FEFOCUS

Volume 11, Issue 1 Fall 2012

President's Message

From inception, the mission of the Florida Education Fund (FEF) has been to produce well-trained scholars and professionals who lead communities and forge impactful pathways to self-reliance and innovation. Our efforts have paid great dividends, with 98% of our pre-college students earning college admission and nearly 80% of McKnight Doctoral Fellows completing Ph.D. programs within 5.5 years, two years earlier than the national average. With this critical mass of successful students and graduates, we now help transform communities.

As shown in this edition of the *Focus*, our graduate and matriculating McKnight Fellows help us fulfill our mission by providing a significant portion of our academic support programming at both the pre-college and Ph.D. levels.

With our doctoral programs, by presenting workshops, collaborating on research and publication projects, and mentoring younger scholars in the spirit of the late Dr. Bill Jones, graduates help extend our highly effective developmental efforts. Most recently, for example, graduate Dr. Mark Dawkins, business school Associate

Dean at the University of Georgia, led our team of professors in developing publication workshops for our growing Summer Research and Writing Institute.

At the pre-college level, we, our graduates and Fellows work around the State to help improve STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) education, an area critical to U.S. economic strength and global competitiveness.

In this edition of the Focus, you will meet Amanda Tazaz, a Florida State University Fellow who trains Citrus County middle school teachers to incorporate STEM into their curricula. You will discover how our virtual math tutoring impelled the FEF to develop a Web app to help students increase the computation speed essential to performing well in class and on standardized tests. You'll learn about the FEF's first summer math and robotics camp in Opalocka, where McKnight graduate Dr. Dawn Elliot Martin, a NASA Engineer, visited with students to talk about jobs in aerospace. After interacting with Martin and other role models, learning math and building robots at camp, most students reported improved math skills and heightened interest in STEM careers. Finally, you'll read about the 2012 State Brain Bowl Competitions, which boasted the highest number of competitors yet in the FEF's intense contests designed to help students excel in math.



Dr. Lawrence Morehouse President & CEO

These strategies to continue producing highly competitive pre-college students, scholars, and professionals despite the budget crisis benefit from graduates such as Senator Anitere Flores, whose story also appears in this edition of the *Focus*. A member of the Florida Legislature for eight years, Senator Flores has helped the FEF meet most of its legislative budgetary goals. We remain mindful that her ability to support us is strengthened as we continue to invest in human capital, guided by the wisdom of experience, and embracing the inevitability of change with the willingness to make timely adjustments.

Senator Anitere Flores Addresses FEF's New Ph.D. Fellows



Florida State Senator Anitere Flores

In 1997, a bright, ambitious college graduate named Anitere Flores began law school with the help of FEF's Minority Participation in Legal Education scholarship program. She earned her J.D., passed the bar, and worked as Governor Jeb Bush's Education Policy Chief before running for Florida State Representative in District 114, South Miami-Dade. After serving three terms in the Florida House of Representatives,

Flores won the District 38 State Senate seat in 2010. This June, at the 2012 McKnight New Fellows' Orientation, Senator Flores spoke to the FEF's 40 new Fellows about the rewards and responsibilities appurtenant to FEF's investment in them.

Without the FEF, she recounted, she would not

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MDF's Model Mentor Dr. William R. Jones Leaves Legacy of Scholarship and Guidance

Because of his expansive devotion to guiding and counseling the next generation of scholars, the FEF, in 1988, named its award to annually recognize outstanding mentors in honor of Dr. William R. Jones. From the McKnight program's inception, Dr. Jones' tireless efforts to mentor have served to prepare and inspire hundreds of McKnight Fellows.

Sadly, Dr. Jones, who was still an active scholar, passed away on July 13, 2012. He is survived by a loving family; extended family of students, McKnights, and colleagues; and a legacy that will continue forever.



Dr. Bill Jones

Dr. Jones was Professor Emeritus at the Florida State University (FSU), after having retired as the longtime Director and founder of the University's Afro-American Studies Program. He gained national renown for authoring three books, producing vast numbers of articles, and earning numerous teaching and scholarship honors. Equally important, through the years, he mentored count-

less students and earned a special place in the hearts of Mc-Knights and other individuals from underrepresented groups.

