Competitions

—Dr. Tracy Riley
Massey University, New Zealand

Competitions can serve a dual purpose: identification of creative and innovative abilities and talents, as well as a provision for their development. Competitions create an environment whereby students across all areas—academics, creative endeavors, performing arts, leadership and service—can perform a task and be judged against their peers of similar abilities. It is not surprising that competitions have been a cornerstone of gifted education, putting talents to the test by enabling gifted students to showcase their abilities and receive acknowledgement and recognition for their talents.

Education and competitions are inextricably linked in at least three ways. Firstly, children naturally compete, and therefore, educators have utilized competitions to motivate, encourage and spark short-term and long-term motivation. Secondly, in the “adult world” there is an expectation of competitiveness, and many societies teach their children to compete. Finally, competitions are designed as a way of developing talent for the workforce, complementing educational initiatives in securing and developing a nation’s economic health. Competitions have long-served as inducements for scientific and technological innovations, tempting geniuses with prizes and other inducements for solving difficult problems.

These connections between education and competitions are but a few of the reasons for involving students in competitions. There are other more compelling educational reasons for using competitions, namely the potential benefits for participants. However, many of the benefits of competitions are speculative, rather than based on strong empirical data. This is surprising given the use of competitions for students throughout the world. For example, in a national study conducted in New Zealand several years ago, our research team found that more than 65% of schools reported competitions as one of the school-based provisions for gifted and talented students. It is important that teachers and schools regularly monitor and check their students’ engagement in competitions to ensure their involvement is beneficial intellectually, socially and emotionally.

The benefits of competitions include opportunities to develop and enhance natural behaviors associated with giftedness: independence, confidence, energy, risk-taking, divergent thinking, adventurousness and enjoyment of playing with ideas. Competitions can sharpen these skills, and importantly, through being given the opportunity to showcase their abilities, provide a chance for students to develop self-awareness. Being recognized as highly able, through competition involvement, alerts students to abilities and qualities of difference, of which they may not have been previously aware. This newfound self-awareness potentially raises self-esteem and self-understanding.

Competitions also provide opportunities for students to further develop and enhance content knowledge, process skills, and product design and dissemination. Competitions expose students to 21st century skills—critical thinking, communication skills, creativity and collaboration—and provide opportunities for developing these. Advanced knowledge applied creatively often reveals itself in an array of innovative products. The test of innovation relies on public acceptance and recognition, which can only be achieved through

(Continued on page 3)
DEAR FRIENDS:

Our lead article, “Competitions,” was written by Dr. Tracy Riley. She and I have co-authored the book, The Best Competitions for Talented Kids. This edition was published in the fall of 2013.

The conference, Day of Sharing for Teachers of the Gifted, that is usually held in the fall was not held due to the Mississippi Association for Gifted having a conference in Hattiesburg. It will be conducted March 21, 2014.

Support is still needed for the Frances A. Karnes Endowed Chair. In addition, support is needed for needy students to attend our programs.

Sincerely,

Frances A. Karnes, Ph.D.
DISTINGUISHED PROFESSOR, Curriculum, Instruction and Special Education and DIRECTOR, The Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies

Thank You! Thank You!  We wish to thank our donors who have continued to support the Frances A. Karnes Endowed Scholarship, the Christopher J. Karnes Gifted Education Memorial Fund, the Summer Program for Academically Talented Youth, and Friends for Gifted Education. The Friends fund was established in 1999 for scholarships for needy and eligible students to attend our summer programs and the Saturday Gifted Studies Program.

PROGRAM SPONSORS

Sponsorships for our programs also provide necessary funding for program support and student scholarships:

SATURDAY GIFTED STUDIES PROGRAM

LEADERSHIP STUDIES PROGRAM

SUMMER GIFTED STUDIES PROGRAM

SUNDAY GIFTED STUDIES PROGRAM

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MISSION STATEMENT

Beginning in 1974, programs and other endeavors in gifted education were initiated at The University of Southern Mississippi. The Center for Gifted Studies was established in 1979 and dedicated as The Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies in 1999, its central purpose to further the education of gifted students and those with leadership abilities through teaching, research and service. Emphasis is also placed on these areas for those interested in the gifted: teachers, parents, administrators, psychologists, counselors and other concerned citizens.

