

# FIRST RESPONDERS: GRADUATE STUDIES

By **Cathee Phillips**

**M**orningside College's Graduate Studies program has been steadily growing. A record number of graduate students participated in May commencement exercises; ninety-nine graduate students earned their Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree this spring. The number is only expected to increase in coming years.

Nearly 500 Iowa teachers enrolled in graduate courses last fall—also setting a record. That number, too, is expected to increase. The Graduate Studies program has also grown in another way: Teachers can now take Morningside graduate courses at extended sites located in 16 cities across the state of Iowa.



**Dr. Glenna Tevis**, director of Graduate Studies, has been at Morningside since 1983. She attributed the growth to the program's intentional responsiveness to the needs of Iowa's teachers and ongoing collaboration with the state's Area Education Agencies (AEAs) and school districts to meet these needs.



**Dr. Richard Owens**, director of professional development, noted that the staff has worked to earn respect from Iowa educators. "Programs like this are built both on facts and on trust. We sell Morningside by saying, 'You can trust us. When we start working with you, we're going to stay with you.' It's about relationships, with students, the AEAs, and the school districts."



With tongue only slightly in cheek, **Joe Rosener**, associate director, said that "old age" has played a role in establishing this trust.

"A thing that has helped all of this is our age, in terms of our visibility," said Rosener, who worked at the AEAs for 20 years before coming to Morningside in 1999. "We've been in this so long that we know so many people around the state. We have a track record so that individuals can look back and see others who have already earned their master's degree or taken endorsement classes at Morningside."

While Graduate Studies has been around for 40-plus years, it shows no signs of the stagnation that sometimes accompanies established programs. In fact, "responsiveness" may be the mantra of the staff. Tevis and Owens identified specific turning points in the program's development that have led to its current success.

Founded in the 1960s, the graduate program was based in specific subject areas and remained small but functional, operating entirely on campus. In the early 70s, Owens worked at Morningside and added a special education component before leaving to work for the Iowa AEAs. But the first real turning point was in the late 1980s, after Owens returned to Morningside in 1985.

## EXPANDING SPECIAL EDUCATION

"When I was at the AEAs, I saw a need for an expanded special education graduate program. I came back to Morningside with the idea that the AEAs had a responsibility for

professional development and that the college had the responsibility to provide the endorsement," said Owens. "I envisioned a partnership."

Owens had to hurdle a few road blocks in promoting the partnership. The biggest one may have been the then prevailing attitude that courses offered on campus were superior to those offered off campus, mostly based upon the strong research component that should be part of graduate work. Technology came to the rescue.

"By the 1980s, technology had developed that would offer library access off campus," he said. "But it still took five years to convince people that we could offer quality courses at extended sites." The first Morningside graduate courses offered at these sites were used by teachers primarily for adding endorsements and salary advancement but not accepted for the master's degree.

Owens also had to convince Morningside's administration that a partnership would be good for the college. After he expanded the special education program on campus, enrollment increased to the point where, as the only full-time faculty teaching special education courses, he was teaching classes of 50 students. At that point, he could have started turning students away and kept the program small—but that went against his grain.

He said, "You didn't have to have a lot of vision. I just looked across Morningside Avenue, where the AEA office was, and remembered that Iowa didn't have a lot of qualified special education teachers."

**Dean Frank Terry** and **Dr. Sharon Ocker**, who was education department chair and director of Graduate Studies, had told Owens

that if he designed a program that brought students in, they would commit dollars. Owens also had the support of Morningside board member **Chuck Irwin 1951**, who “sold” the partnership with the AEAs to **President Miles Tommeraaasen 1943** over lunch one day. The stage was set for the program to grow.

### MICRO-MANAGEMENT

The second turning point, allowing courses taken at extended sites to be accepted for elective credit towards the college’s MAT degree, took the full decade of the nineties to realize. This time, Owens’ “Companion Teacher Model,” where a full-time faculty member mentors an off-campus adjunct instructor, was the catalyst for change.