Not only an outstanding scholar, philosopher, teacher, mentor,

"He was the epitome of a scholar-activist. He believed scholarship was not something you just pontificated about in front of an audience or shelved in journals. He believed scholarship should impact the community."

-- McKnight Alumnus Dr. Billy Close

and theologian, Dr. Jones also exercised a deep commitment to the cause of inclusiveness and diversity that formed the basis of his scholarship and mentoring ethos.

The words of FSU criminology professor and McKnight alumnus Dr. Billy Close capture the feelings of students who had the opportunity to learn from Dr. Jones: "He was the epitome of a scholaractivist. He believed scholarship was not something you just pontificated about in front of an audience or shelved in journals. He believed scholarship should impact the community."

Another of Dr. Jones' protégés, Dr. Yong U. Glasure, now Professor of Economics at the University of Houston-Victoria, remembers asking Dr. Jones how he could repay him. "You do not need to repay me," Dr. Jones replied. "Instead, help the disadvantaged when you

see them."



Indeed, the McKnight Pro- Dr. Billy Close gram continues to grow

stronger as more Fellows graduate and embody Dr. Jones' guiding spirit to help current Fellows and other historically underrepresented or disadvantaged students overcome challenges and reach their goals.

MDF Mentor Dr. Glen Jones Rises to Presidency at Henderson State University



Dr. Glen Jones at the MDF Annual Fellows' Meeting

Longtime MDF mentor and friend Dr. Glen Jones, Jr., has been appointed the 17th President of his alma mater, Henderson State University (HSU) in Arkadelphia, Arkansas. An incredibly warm, charismatic, and capable leader with great integrity, Jones is extremely well suited to lead "The School with a Heart," as HSU is known.

Formerly the interim Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost at Arkansas State University (ASU), Jones' presidential tenure at HSU began this fall, capping an impressive array of professional accomplishments. At ASU, after teaching for years, Jones successfully oversaw advancement of the University's academic and research agenda and led all three of the academic colleges, the library, the Arkansas Biosciences Institute, Research and Technology Transfer, and communications with external agencies and organizations. He also has served as president of the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education and on the governing boards of St. Bernard's Healthcare, Southern Bancorp, City Youth Ministries (President), and the Arkansas Science and Technology Authority (Secretary).

After embracing the MDF program several years ago, Jones has remained actively involved with McKnight by personally recruiting Fellows for ASU faculty positions at each

Annual Fellows' Meeting (AFM) and helping place McKnight Alumna Dr. Guitele Rahill in a tenure track position in 2008. He also served as a panelist on the enlightening AFM tenure and promo- Dr. Guitele Rahill tions panel in 2009 and



delivered the AFM Keynote Address in 2010.

For the 2012 AFM, Dr. Jones' has committed to have ASU and HSU attend to recruit



ASU recruits at the AFM.

McKnights, extending the partnership he and the FEF plan to continue for many years to come.

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Senator Anitere Flores Addresses New Ph.D. Fellows at 2012 Orientation

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have been able to afford law school, which made her accomplishments possible. She is grateful that, because of her education, she can advocate for vulnerable populations, lend her expertise to boards and community organizations, and support beneficial policies, laws, and appropriations. She urged the new Fellows likewise to conduct research that advances local, national, and global communities; volunteer their services to schools and children; and work for government and community organizations.

"Always remember your duty to give one hundred percent because others are paying for your education," Senator Flores implored her audience. "There will be challenges, some anticipated and others not, and you must make every effort, through



New Fellows talk with Dr. Mohsen Milani, USF, about "Negotiating the Ph.D. Environment"

discipline, focus, and determination, to succeed. You were chosen from a field of many applicants to receive resources because of your talent and accomplishments, so now you must learn the requirements for good scholarship, be willing to under-

take leadership responsibilities, and be innovative in your approach to learning," she said.

