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## Five NIU deans promote P-20 initiatives to national audience

DeKALB - Northern Illinois University's push to lead Illinois toward P-20 thinking consistently touts that improving education is "everybody's business."

In the meantime, the initiative's leaders are making sure that the work of promoting P-20 is also everybody's business.

Five deans from NIU - Chris Sorensen (Education), Frederick Kitterle (Liberal Arts and Sciences), Harold Kafer (Visual and Performing Arts), Promod Vohra (Engineering and Engineering Technology) and Shirley Richmond (Health and Human Sciences) - presented the P-20 project to a national audience earlier this month during the Association of Teacher Educators Summer Conference in Cambridge, Mass.

Sorensen, Kafer and Scott Kubelka, principal of the soon-to-open Wright Elementary School in Malta, also led a panel session on the partnership between NIU and DeKalb School District 428 to create a school where arts and technology are integrated into the curriculum. The District 428-NIU partnership is part of NIU's P-20 initiative.

Joint presentations also have been accepted for national education conferences this fall and next spring.

"I cannot stress enough the importance of our P-20 initiative, nor can I adequately express my pride in the collective effort of these deans to develop and sustain so many projects to prepare better teachers and provide stronger schools for the children and adults of Illinois," NIU President John Peters said. "A good education is a critical component of a successful life and the seed of lifelong learning. What we're doing today with P-20 will enhance these opportunities tomorrow, not just in our state, but perhaps in every state represented at the conference."

The healthy collaboration among NIU's deans became "the talk of the conference," Sorensen said.

"People can't believe a group of deans gets along so well. They were impressed with that, and also with what we had to say about the work we're doing," she said. "We have a lot of respect for one another, and we trust each other. We've learned the whole is always greater than the sum of the parts."

"I'm really proud of the fact that P-20 has become a part of the university's mission, and that five deans from five different colleges are making it a priority for their colleges and the university," Vohra said. "By giving it a priority, we are able to sit down, brainstorm many ideas and then bring those ideas onto the table for faculty to consider, take ownership and then begin individual research."

The presentation - "P-20 on Campus: Teacher Preparation as a University-Wide Commitment" - looked at the initial results from the last two years of work.

P-20 is a movement that promotes lifelong learning and aligns all educational programs in a continuum that improves transitions at every level. By regarding formal education as broader than the typical K-12 concept - starting earlier than kindergarten and continuing beyond high school through the bachelor's degree and into graduate school - educators can break down the barriers that have prevented collaboration.

NIU has assembled representatives from elementary and secondary schools, two- and four-year colleges and universities and education-related agencies for statewide summits, and has started a Web site ([www.p20.niu.edu](http://www.p20.niu.edu)) to track the work.

The deans have pursued and encouraged collaborative grant writing. They also have discussed policy issues and together drafted reflective statements, which were sent to state legislators.

"We're doing more to work together across colleges to really advance the way in which we prepare teachers," Kitterle said. "It's also given us opportunities to do research on learning so we can learn how to be more effective."

Kitterle points to Project REAL, a joint project in Rockford between NIU, Rock Valley College and the Rockford School District funded by a \$5 million federal Teacher Quality Enhancement grant.

Faculty from the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences are "working to improve math and writing skills," Kitterle said. "We're setting up a writing center in Jefferson High School to reach students with different learning styles."

Closer to campus, the Wright School will, in coming days, become a living example of what P-20 can birth.

Located in Malta, Wright Elementary School will offer a unique and challenging learning experience for children in kindergarten through fifth-grade.

Each school day will present children with opportunities to use higher-order thinking skills and creativity in problem-based learning activities.

Teachers will weave fine arts and technology across the core curriculum so children not only learn about fine arts and technology, but learn through fine arts and technology.

"Certainly the most obvious piece of the P-20 action - the most obvious focused initiative - between the College of Visual and Performing Arts and the College of Education is the Wright School," Kafer said.

"We're all together moving into this Professional Development School model," Sorensen said. "It's not just the College of Education. It's all of us. The joint resources of the university have a lot to contribute."

Camaraderie between the deans has produced two "critical" results, Kafer said.

"It has given us a context in which to communicate to external constituencies about collaborative efforts that were already ongoing," Kafer said.

"The other is that by enabling us to develop such a context for communication, the internal result has been expanded communication across the academic colleges involved in P-20, not just at a

dean's level, but at the faculty level," he added. "The result of that, you see, has been collective wisdom manifesting itself in creative responses to new opportunities for action."

Vohra confirmed that his faculty are embracing P-20's rich fountain of ideas.

"At least six or seven people are looking at P-20 as a possible research cluster and a source of competitive funding for doing things with high schools and community colleges," he said. "I see more diverse activities becoming a part of P-20. More partnerships. More funding. More innovation. A wider group."

Many or all of those desires could arrive soon.

"Right now, I think it's fair to say that we're catching our breath and waiting to see the results of two large federal grant initiatives, about which we will hear in September," Kafer said. "Getting one or both of those grants will then become the focus of next steps and application of resources."

"What our activities have illustrated is that the way in which we are going to make a difference in the quality of educations for kids in K-12 is going to be because universities are comprehensive and that different kinds of people contribute," Kitterle added. "The ability to help schools is not just a College of Education thing. It is really broad and encompasses wide ranges of faculty expertise and research."

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