

GROWTH OF RESEARCH METHODS TRAINING IN THE CU SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

By James R. Sanders, LER '70
Professor Emeritus of Educational Studies
Western Michigan University

During the mid-1960s, the stars seemed to align to bring together a unique set of events and people that would have a lasting impact on research methods training in education at CU-Boulder and beyond. As Professor Emeritus Kenneth Hopkins recalls, Professors Daryl Sander, Harold Anderson, and others developed a position paper in 1964 making the case that the School of Education should move from a teacher-preparation emphasis to a more research-oriented posture congruent with a research university. This led to the first faculty position with primary emphasis on research methodology, a position filled by Dr. Hopkins, who arrived from the University of Southern California to begin the 1965-66 academic year.

In 1965, Dr. Hopkins was selected for a post-doctoral fellowship at the Laboratory of Experimental Design at the University of Wisconsin. This summer program was taught in part by Dr. Gene V Glass, who had just completed his PhD at Wisconsin. During their brief time together, these two young professors found that they had common interests in research and basketball.



Current School of Education Professor Greg Camilli, left, meets with his mentor, former LER Professor Gene Glass.

As fate would have it, the U.S. federal government committed significant funds to support research training in education in 1965, through Title IV of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). In 1966, Dr. Hopkins applied for and received ESEA funds that would be used to establish the Laboratory of Educational Research (LER) and to add a second faculty position in research methodology. Hopkins offered that position to Dr. Glass in 1967; the fame of the CU research training program would soon begin to build.

The first group of eight gifted LER Fellows began in 1967. Federal fellowships continued to support doctoral students for several years before the winds in Washington changed direction, but the research training program initiated in 1966 continues today with support from CU graduate fellowships, assistantships, grants, and contracts.

What has sustained the growth and development of research training in CU's School of Education? According to Drs. Hopkins and Glass, it has been a combination of factors: engagement in "real world" research experiences by faculty and students working together through practicum and consulting activities, rigorous technical coursework, gifted students, and a closeness of faculty and students. The University of Wisconsin Laboratory of Experimental Design (under the leadership of Dr. Julian Stanley) and Harvard University (under the leadership of Dr. Frederick Mosteller) were models for CU's LER.



Alumni from LER have become research leaders in universities, state and federal agencies, private research firms, nonprofit organizations, and as private consultants. And they in turn have become mentors for second- and third-generation researchers. Their memories of the LER experience echo those of Professors Hopkins and Glass, but also include fond feelings for the experiences provided by these two faculty mentors.

Alums and spouses from the LER era include, from left, George Kretke, Carol Wilson, Vic Wilson, Lorrie Shepard, Ken Hopkins, Colleen Hopkins, and Todd Rogers.

In the words of one alumna who graduated in the early 1970s, “The lab was a wonderful place for me. It changed the direction of my life and I’ve benefitted greatly from it; my family has too. It is hard to encapsulate all that happened in those two years from being scared to death at the beginning to being confident by graduation. I know much of my growth was due to my peers and the faculty.”

Other LER alumni have added:

“The fact that we each had our own desk in one large room meant that there was almost always at least one other student in the room whenever I was there, and that person was usually open to conversation about whatever I was working on. Consequently, I learned a great deal from other students, and clarified my own understanding by explaining concepts and working through problems with other students.”

“Dr. Glass was amazingly available to us. He preferred to work in the LER room rather than in his own office, and he chatted with whomever was there.”

“Dr. Hopkins’ teaching and testing methods have stayed with me forever. I still use his textbooks.”

“It was an exciting and very happy time of my life. There were all the fun times...noon hour basketball, touch football, attending CU football games, professional conferences, the sense of ‘colleagueship’ with all of the lab fellows...the enlightened guidance from Ken and Gene and their invariable accessibility, and discovering the real excitement of doing original research. I realize that we all got far better, and more balanced, training in research design, applied statistics, and measurement than did most graduate students. I found that I was way ahead of my contemporaries coming out of other programs. Gene and Ken’s care in ensuring we were exposed to courses and learning experiences available to us at CU, their knowledge of the field,

energy, dedication, and generosity as teachers and mentors, and insightful grasp of where the field was going were all contributing factors.”

These themes were repeated frequently as LER alums reminisced. It is exciting to see that the tradition that began in 1965 continues with different faculty and students but with the same dedication to excellence in educational research training.

Author's Note: *Many thanks to Drs. Glass and Hopkins for their willingness to be interviewed for this article, and to the following LER alumni who shared memories about their research training in CU's School of Education: Drs. Marilyn Averill, Zoe Barley, Evelyn Brzezinski, Alan Davis, Roy Gabriel, Arlen Gullickson, Ralph Hakstian, Stephen Jurs, Tom Miller, Larry Nelson, Beverly Parsons, Rory Remer, W. Todd Rogers, Robert Stonehill, Victor Wilson, and David Williams. Dean Lorrie Shepard proposed this article as a follow-up to a conversation we had at a CU football game in November 2009.*