The Senator praised FEF workshops and conferences designed to help McKnight Fellows develop professional networks and skills they need to collaborate on important projects. She recalled her own experiences, which helped her cultivate relationships that contributed to her success as a member of the Florida House for six years, where she served as Deputy

Majority Leader, Chair of PreK-12 Appropriations, Vice-Chair of PreK-12 Policy, and member of several other committees. As a Senator, Flores has served as Majority Whip,



a Senator, Flores
The FEF's Dr. Lawrence Morehouse thanks MDF Alumnus
has served as
Dr. Mark Dawkins for counseling and motivating Fellows in
the Orientation's keynote address.

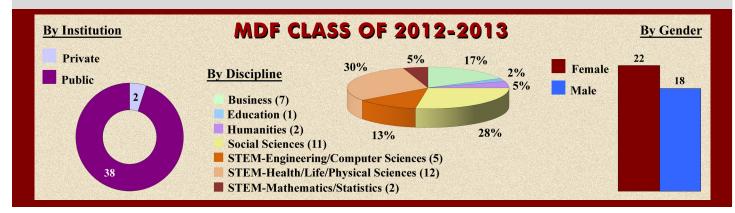
Chair of the Senate Judiciary, and member of at least six other influential committees with responsibilities for appropriations, energy and utilities, reapportionment, accountability, and rules.

Flores is happy her position has allowed her to support McKnight and recognizes this is possible because of the program's unparalleled record supporting students through their doctoral programs. She noted that McKnight's success is bolstered by the fact that, even before attaining doctorates, Fellows provide value to the educational system and communities through work as graduate, teaching, and laboratory assistants; instructors; lecturers; and volunteers.

Senator Flores congratulated the McKnight class of 2012-2013 for their achievements and talents. "You have done a fantastic job," she said, "and now you must do everything in your power to excel, so this program can continue for those who follow."



On the Orientation's Graduate Deans' Roundtable moderated by FAMU's Dr. Verian Thomas, from left, Drs. Koren Bedeau (UM), Sonja Montas-Hunter (FIU), Laurence Alexander (UF), Peter Harries (USF), Anne Marie West (FSU), and Michael Stern (UCF) provide advice for thriving in and completing Ph.D. programs.



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FEF's Summer Institute Expands Support

Since the McKnight Summer Research and Writing Institute (SRWI) debuted on the University of South Florida (USF) campus six years ago, the number of scholars participating has increased almost fourfold, from 26 in 2007, to 44 last year, to 99 this summer. Credit the growth to FEF inviting greater numbers of USF graduate students to participate in sessions each year. In 2011,



greater numbers of USF graduate students to participate in USF graduate programs.

The 2012 Summer Research & Writing Institute welcomes more students from USF graduate programs.

of 44 participants, 25 were from USF (seven McKnight Fellows plus 18 non-McKnights), and, this year, 79 out of 99 participants matriculate at USF.

They participate because the Institute provides information essential to their academic requirements and scholarly goals. Rajendra Kadel, who has juggled work, family, and his USF Ph.D. program in epidemiology and biostatistics for seven years, at-



tended most of the Institute sessions, including workshops by prolific authors, publishers, and grantwriters. "It would have been better if I had this information before spending

this much time in my program," he said. Other participants agreed. "We don't get this training, not because they don't care, but because they don't have the time," according to Patrice Rasmussen, who researches adult education curriculum and instruction and statistics. Dean Moore, Electrical Engineering, said the sessions delineated "critical procedures and requirements, as well as the politics" involved in graduate writing and publishing.

Ramiro Vega, who is drafting his dissertation proposal in civil and environmental engineering, said "maybe the most important benefit in my case, since English is not my native language, and I'm always afraid I'm not communicating my ideas, is learning you have to write it and share; you have to be self-confident. There is a process for communicating your ideas." Melissa Coakley, Philosophy, called the Institute "an invaluable experi-

ence," due to at least one session that taught her a new approach to use with members of her dissertation committee. "I've actually learned you don't have to spend a year doing nothing because you can't figure out what to do," she said. "I'm really grateful this Institute was open to USF students."



