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Progress Report

UNLV Fusion staff writer

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Progress Report

UNLV's nationally recognized department of educational psychology, housed within the College of Education, has made remarkable strides recently

In less than five years UNLV's department of educational psychology has achieved national recognition on the basis of increased faculty research productivity, public visibility, and academic influence, department chair Ralph E. Reynolds says, adding that there are several indications of the progress the department has made.

Perhaps the most noteworthy is the department's listing in the top 20 educational psychology programs ranked by *U.S. News & World Report*. The department was ranked 19th among all U.S. graduate programs evaluated in the study and was selected for the honor by deans at peer institutions.

"It's an extraordinary accomplishment," says Reynolds. "It's an indication of both the greater recognition of the program and the growing academic influence of the department faculty." Reynolds adds that he hopes that the department's *U.S. News* ranking helped support the visibility of UNLV's College of Education, which also received acknowledgement this year as one of the top graduate-level education programs in the country.

He notes that another example of the department's success is the annual number of faculty publications: They increased 200 percent from 14 in 2000 to 42 in 2003. Also, the quality of the journals in which faculty members are publishing has increased significantly. National paper presentations have increased 81 percent also.

These are just a few of the accomplishments of the department, according to College of Education Interim Dean Thomas Pierce.

"We are delighted to see this progress in the department of educational psychology," Pierce says. "There are many additional indicators of the

excellence the department is achieving. The College of Education is proud to see the wonderful strides they've made."

For example, in just a few short years a department faculty that once held only nine editorial board positions now holds 30 such positions on the boards of influential professional publications such as the *Journal of Educational Psychology* and *Contemporary Educational Psychology*. Additionally, five years ago, no professor from the department held an appointment as editor on any of the major educational psychology journals; in 2004, department faculty members held four such positions.

Since 1999, the department also has successfully established two new Ph.D. programs, including the first in learning and technology, created in collaboration with technology faculty from the department of curriculum and instruction. The second is in education psychology with strands in assessment and evaluation, learning and cognition, school counseling, school psychology, and content area emphases.

Most remarkable, however, is the upswing in the graduate student population, Reynolds says. This year, the educational psychology department formally admitted 90 master's and doctoral students; the number of graduate students admitted in 2000 was 18.

"At the core of any successful university department is its faculty," Reynolds explains. "Without question, it is the professors – teachers, scholars, and researchers – who build the educational foundation that provides the exceptional learning experience for today's students and tomorrow's teaching professionals."

The department's successes can be traced back to 2000, Reynolds says, when a group of newly hired faculty, working with existing faculty, created a shared

vision with the following goals: (1) to achieve national prominence in research by increasing department-wide scholarly productivity, (2) to create new doctoral programs and attract exceptional local, national, and international students, and (3) to maintain the department's traditional excellence in teaching and the preparation of education professionals. Additionally, the faculty established a goal to seek national visibility and prominence relative to doctoral program quality and student research opportunities.

According to Reynolds, the five essential steps used to establish the department's highly successful research culture and program excellence included:

- Creating a shared vision that is not mandated, but instead emerges from honest, continuous faculty dialogue.
- Establishing goals that pertain to, and are achieved by, the department as a whole, thus allowing each faculty member to contribute to meeting these goals in ways that best suit his/her particular talents and interests.
- Hiring new academic faculty to support existing faculty in creating an environment of collegiality and productivity.
- Initiating and maintaining a workload policy that allows time for faculty to do more research and grant writing while continuing to value traditional faculty excellence in teaching and professional educator preparation.
- Initiating and maintaining equitable treatment of faculty in relation to these new goals and policies.

"While all of these components are significant, the most crucial element in this entire process is trust," Reynolds says. "It is the creation of trust within a department that allows important activities to continue, regardless of changes in administration and faculty."