SERVICES

Many services are offered through the Center. Instructional programs are provided for intellectually gifted students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12. The Saturday Gifted Studies Program provides instruction for students in pre-kindergarten through 12th grade for seven consecutive Saturdays during the months of January and February. The Summer Gifted Studies Program, a one-week residential program, serves youth in grades four through eight, while the Summer Program for Academically Talented Youth, a three-week residential program, serves students in grades seven through 10. The Leadership Studies Program is a one-week summer residential program designed to develop leadership concepts and skills and is offered for students enrolled in grades six through 11. Leadership competitions are held for students in grades seven through 12 each year and are designed to develop leadership skills and style and to build self-confidence. Teacher training and staff development are provided for regular education personnel and for teachers who specialize in gifted education. A conference for parents of gifted youth and other concerned adults is provided on an annual basis. In addition, research is conducted in rural and urban schools in response to issues in the field of gifted education.
its wide dissemination to appropriate peers and audiences. Designing, displaying, and disseminating products, such as experiments, essays, films, paintings, inventions, photographs, posters, songs and sculptures, to appropriate audiences and for constructive critique by experts is part of the competition process.

Opportunities to experiment with new and different ways of expressing knowledge, skills and ideas are also granted by competition involvement. Therefore, competitions provide opportunities for the development of skills like creative problem finding and solving, critical and analytical thinking, ideas testing and so on.

Students who compete are given opportunities to experience a taste of what lies ahead in the challenges of the everyday world. And just like adults work in a variety of ways, competitions give experiences for groups of students or teams to work together, developing the skills of cooperative learning with like minds, while others provide the chance for self-directed learning, which leads to more individual responsibility in planning, setting and achieving goals Therefore, personal skills can be honed and enhanced through participation in competitions; time management, punctuality, following directions and planning are developed.

Competitions provide a forum to meet and greet new and different students and adults, often of like minds, and serving as a networking tool. Being placed in a competitive environment, with adequate support, gives students the chance to learn about individual differences, cope with diversity, aspire to excellence, accept mistakes or failure, and receive recognition for their unique abilities.

Of course there are other benefits and awards to competition, such as cash prizes, scholarships, ribbons, trophies, certificates, travel and other incentives. While winning first prize might be the ultimate goal, emphasis should be placed on the premise that participation in and of itself constitutes winning. Winning a competition is what athletes call “performance excellence” but competitions also provide students with the chance to develop the qualities of personal excellence. Personal excellence requires competitors to focus not on the prize, but on the process: how one performs is a better measure of excellence than winning. Those striving for their personal best are competing only with themselves. Thus, a benefit of competitions can be the opportunities provided to be inspired to strive for excellence.

There can, of course, be a down side to competing if students are not carefully managed and supported. Students who develop extreme competitiveness — striving to win at all costs, rather than for personal gains — may experience stress, frustration and feelings of failure in their desire to succeed, and perhaps even begin to strive for perfectionism to their detriment. If too much emphasis is placed on winning by the student, parents, teachers and/or peers, competitions can be hurtful to students. It is important that students have well-planned competitive goals and a balanced perspective of winning and losing. They need to learn how to deal with being a competitor and specifically how to appropriately interpret wins and losses. It is important to help students understand that taking the risk of preparation, involvement and participation makes all the contestants “winners” by placing emphasis on the process rather than the outcome.

Also, the use of competitions with gifted children provides opportunities to fail in a safe environment. Failure is a key part of the learning process, but not always a familiar concept for gifted students. This is not to suggest setting learners up for repeated failures, but raising the bar high enough that gifted students gives them the advantages of a competitive edge.

Providing the levels of support competitors may require can prove challenging and difficult for teachers who have busy timetables, an overcrowded curriculum, and limited time. The availability of competitions and the time involved in seeking those out, adequately assessing their value, and working with students in preparation could prove a barrier. Another potential weakness is the costs involved in relation to entry requirements, travel, materials, sponsorship, and some of these can be ‘hidden’. There are tensions surrounding equity of opportunity, funding, support, and recognition and development excellence through competition involvement.