Amanda Tazaz Explores, Educates, Empowers

McKnight Doctoral Fellow Amanda Tazaz lives by the motto, "someone taught me everything I know, so I feel it is my duty to teach someone else." She thrives on communicating information to others that will help improve their lives. Amanda accomplishes this mission by obtaining the education and training necessary to effectively edify the various groups and individuals that benefit from her expertise.



Tazaz writes at the 2012 SRWI.

Toward that end, having earned a B.S. in Marine Biology from Florida International University and a second B.S. in Economics from Florida State University (FSU), in the fall of 2008, Amanda began her Ph.D. program in Oceanography at FSU as a McKnight Fellow. Her dissertation research investigates

hypersaline ponds to identify methane production (which is largely associated with life forms) for signs of life on other planets. By identifying methane patterns in water found on Earth, she hopes to discover those same patterns on planets such as Mars, where water and traces of methane have also been found.

To further her scholarship, she readily presents her research at MDF Mid-Year Research & Writing Conferences as well as national conferences such as the American Geophysical Union; embarks on numerous field research trips; and serves as a lab research and teaching assistant at FSU.

Having completed almost all Ph.D. program requirements, she expects to defend her dissertation and graduate by the spring of 2013.

To share her knowledge pro bono, Amanda helps Citrus County middle school teachers enhance student learning by incorporating STEM into their classrooms through the FSU



Tazaz scores at the FEF's 2012 State Math Brain Bowl.

Learning Systems Institute; teaches in children's chemistry labs; and scores team answers at the FEF's annual State Math Brain Bowl Competitions. Beyond academia, she volunteers for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society and runs marathons and other distance events for charities in the community.

Amanda is grateful for the opportunities the MDF Program affords and keenly aware of the obligation to help sustain it. As such, when called upon by Dr. Morehouse earlier this year, she appeared with other Fellows before key members of the Florida Legislature to testify about the importance of MDF. While there, the group successfully demonstrated that the impact of the work McKnight Fellows perform while in school, volunteering in communities and teaching students, far exceeds their personal research and academic achievements. This testimony helped not only solidify MDF funding for 2012-2013 but also generate a new level of understanding and goodwill towards the Fellows, the Program, and the FEF.

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FEF's Opa-locka Robotics Camp Inspires Interest in Math and STEM Careers



A team builds its robot.

One machine audibly identified and physically separated balls by color; a mock alligator charged at its target after sensing motion; and another apparatus solved the Rubik's cube. They were three of eight robots created and showcased by teams of students attending the FEF's Summer Math & Robotics Camp in North Miami-Dade. The Camp, funded by the Opa-locka Community Development Corporation, marked the FEF's first robotics camp outside the Tampa Bay area, serving mostly middle school students from Opa-locka.

Each day from July 5th through August 1st, Camp students worked on their math skills with a certified math teacher and then learned from a technology instructor to apply those skills to the tasks of building Lego robots and programming them to perform.

They also went on a field trip to the Miami Museum of Science and participated in a speaker series that brought professionals to campus 13 of the Camp's 20 days to begin to focus on college and career preparatory strategies and goals.

College visitors included South Florida Center of Excellence Director Jose Filpo from Florida International University, admission representatives from Florida Memorial University and Miami-Dade College,



A team programs its robot.

and former National Achievers Society State President and current University of Miami student Jasmine Holmes.

Career visitors included McKnight Doctoral Fellowship alumna Dr. Dawn Elliot Martin, a NASA aerospace engineer; the City of Miami Gardens City Attorney; an accountant; a physician; an IT manager; and an air traffic controller with the Federal Aviation Administration.

In camp evaluations, several students commented positively on the speaker series, including one who said "The speakers are great: they teach us about their jobs and what awaits us in the future." Another added, "thank you for the free camp...It was wonderful with your inspiring motivational speakers every day." Finally, parent Latoya James noted that the speakers exposed her son to multiple vocational paths: "The summer A campertests his creation.

program made an impact on him and his career choice. He has always been interested in math and finding a career in the math/science field, but the summer camp opened his eyes to new options. Now he wants to be a graphic engineer."

