

## **Prof. earns Native student achievement grants**

by Walter Baumann - Tuesday, November 25, 2008

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1502/prof-earns-native-student-achievement-grants-3/>

An associate professor in the College of Education and Human Services recently received nearly \$1 million from two grants to continue her nationally recognized Native American student education projects.

Judith Hanks, whose own experiences in Native American culture and teaching led her to that field of study, outlined the goals of the ambitious program.

“With these two grants from No Child Left Behind, we will be helping teachers of learning-disabled and emotionally/behaviorally disturbed students teach using the students’ learning and thinking strengths,” Hanks said. “When they understand the concepts and methods, they can help the students learn that much more effectively.”

Hanks explained that the disproportionately large number of Native American students in these two classifications is a result of historical issues with boarding schools and cultural assimilation.

“All the assessments of learning aptitude happen at a young age. Because of the low number of Native American teachers, these Native students are usually assessed by white teachers,” Hanks said. “That, coupled with the parents’ aversion to education from their childhoods, makes the children uncomfortable, and they clam up.”

The goal of project, titled “Closing the Mathematics Gap for Native American Students Project,” is the re-education of teachers in several Native American-serving public school districts around the state of Wisconsin. The \$935,468 grants will be spread out over three years and will cover substitute teaching during workshops, training tools, classroom materials and travel.

Hanks believes that, by using concepts based on traditional Native American teaching method, she can help the teachers to teach more critically. She hopes this will help them to adjust their teaching styles to the children’s cognitive skills, instead of reading straight from a textbook.

Hanks’ dissertation, “Native American Pedagogy and Cognitive Based Mathematics Instruction”, was among the first to champion this new style of classroom instruction and helped change the formal teaching method endorsed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

While a lot of footwork lies ahead of her, she remains optimistic and excited that this project will bear fruit.

“This whole project is going to involve a lot of travel as we visit each school district to assess progress on teaching method changes,” Hanks said. “But I’m definitely passionate about seeing this project advance.”