To make the most of the potential benefits of competitions, and to alleviate the possible negative outcomes, teachers should work alongside their students, individually or in teams, to make decisions about competition involvement. Start by identifying areas of interests with a standardized interest inventory or simply asking students, “What talents do you have?” They might also list their interests and areas they would like to know more about.

Frances and I have recently published the third edition of our competitions book, The Best Competitions for Talented Kids, which features more than 150 competitions across all areas of academics, performing arts, leadership and service. From their analysis, students can select several competitions and read the descriptions of the competitions, asking the following types of questions:

- Is this competition in my area of ability and interest?
- Can I do what is expected?
- Do I have the time and resources to participate?
- Do I need a sponsor? If so, how will I get one?
- If a team is needed, are there other students interested?

It is important for students to discuss their ideas with their teachers, parents and friends to help them prepare adequately for their involvement. They may choose to use a competition planning calendar or diary or use a competitions journal, which is included in our book. Leading up to the competition, teachers can facilitate trial presentation run, provide time for practice, co-evaluate their performances, help secure resources, and prepare them to cope with competition pressures. After students have participated in a competition, they should also reflect upon their involvement, evaluating and celebrating their efforts, as well as setting new competition goals.

Competitions are one way to showcase the innovation and creativity of gifted and talented youth. There are many potential benefits, and while many of these remain to be empirically tested and proven, they promise opportunities for students to achieve excellence. However, there are also potential challenges which can be averted through careful management. Through careful school-wide facilitation and implementation, as well as individual guidance and support for competitors, students can enjoy competitive excellence.
**Connections**

**Participants in programs conducted by The Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies**

**TRACY POWELL** attended the Center’s S.H.A.R.P. program in the summer of 1976. Tracy graduated from The University of Southern Mississippi with a bachelor’s degree in accounting in 1986. He then attended Vanderbilt School of Law, where he graduated in 1989. He has received many awards and recognitions including Best Lawyers in America—Healthcare (2009-present), Chambers USA: America’s Leading Lawyers, Petal School District Academic Hall of Fame (2011) and Vanderbilt Law Review/Order of Coif (1989). Since graduating from Vanderbilt, Tracy has been employed at Sherrard & Roe, PLC, located in Nashville, Tenn. Tracy is currently a USM Foundation member, and was a Southern Miss Alumni Association board member from 2000-03. Tracy enjoys watching Southern Miss sports and the Tennessee Titans. He also enjoys cooking and coaching youth sports.

**DANIEL BRACKMAN** attended both the Center’s Summer and Saturday Program’s from 1980-83. He graduated in 1993 from The University of Southern Mississippi with a degree in mechanical engineering technology. Daniel is the owner of Brackman’s Stepping Stone Rock and Garden Center in Hattiesburg, Miss.

**ELIZABETH “ASHLEY” THOMPSON** attended the Center’s Academically Talented Programs from 2008-11. Ashley graduated high school in 2013. During high school, she was active in the French Club, where she was president. She also received third place at the state mock trial. Ashley was also named honor thespian. Ashley currently attends The University of Southern Mississippi. She is active with the Wesley Foundation on campus and is interested in community service, the sciences, literature, history and reading.

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**What is MAGC?**

Founded by parents and teachers in 1974, the Mississippi Association for Gifted Children (MAGC) is a nonprofit organization that serves as a public advocate for gifted children and youth in the state of Mississippi. The mission of the Mississippi Association for Gifted Children is to encourage advocacy, communication and collaboration among educators, parents, agencies and other organizations; address the unique needs of gifted children and improve the quality of their educational experiences; and work for improvement in all areas of education and for better educational opportunities for all children.

In 1988, MAGC-initiated legislation that resulted in state-mandated gifted programs and their funding in all Mississippi public school districts. What does Mississippi law say about gifted education? The Mississippi Gifted Education Act requires public school districts to provide gifted education programs for intellectually gifted students in grades 2-6. These programs must be designed to meet the individual needs of gifted students and shall be in addition to and different from the regular program of instruction provided by the district. School districts also may provide programs for intellectually gifted students in grades 7-12, creatively and artistically gifted students in grades 2-12, and academically gifted students in grades 9-12.