In fact, at the end of the Camp, 71% of students indicated they were more likely to consider a math, science or technol-

> ogy-related career, and 92% said they had learned more about how to prepare for college. Also, 96% said they felt they had improved their math skills, sentiments largely confirmed by the fact that 83% of students who took pre- and post-tests improved their math scores. "Thank you for making this Camp possible," said one student. "I had fun from the beginning to the end, and at the same time I was learning the math I need for the next grade."



FEF App Aims to Boost Math Computation Skills

While observing hours of middle school math tutoring in the FEF's virtual classroom, FEF staff has often watched valuable tutoring minutes tick away as 6th graders slowly figure by hand foundational multiplication facts they should already know by heart.

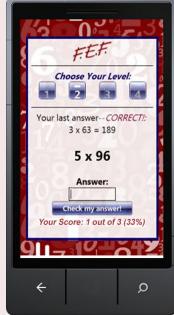
Staff, tutors, and instructors agree that more practice with the times tables will help these students accelerate performance, not just when they calculate on real and virtual whiteboards, but when they perform sophisticated tasks on high stakes tests as well.

So, the FEF decided to develop a simple Web application that (a) pits students against the clock as they practice multiplying and dividing, (b) immediately displays correct answers, and (c) tallies the

number of correct answers. We asked a Florida school district Secondary Math Specialist how long it should take a middle schooler to answer problems involving numbers of varying digits and used those time limits in the app. For instance, at

> Multiplication Level 1, students have 5 seconds to multiply numbers from the 0 to 12 times tables and then type and enter their answers; at Division Level 3, they have 60 seconds to divide a four-digit number by a double digit one, etc.

> The FEF will launch the app in 2013 and likely award prizes to students who attain highest scores. While the students' primary goals may be to earn points for prizes, FEF's will be to help them maintain accuracy as they increase their computation speed.



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Record Numbers Compete in FEF State Academic Championships

Once upon a time, the State Brain Bowl consisted of no more than a total of 70 students divided into ten teams, competing for victory in the History & Culture Competition started in 1985 by the FEF's inaugural President Dr. Israel Tribble, Jr. Then, in 2001, new FEF President Dr. Lawrence Morehouse initiated the tri-level Math Competition, allowing each Center of Excellence (COE) to enter a team for each level, a potential 30-team, 150-student increase.

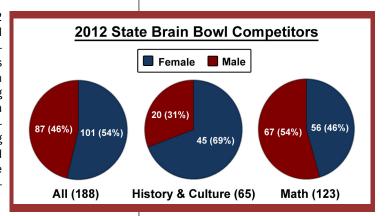
Math Wizards

Math Masters B



From top: Brain Bowl Champions in History & Culture, Precious Pearls, Santa Fe College COE; 11th-12th Grade Math, Math Wizards, UCF-McKnight COE; 9th-10th Grade Math, Math Masters B, South Florida COE; and 6th-8th Grade Math, The Mathletes, Hillsborough County COE

At the FEF's 2012 State Brain Bowl Competitions in Orlando, the contests came closer than ever to reaching that capacity, with a record 188 students competing on 35 Math and History & Culture regional championship teams.



After a full day of intense double-elimination competition, the following four teams emerged as State winners: The Mathletes, Hillsborough County COE, 6th-8th Grade Math; Math Masters B, South Florida COE, 9th-10th Grade Math; Math Wizards, UCF-McKnight COE, 11th-12th Grade Math; and Precious Pearls, Santa Fe College COE, History & Culture.

As the major prize, each student on the winning 11th-12th Grade Math and the History & Culture teams won a 4-year scholarship donated from one of the following Florida colleges and universities: Florida A&M University, Florida Atlantic University, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida Institute of Technology, Florida Memorial University, Florida, Rollins College, St. Petersburg College, University of Central Florida, University of Florida, University of North Florida, University of South Florida, University of Tampa, and the University of West Florida.

6th-8th Grade and 9th-10th Grade Math champions won trophies, gift cards and other prizes.