“Morningside can do some things that other institutions can’t do because of the way the programs are managed,” said Tevis. “To ensure that the extended-site courses are the same quality as those on campus, we’ve used the companion teacher model to provide assistance and support to our adjunct faculty. We also do instructor training regarding our policies and procedures. We micro-manage, and we have professors who have taught with us for years.”

Today, courses can be generated by the AEAs or school districts but must meet stringent requirements to be approved by Morningside for credit. Regardless, in order to earn an MAT degree, graduate students are required to take at least 18 hours of program courses, which are courses developed by the college.

The last few years have also seen strides in the use of technology in Graduate Studies. Some online courses are now offered, and, most recently, Morningside has partnered with Virtual Education Software, Inc., (VESD), a developer of CD-ROM courses.

“All of these developments have paved the way for the success of the Professional Educator degree program, certainly another turning point for us,” said Owens.

### PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR

The launching of the Professional Educator master’s program during the

2002-03 academic year was in direct response to the new Iowa Teaching Standards established by the Student Achievement and Teacher Quality Law, which was passed by the Iowa legislature in 2001. As of July 1, 2005, all teachers had to be evaluated using the new standards.

The Professional Educator degree program, which uses the Iowa Teaching Standards as a basis for its structure, is a result of nearly two years collaboration between Morningside College and local AEAs and more than four years of research and study by Owens.

“Morningside and the AEAs were on the front line with the Professional Educator degree program,” said Tevis. “The main thrust of the program is how to increase student achievement through reflective teaching, which complements Iowa’s new evaluation system.”

An added benefit of the new program has been for teachers in secondary education.

“Before the Professional Educator program, we didn’t offer many options for secondary teachers unless they wanted to enroll in our special education master’s degree program,” Tevis said. “We now have enrolled many more secondary teachers, who teach such content areas as math, English, biology, Spanish, and physics.”

The Professional Educator degree program allows teachers to customize their coursework, depending upon their content area or the endorsements they need and whether they teach at the elementary or secondary level.

### “PERFECT TIMING”

The timing for launching the new degree program couldn’t have been better, with Morningside’s graduate courses only recently becoming available at some extended sites in the state of Iowa. Plus, direct registration with Morningside College is now being offered more widely. Until recently, a large number of graduate students registered for classes through the AEA offices. Direct registration benefits the AEA offices, many of which are merging and are understaffed, and benefits teachers, who become eligible



## THE POWER OF LEADERSHIP

“**B**ecause of the Professional Educator master’s program, I realized that I don’t want to be a passive teacher,” said **Nicholas Kleve 2003**, who received his Master of Arts in Teaching degree from Morningside in May. “I want to grow as a teacher, whether I teach three years or 40 years.”

Kleve has taught fifth grade at E.N. Swett Elementary School in South Sioux City, Neb., for three years. He told his students about the commencement exercises and even tried on his cap and gown for them. “I have a high immigrant population in my class; these students are often very uncertain about their future. I try to be a role model for them and show them that if they work hard, they’ll succeed no matter where they are,” he explained.

The “action research” component of his coursework had a strong impact on him. In the Educational Research course, he created a proposal for researching the effect of humor on a classroom environment and then actually conducted the research.

“I spent hours and hours on this project. It helped me to take on an active role as an educator and be a leader and decision-maker,” Kleve said.

He learned that students appreciate humor if it is appropriate—and if they understand it, which is something that teachers should not take for granted.

“Both as an undergraduate student and as a graduate student at Morningside, I have developed so many skills that have prepared me to be a successful teacher,” he said. “The master’s degree helped me to understand the power of leadership and to focus my attitude as a teacher, to keep striving to be the best.”



for financial aid and can take advantage of improved scheduling of classes.

