

College of Education wins behavior research funds

■ The two grants will fund the creation of new research centers within the college

By John Liebhardt
Oregon Daily Emerald

The University's College of Education recently received two grants totaling nearly \$9 million to study methods on improving student behavior and reading skills.

The grants, awarded by the U.S. Department of Education, will fund two research centers within the College of Education to develop methods to help children from kindergarten to third grade who have difficulty reading or who exhibit behaviors that may become future discipline problems.

"These grants speak to the extraordinary breadth and depth of the faculty and students at the College of Education," said Martin Kaufman, dean of the College of Education. "These centers are making cutting-edge research available to

those in the teaching profession so they can implement best practices in the classroom."

The U.S. Department of Education only awards six research grants in this area, and the University was the only institution to receive more than one, Kaufman said.

Robert Horner, professor of special education and one of the administrators of the grants, said the two awards are "collaborative grants" because they fund research on schools' two most important tasks: teaching students how to get along with other students and teaching students how to read.

The reading grant will create the Center for Improving Reading Competence Using Intensive Treatments Schoolwide program, which will help identify beginning readers who are not developing reading skills at the same level as their peers, said Deborah Simmons, associate professor of education and an administrator of the grant. Un-

der the department of education's Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement, CIRCUITS will work with students from 12 schools in three states to develop strategies for reading intervention programs. The grant will also monitor the progress of these strategies.

Research shows that struggling readers may make up to 20 percent of an individual classroom, Simmons said. Reading skills are enormously important because the United States is based on text-heavy information technology, she said.

"Students today are not poorer readers than they were years ago — the demands are higher," she said. "The literacy bar has been raised."

In fact, she said, U.S. grade schools develop curriculum as if every student knows how to read by the end of the third grade. In education jargon, it is said that students between the grades of kindergarten and grade three "learn to

read"; after third grade, students "read to learn."

However, teaching appropriate behavior is a more complex task, Horner said. While schools assume that students have learned to read by the end of the third grade, "We don't have something as clean as that with school behavior," he said.

The basis of behavior programs is to proactively teach every student behavior rules, Horner said. For example, each student is taught basic rules, such as taking turns and being respectful to others. School faculty, staff and administrators explain the rules beginning on the first day of school, reward students for good behavior and punish them for poor behavior.

The behavior grant will create the Center for Schoolwide Behavior. Under the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior, the new center will work with 90 schools from five states to track changes in behaviors, academic performance

and effect on families.

Students react positively to schoolwide approaches, Horner said, because everyone understands the same non-negotiable rules.

"The students are taught how to behave correctly, not just how not to behave badly," Horner said. "All the kids in the school know what is expected of them."

Members of the College of Education have been promoting schoolwide behavior for the past ten years, often to great results, Horner said. In one middle school, the most common type of office referrals dropped 50 percent in the first year after a schoolwide behavior program was instituted.

"Kids like organized schools," Horner said. "They are not happy with chaotic, random environments."

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Supreme Court reviews virtual child porn law

By Judy Peres
Chicago Tribune

WASHINGTON (KRT) — The U.S. Supreme Court this week will hear arguments on an amendment to the federal child pornography law that critics say is so broad it would make such mainstream films as "Risky Business" and "Romeo and Juliet" criminal.

The government has asked the top court to uphold the Child Pornography Protection Act of 1996, which it contends is a legitimate and essential tool to keep pedophiles from preying on children. In oral arguments set for Tuesday, a group of civil libertarians will try to convince the justices that the law violates the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech.

The challengers claim the statute targets numerous mainstream films that depict sexually active teenagers, as well as video games, cartoons, photographs and paintings. They maintain it is so vaguely worded that individuals have no way of knowing what is over the line until police knock on their doors and confiscate it.

That's because the law bans not only real child pornography — that is, pictures of individuals under the age of 18 in sexual situations — but also images that "appear to" or "convey the impression" that they depict minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct.

Mere possession of what some are calling "virtual" child porn carries a prison term of up to 10 years; the penalty for creating or distributing such images is up to 30 years.

The legislators who amended an earlier child pornography statute said the change was a necessary accommodation to the computer age, in which anyone with a computer can alter photographs and video clips or create fictional images to look exactly like actual images. That way, a film purporting to show children engaged in sexual activity might be based on no real people at all.

"Since there are no real children involved," said Eric Freedman, a professor of First Amendment law at Hofstra University, "what the statute targets is the concept of sex with children. Down that road lies thought control."

Supporters deny the law was meant to target mainstream films or artwork.

"This law merely regulates sexually explicit images which are virtually indistinguishable to unsuspecting

viewers from un-retouched photographs of actual children engaging in the act," said Jay Sekulow, chief counsel for the American Center for Law and Justice, which represents members of the House and Senate who drafted the 1996 amendment.

But challengers of the law say its language is so broad that it criminalizes far more than child pornography, and it makes no exception for legitimate users of what might appear pornographic, such as sex therapists, researchers and the authors of textbooks and safe-sex manuals.

Within weeks of passage of the amended child pornography law in 1996, a legal challenge was mounted by the Free Speech Coalition, an adult-entertainment trade association, along with a publisher, an artist and a photographer who feared the law would infringe on their constitutionally protected right to artistic expression.

A federal district court judge found the law constitutional, but the U.S. court of appeals in San Francisco struck it down, saying "censorship through the enactment of criminal laws intended to control an evil idea cannot satisfy the constitutional requirements of the First Amendment."

Other appellate courts have disagreed, which likely helped persuade the Supreme Court to take the case.

The government says computer-generated images of minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct "whet the appetite" of pedophiles and allow them to seduce real children. It also argues that the statute is unenforceable without the "virtual" provisions, since the government would have the burden of proving that the image depicts a real child, and modern computer technology makes that distinction extremely difficult.

Supporters of the legislation argue that even though no real child was exploited in the manufacture of a virtual image, such images can lead to the molestation or exploitation of real children.

But Ann Beeson of the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed a friend-of-the-court brief siding with the challengers, says that can never be a sufficient reason to ban otherwise-protected speech: "All the government would have to say to justify any censorship law is, 'This speech might cause a crime.'"

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