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ADVOCATE FOR GIFTED CHILDREN AND YOUTH?**

- Gifted children are the **only exceptional learners not protected** under federal law for a free and appropriate public education.
- Gifted children are at a **greater risk for underachievement**.
- Many gifted children have mastered 35-50% of the school curriculum in the five core subject areas **before their school year begins**.
- Without appropriate challenges, gifted students are likely to **regress** to normal or below normal levels of achievement.
- America’s **top students do not perform well** when compared with their counterparts around the world.
- Most public school teachers are **not equipped** to deal with the special needs of gifted children because they have **no specific training** in gifted education.

Teachers, family members and others should join MAGC because it provides workshops and special training sessions for parents and teachers, publications and information for teachers and families of gifted children, student scholarships and teacher grants, opportunities for teachers and parents to network and form support groups, assistance to local parent affiliate groups who support gifted education in their communities, and an annual conference to supply training relevant to the education of gifted children and youth. MAGC’s parenting resources include information regarding summer programs, competitions and special schools designed for gifted students. Parents can also find a helpful chart on the MAGC website that lists characteristics of gifted children alongside possible problem behaviors.

In these uncertain economic times, it is doubly important that parents of gifted children join together to send the message to our legislature that gifted education for our children is valued. Please consider adding your voice to that of MAGC’s in support of gifted education for the more than 34,000 gifted children in Mississippi. For more information, contact MAGC, P. O. Box 3545, Jackson, MS 39207, or visit www.magcweb.org.
Dr. Suzanne M. Bean, professor emeritus of Mississippi University for Women (MUW), is now serving as an education and leadership consultant working with schools, colleges and universities, nonprofit community agencies and businesses across the South. In September of 2013, she became a member of the John Maxwell Team, an internationally recognized leadership training program. She serves as vice president of the board of directors for Mississippi Association for Partners in Education, a nonprofit agency, which is leading the efforts to strengthen partnerships between schools and communities across the state of Mississippi.

Dr. Bean is the author of the first congressional request, which established the Roger F. Wicker Center for Creative Learning at MUW. She served as the founding director through 2010, and under her leadership, the Center received more than $13 million of grant funding for projects which have improved communities and schools across Mississippi. Dr. Bean has served as an evaluator for the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). She is also a retired faculty member and professor emeritus at Mississippi University for Women.

Dr. Bean was awarded three of the highest honors MUW offers, Outstanding Faculty Member (selected by MUW students), the Kossen Award of Excellence (selected by professional colleagues) and the MUW Medal of Excellence. She was also awarded Educator of the Year by the Columbus-Lowndes Development LINK and the Town and Tower Award of Service by the university and community organization. Dr. Bean was also recognized by the Mississippi Legislature and Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning as Outstanding Faculty Member at the Higher Education Appreciation Day: Working for Academic Excellence.

Dr. Bean has worked as a K-12 teacher, university teacher educator and education/leadership consultant since 1979. She has co-authored seven books and had numerous publications in professional journals. She has co-authored a textbook for teachers of gifted students, *Methods and Materials for Teaching the Gifted*. For the past three decades, she has made numerous presentations at the state, regional and national levels. She was selected for and participated in the Mississippi Economic Council’s Leadership Mississippi program and has served as president of the Mississippi Association of Gifted Children and director of the Mississippi Governor’s School.

Dr. Bean’s areas of professional expertise are leadership development, personality type in the workplace, best practices in teaching and learning, workplace assessment and effectiveness, community engagement and service-learning.