Word Wizard

A record number of students also competed in the FEF's vocabulary competi-

tions held at the annual statewide National Achievers Society (NAS) Summit, with 8 students each seeking the title of 3rd-5th Grade and 6th-8th Grade Word Wizard. Asked to spell words, identify antonyms and synonyms, complete sentences, and solve analogies, Linash Thomas, North Florida

COE, and Harrisson Millien, UCF-McKnight COE, excelled through 4 rounds of play for the 3rd-5th Grade and 6th-8th Grade win, respectively.

NAS Voices

With a moving speech on one of five official topics, "Children should be required to eat healthy foods," Pashen Williams, a 10th grader from the North Florida COE, won the 2012 second

Left: 3rd-5th Grade Word Wizard

Word Wizard Harrisson Millien

Linash Thomas; Right: 6th-8th Grade



annual NAS Voices Speech and Oratory Contest. Williams began her speech by citing research from the American Diabetes Association and other sources linking poor nutrition to kids' physical and developmental problems. She concluded by relating her

own health challenges caused by a poor diet, as she urged parents to help children lead more healthy lives.

Other NAS Voices contestants included Alexis Marion, Atlantic Coast COE; Thomas Coates, Palm Beach County COE; Brianna Collins, St. Petersburg Col-

lege COE; Chinyere Okafor, South Florida COE; and Alysia Waugh, UCF-McKnight COE.

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Pre-College Summit Recruiters Share Information with Prospective Students and Parents



Bethune-Cookman University

University of Florida

University of Miami

University of South Florida

Nineteen recruiters from the following colleges and universities set up tables at the 2012 NAS State Summit to talk with students and parents about higher education plans: Bethune-Cookman University, Carleton College, Colby College, Eckerd College, Edison State College, Florida A&M University, Florida Gulf Coast University, Florida International University, Florida Memorial

University, Hillsborough Community College, St. Petersburg College, Stetson University, University of Central Florida, University of Florida, University of Miami, University of North Florida, University of South Florida, University of West Florida, and Valencia College.

Recruiters answered questions ranging from the list of majors offered, to recommended SAT

"My favorite part of the Summit program was the college recruiters. Thank you for all of the outstanding information I received. This will help me prepare myself for my college future."

-- 2012 Summit Participant

scheduling and admission statistics, to campus food options and safety history, to school dropout and/or transfer rates. On evaluation forms, students, parents and recruiters indicated they valued the time spent talking with each other.

Achievers Sharpen Skills and Showcase Talents at State Summit

At the schedule-packed 2012 NAS State Summit, in addition to conducting the College Fair, hosting several academic contests, and presenting developmental workshops for students and parents, the FEF and student leaders ran biannual statewide NAS elections, staged a talent extravaganza, and acknowledged exemplary NAS members and parents through various awards.

The day began with an opening ceremony that included rousing campaign speeches by candidates running for statewide office. After the speeches, high school NAS members cast ballots for the following new student officers: Syclair Jones, Pasco-Hernando COE, President; Tyler Daniels, South Florida COE, Vice President; Priyanka Patel, North Florida COE, Secretary; and Kezra Johnson, St. Petersburg College COE, Treasurer.



2012-2013 NAS Cabinet: From left, Tyler Daniels, Vice President; Kezra Johnson, Treasurer; Syclair Jones, President; Priyanka Patel, Secretary



2012 Talent Extravaganza Winners: The North Florida COE Step Team and Eddie Oliver, Atlantic Coast COE

New officer announcements followed a two-tiered talent extravaganza. The North Florida COE Step Team won the 3rd-7th grade tier, while Eddie Oliver from the Atlantic Coast COE won the 8th-12th grade tier with his vocal rendition of "Ordinary People."

After talent, the FEF and NAS leaders presented more than 30 annual awards to outstanding individual COE Achievers and Par-

ents of the Year as well as to the Largest Summit and Parent Delegations.



The 2012 Summit's Largest Delegation from the St. Petersburg College COE

Upcoming FEF Events

February 15-16, 2013 March 22-23, 2013 MDF Mid-Year Research and Writing Conference, Tampa 28th Annual Brain Bowl Competitions and Florida National Achievers Society Pre-College Summit, Orlando

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