gifted Children.

Each session — limited to 150 participants — costs \$320 and includes housing, food, instruction and recreation. This summer's program will continue until August 8.


Student reactions to experiences in the talented and gifted program all seem to be positive, but one common complaint sounds typically collegiate — "the dorm food is really awful."

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