UF special education researcher earns international honors for 2nd year in row

GAINESVILLE, Fla.—For the second straight year, University of Florida special education professor Mary Brownell has been chosen to receive a top honor from the Council for Exceptional Children, the world’s largest advocacy organization for students with special needs.

Brownell will receive the Kauffman-Hallahan Distinguished Researcher Award, to be presented by the CEC’s Division for Research at the council’s annual conference April 11 in Philadelphia. The award, which includes a $1,000 stipend, recognizes special education researchers whose work yields more effective services or education for exceptional individuals.

Brownell is recognized internationally as a leading scholar and policy expert in special education and teacher preparation. While the CEC honors her this year for her research, the council’s Teacher Education Division last year gave her its Pearson Excellence in Teacher Education Award. The CEC is the largest international professional organization for special educators, with more than 30,000 members.

“Mary is the premier scholar of teacher quality issues in special education,” wrote top special education researchers Donald Deshler of the University of Kansas and David Houchins of Georgia State University in jointly nominating Brownell for the CEC honor. “Her work has had enormous impact on the way teacher educators think about educating special education teachers and state policy and practice in educating teachers for students with disabilities.”

Brownell’s research has focused on improving the quality of teachers serving students with disabilities, including the advancement of literacy instruction among special education teachers, and studies on the induction and mentoring of beginning special educators.

She is the UF College of Education’s top-funded researcher. After more than two decades at UF, her scholarly productivity and international reputation have helped the University of Florida consistently rank among the top 10 special education programs in the nation.

“Developing a serious research agenda focused on teacher quality issues and engaging other scholars and doctoral students in that agenda is of great important to me,” Brownell said.

In 2013, Brownell, with UF co-researchers Paul Sindelar and Erica McCray, received a federal award worth $25 million—the college’s largest grant ever—to create and lead a national CEEDAR Center (Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform) at UF. The researchers are working with multiple states in restructuring and improving their teacher preparation programs and policies in special education.

Funded with $800,000 by the federal Office of Special Education Programs, Brownell and colleagues also are addressing the scarcity of research on teacher quality issues in special education. Their grant has
supported four doctoral students over four years in their pursuit of new innovations for preparing special educators.

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