

First education leadership doctoral cohort begins at Western

By Darcie Shinberger, University Relations

The 25 members of the Class of 2009 are making history at Western Illinois University.

These 25 aren't your typical students. They are principals, superintendents and school administrators by day; by nights and weekends they carry the title of Western's first cohort of educational leadership doctoral students.



Robert Dyer '96, the director of educational programs for the Moline (IL) School District, former principal of Willard School in Moline and one of the first students in the program, said this degree program couldn't have come at a better time.

"It has always been a long term goal of mine to obtain my doctorate; and the WIU program was of particular interest because not only was it close to home, it was the first doctoral program for the university and it's exciting to be a part of a new venture," said Dyer, who also holds an education specialist degree from Western. "This program will also provide a great opportunity to interact with colleagues, which should lead to a deeper understanding of the issues that face schools and administrators."

In July 2005, the North Central Association Higher Education Commission, the accrediting agency for colleges and universities, approved Western Illinois University's first doctorate program, an Educational Doctorate (Ed.D.) degree in educational leadership for elementary and secondary school administrators in the greater western Illinois region.

"Western has developed a doctoral program that provides school administrators with the leadership skills necessary to address the rapidly changing educational landscape and distinctive characteristics of Pre-K-12 public education in the University's service region," said Western President Al Goldfarb. "The University is proud to offer a program that recognizes the role of schools in the local economy and

integrates the use of Western's nationally-known technology applications and innovations into the curriculum."

Lonny Lemon '98, superintendent of Pawnee (IL) Community Unit School District No. 11, received both his Type 75 and education specialist degrees from Western. His past collaboration with Western led him to investigate the new doctoral program.

"I was overwhelmingly satisfied with the degrees I received from Western, and I especially liked the weekend formats. Most important, however, was the fact that the professors became our colleagues. We learned from them in a variety of settings; their teaching didn't end at the classroom door," Lemon added. "I'm sure this same philosophy will continue with the doctoral program. I'm expecting this program to make me a better educator and leader, and I'm sure the WIU staff will lead us down that path."

Vicki VanTuyle '79, the superintendent of North Green Unit District No. 3 in White Hall (IL) also completed her master's degree at Western and participated in the Alternative Certification program at WIU designed for superintendents.

"The coursework was challenging and productive; I expect the same from this program," she said. "The association with colleagues from around the state will benefit each of us as we move forward in our educational careers."

Mark Twomey '97 '99, assistant principal of Macomb High School - and soon-to-be principal of the school - agrees with his fellow students' assessments.

"I hope to use the research I conduct in this program to make the Macomb School District as successful as possible," Twomey, who received his bachelor's and master's degrees from WIU, said. "I hope to learn how to impact as many students as possible with best practice research. We must continually get the research results to the classrooms where they can make a positive impact on students."

The doctoral program coursework consists of 43 semester hours over a three-year time frame. The next two 20-student cohorts may begin as early as 2008 and 2010, respectively. Each student will work with a specific low-performing school/district in Western's service region as part of the program's partnership with public education.

"We designed the educational leadership program, using a cohort model and an applied research approach, to provide current school administrators with the skills necessary to effect significant improvement in the academic performance of all students served," said Bonnie Smith-Skripps '73 '74, College of Education and Human Services dean. "I am impressed with the quality and commitment of our first cohort of doctoral students, and am confident that their academic pursuits will greatly impact not only the students in their own schools, but the culture of educational leadership across the region."

Ellin Lotspeich '74 '95, the principal at Irving Elementary School in Kewanee (IL), added that she enrolled in this program so she could expand upon her work helping a rural school district reach its potential.

"No Child Left Behind has set a challenge to ensure all children succeed in school. This doctoral program is a foundation that will further our knowledge base to help children," Lotspeich said. "I've seen success at Irving with our students, but each year the challenges increase. I want to better prepare myself to meet those challenges head on."

Additional information on the Ed.D. in educational leadership can be obtained from the department of educational leadership website at www.wiu.edu/edleadership or by calling the department at 309/298-1070.