News Release

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Finlayson Named NIU Lincoln Laureate For 2003

DeKALB -- A love of learning and teaching, and a knack for technology, have helped Shannon Finlayson become Northern Illinois University’s Lincoln Laureate for 2003.

Finlayson, of Glendale Heights, joined other winners from each of the state’s four-year degree granting institutions at ceremonies in Springfield on Nov. 2 to receive her award from Governor George Ryan. The honor is bestowed upon one student from each university who has demonstrated outstanding excellence in curricular and extracurricular activities.

“Shannon is one of the best students we have ever had come through the mathematics teacher certification program,” said Cindy Stecher, who coordinates that program, and who nominated Finlayson for the award.

What separated Finlayson from other students, Stecher said, was her blend of technological skill and her ability to help students of all skill levels learn material. The incorporation of technology into her teaching was a natural for Finlayson, who began her college career studying engineering, but later opted to pursue a double major of secondary mathematics education and computer science. She earned her computer science degree last May and will complete work on her education degree in December. She has posted a near perfect grade point average while participating in the university’s challenging Honors Program.

Her use of technology in the classroom was epitomized by her honors program senior capstone project, for which she created a website designed to assist students in the classes where she did her student teaching. The sites were designed not just as repositories of static information, but as resources to help students learn. They included information on assignments, practice tests and answers, information and feedback opportunities for parents, and study tips.

All of the information (where appropriate) was referenced to the class texts.

“I was trying to help them learn to be better students and take learning into their own hands,” says Finlayson, who has created a similar website for students in a computer programming class she is currently teaching at Lyons Township High School.

That concern for student well-being was noted by instructors throughout her college career, said Stecher, who noted that when Finlayson served as a supplemental instructor in a class for students in need of remedial math help, she not only answered questions on topics taught in class, but also worked with students to improve their study skills. As a result, most showed improvement over the course of the semester.

Finlayson also excelled outside of the classroom. As an active member of the Alpha Phi Omega (a co-ed service fraternity where she was chapter president and once elected “Brother of the Year”) she helped raise $2,000 for Habitat for Humanity and worked as a volunteer to assist with fundraisers for AIDS and multiple sclerosis. She also organized a panel for the 2001 Northern Leadership Institute and was the Public Relations Chairman on the state board for the Illinois Education Association Student Program.

She was also one of 700 students from across the country selected by Microsoft to spend last summer as a software test engineer, testing and revising software that will be released in the coming years.

As interesting as that experience was, Finlayson plans to pursue her first love: teaching.

“I always enjoyed helping people learn, even when I was a student just helping out friends. But with students in my own classroom it’s different. It’s not just helping them to get a good grade on a test, but actually teaching them everything they know about a topic. When my students hand in assignments I’m always amazed, it’s like, ‘Wow, I helped teach them all of that!’ ”

Finlayson’s past honors have included induction into the Golden Key Honor Society, receiving the Marguerite Montague Wheeler Scholarship for Outstanding Scholarship in Mathematics and Potential as a Teacher, and winning the NIU Outstanding Woman Student Award in 2002 from the NIU office of University Resources for Women.

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