Dr. Debbie Troxclair, assistant professor at Lamar University, serves as the program coordinator for the graduate and undergraduate Special Education Programs in the Counseling and Special Populations department. She is currently teaching graduate and undergraduate special education courses, and she is busy developing graduate special education and gifted courses for Lamar’s online certification and master’s degree programs. Dr. Troxclair was a contributing author of the NAGC Publication, *Using the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts with Gifted and Advanced Learners*, and she has also recently published two journal articles. The first article, “Pre-Service Teacher Attitude Toward Gifted,” was published in *Roeper Review*, and the second article, “Response to Intervention and Gifted,” was published in *Tempo*, the journal of the Texas Association for Gifted and Talented. She continues to serve on the NAGC Professional Standards Committee and will assume duties as chair of the Education Committee for Texas Association for Gifted and Talented this fall. This past summer she conducted staff development dealing with the nature and needs of gifted learners for about 100 teachers in the Catholic School Diocese in Beaumont, Texas. She has recently presented sessions at the Council for Exceptional Children’s conference in San Antonio, Texas, the World Council for Gifted and Talented in Louisville, Kentucky, and at the Texas Association for Gifted and Talented West Regional Conference in El Paso, Texas.
The Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies held its 2013 Career Explorations for Girls Conference on Saturday, November 2, 2013, in the Liberal Arts Building on the campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. Many girls and their mothers attended. The guest speaker for the event was Dr. Ann Blackwell. Dr. Blackwell spoke on the topic, “Aim High for Success.” Participants attended a variety of sessions related to different careers. Sessions were available in the morning and afternoon. Some of the career sessions included architecture, communications, health care, law, marketing/PR, social work and technology.

2014 SUMMER PROGRAMS

LEADERSHIP STUDIES PROGRAM

The Leadership Studies Program will be held from June 15-20, 2014, on the Hattiesburg campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. This one-week residential program is designed for students in grades six through 11, who have a desire to develop and enhance their leadership abilities. Training includes those areas necessary for leadership development: fundamentals of leadership, written and oral communication, group dynamics, problem-solving, planning, personal skills and decision making. Avenues for becoming leaders in the schools, communities and religious affiliations will be utilized to heighten students’ awareness and development of leadership potential.

SUMMER GIFTED STUDIES PROGRAM

The Summer Gifted Studies Program will be held June 22-27, 2014, on the Hattiesburg campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. This one-week residential program is designed for intellectually gifted students in grades four through eight with intelligence quotients of 120 or above on an individually administered test or the 90th percentile or above at the national level on an achievement test. This program seeks to enhance the cognitive abilities of gifted students through the exploration of instructionally appropriate topics. Course selections include the following: How to Be a Detective, Business Leaders: Today and Tomorrow, Inventions, Money! Money! Money!, Express Yourself!, Designing Games and Write On!

SUMMER PROGRAM FOR ACADEMICALLY TALENTED YOUTH

The Summer Program for Academically Talented Youth will be held July 6-25, 2014, on the Hattiesburg campus of The University of Southern Mississippi. This three-week residential program serves eligible students currently enrolled in grades seven through 10 who scored at or above the level of entering college freshmen on the ACT or SAT. This program is a cooperative effort with the Duke University Talent Identification Program that provides a balance of educational, cultural and recreational experiences. Students will complete an entire year’s high school-level course in three weeks. Moreover, guest speakers visit the classrooms to share with the students different career opportunities associated with each course. Course selections include the following: pre-calculus mathematics, human anatomy and physiology, psychology, creative writing, forensic science, debate, criminal justice and polymer science.

WHAT IS MAGC?

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I want to become a Friend for Gifted Education. The funds generated will apply to scholarships for gifted, financially disadvantaged students and for other notable purposes.

Please enroll me in the category checked below.
- Summa Cum Laude ($1,000+)
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- I would like to learn more about corporate sponsorships and donations.

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Please send all donations to
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Questions?
Please call the Center at 601.266.5236 or 601.266.5246.
The Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies
118 College Drive #8207, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Lost (HOPEFULLY TO BE FOUND)

Over the years, we have lost contact with some of our former program participants. Please help us find them by forwarding their names, addresses, email addresses and phone numbers. Thanks for helping.

Name
Address
City, State, ZIP
Phone ( )
Email
Center programs affiliation(s)

Current school/year or career/position

Activities or interests

We express our continued gratitude to the members of the Advisory Council who have agreed to offer suggestions and support for the advancement of teaching, research and service initiatives of The Frances A. Karnes Center for Gifted Studies.

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