“A person in Storm Lake is about equidistant from Fort Dodge, Sheldon, and Emmetsburg and just a little farther away from Sioux City. We’ll have individuals that will take courses at three different sites in the same summer,” Rosener said. “Up until two years ago, they weren’t able to do this, because each AEA set up the course and time segments, and those classes frequently conflicted. Because we offer the same program statewide, the individual can even physically move around the state and not miss a beat, which makes Morningside’s program unique.”

The Graduate Studies program lays out at least a 3-year timeframe for students and offers all of the master’s and endorsement classes every two years. That way, administrators and teachers can look at the schedule and see when and where classes are going to be held.

### NEW COLLABORATION

Recently, some Iowa school districts have invited Morningside to offer endorsement courses for their teachers on-site, including Clinton, Des Moines, West Des Moines, and Wall Lake View Auburn.

While the Wall Lake View Auburn program centers on the graduate program’s reading endorsement, the Clinton, Des Moines, and West Des Moines school districts invited Morningside because of its special education endorsement programs. Tevis said that Morningside is the only institution in the state of Iowa currently offering the Instructional Strategist 2-Mental Disabilities endorsement for K-12.

Morningside is also collaborating with William Penn University in Iowa to provide teachers the opportunity to earn their English as a Second Language (ESL) endorsement. The classes are broadcast via the Iowa Communications Network (ICN), and teachers from across the state of Iowa are taking advantage of this program.

“Many teachers who earn endorsements through Morningside’s Graduate Studies do not start out with the intent to get their master’s degree,” said Rosener. “But when they see how convenient it is to take classes, they go on to earn their MAT degree.”

The process will become even more convenient for teachers next fall, when the graduate program will offer online registration.

Who knows? Maybe that will be another turning point.

## MORNINGSIDE COLLEGE GRADUATE STUDIES

### MISSION STATEMENT

An Effective Educator is a caring professional who creates interactive learning environments responsive to the diverse learning needs of students and society.

### DEGREE

Master of Arts in Teaching (Professional Educator or Special Education tracks)

### ENDORSEMENTS

Middle School, Reading, Special Education, Talented and Gifted

### ACCREDITATION

State of Iowa  
National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE)

### STAFF

**Glenna Tevis**, Ph.D., Director  
**Joe Rosener**, M.S., Associate Director, Graduate Field Coordinator  
**Dick Owens**, Ed.D., Director of Professional Development  
**Linda Goode**, Graduate Field Coordinator  
**Janet Chobar**, B.S., Licensure Officer, Program Manager  
**Janice Petersen**, Secretary

## SHE’S NOT DONE YET

**W**hen **Emily Turbes**, a special education teacher, received her Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree from Morningside in May, she was the second person in her family to do so. Her mother, **Janet Turbes**, had earned her MAT degree from Morningside in 1979 and now serves as adjunct faculty for the college’s education department.

Things had changed a little since the 1970s. For instance, Emily Turbes took two of her courses online.

“The instructional technology class was very beneficial,” she said. “It was conducted almost completely online. We met with the teacher at the beginning of the course and received the syllabus. She also offered us a few other times when we could meet in person.”

The independent-study course was headquartered in a virtual classroom in Morningside’s virtual “Miller Hall.” The instructor also had her own Web site, where she posted assignments and resources.

“As we were learning, we applied the materials in our classrooms... it was part of the requirements. It was nice for me because I taught in Council Bluffs last year,” said Turbes. “You have to be more accountable with the online courses, but you also have more flexibility. You could do it at midnight or six in the morning. It’s not for everybody, definitely.”

At the age of 24, she was one of the younger teachers in the master’s degree program and found networking with other teachers invaluable: “In my graduate courses, there were all different ages. Some were my parents’ ages, and listening to them in class was very beneficial. They’ve been teaching longer than I have, and I learned from their experiences. I met colleagues whom I would never have met otherwise. Now I can call them up and get advice.”

Turbes enjoyed the master’s courses so much that she plans on taking more. She said, “I feel well-rounded in my learning, and I want to continue my education. The MAT degree was just a stepping stone.”