

R1 Commission Areas of Research Excellence and Scholarship

Title of the Area: Academically/Intellectually Gifted Education (AIG)

Participating Department: Special Education & Child Development

Lead Organizers: Michael S. Matthews, Professor

Cindy M. Gilson, Associate Professor

Target Category: Areas of Future Opportunity and Investment

Keywords: Gifted Education, AIG, Doctoral Preparation, STEM, Diversity & Inclusion

## **Executive Summary: Academically/Intellectually Gifted Education (AIG)**

For at least a quarter century faculty at UNC Charlotte have been in the national spotlight for their scholarship related to the education of students who show evidence of high academic potential or performance—colloquially, gifted students. In the K-12 setting, North Carolina refers to these learners as Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG), and state law recognizes that they require differentiated learning experiences beyond those available in the regular education setting. North Carolina has one of the strongest state mandates for gifted education among the 50 U.S. states, and provides partial funding to school districts specifically to support the education of AIG learners and training for AIG teachers. Gifted education is an add-on to initial teacher licensure; approximately 20 colleges across the state offer a four-course licensure sequence in AIG. UNC Charlotte is unique in that we offer one of only three master's programs in the state in gifted education, and the only doctoral concentration in this field in the Carolinas.

In the Special Education & Child Development Department there are just two gifted education faculty, Dr. Michael Matthews (Professor, 2016) and Dr. Cindy Gilson (Associate Professor, 2020). We both have built strong reputations, receiving national awards for our scholarship and leadership, while simultaneously being heavily involved in partnerships with local schools and districts. We work with upper-level undergraduates through doctoral students, and also have led efforts to develop undergraduate Honors education within our College over the past decade. We have applied multiple times to the single federal grant program in our field but have not yet been successful. We have built our Ph.D. enrollment from zero in 2010 to seven students for fall 2021. With additional resources and faculty, future investments, and new resources, building on our core team, we would envision raising the profile of UNC Charlotte by becoming one of the top programs in the nation in gifted education within the next ten years.

## **Evidence of Strength and Excellence: Academically/Intellectually Gifted Education (AIG)**

The two co-leads are currently the only faculty employed by UNC Charlotte in this field. Dr. Michael Matthews is Professor and has been on the faculty since 2008. Dr. Cindy Gilson is Associate Professor and has been on the faculty since 2014. For only two faculty, our successes, collective impact, and achievements have consistently exceeded expectations. With future investment, UNC Charlotte could become one of the top programs in the nation in gifted education. Below we highlight some of our multiple areas of strength and excellence.

In leading the search committee that hired Dr. Gilson, I (Matthews) sought a colleague with complimentary abilities to better meet the needs of our diverse teacher candidates. My own previous K-12 teaching was with secondary learners, while Dr. Gilson taught elementary grades. We share a STEM focus and have published together in this area. Dr. Gilson has strong credentials in curriculum development and teaches the three curriculum-focused courses in our Graduate Certificate and M.Ed. programs, while I typically teach our courses on assessment, social-emotional needs, and creativity. We both teach our introductory course and our M.Ed. capstone research sequence, and we both also have directed the Education Honors Program and chaired the Education Honors committee. Further, we have advised (and submitted work for publication with) our undergraduate Honors and M.Ed. students. We also collaborated, with Dr. Gilson's lead, to allow early entry to two of our graduate courses for upper-level undergraduates in teacher education majors. Due to our program's strong reputation, we currently have to hire adjunct faculty nearly every semester, including during the summer when we both also teach, to cover the existing demand for our courses; having additional faculty lines would greatly expand our impact and allows us to devote additional time to securing external funding, while ensuring that our students at all levels continue to benefit from interacting directly with full-time faculty.

Dr. Gilson and I both have national visibility and have presented with each other and with our students on multiple occasions. We share a strong history of involvement in the National Association for Gifted Children, which recognized Dr. Gilson with its Early Leader award in 2020. I have been elected to the NAGC Board of Directors, and previously I had been recognized with the organization's Early Scholar award. Currently I co-edit NAGC's *Gifted Child Quarterly*, the field's preeminent journal. *GCQ* currently is ranked #5 of the 42 journals with impact factors in the Special Education category. We both publish regularly, and recently Dr. Matthews tied for the most publications in a single year within our prolific department. Our work focuses broadly on the important topic of diversity, differentiation, and inclusion in programs for advanced learners, addressing this societal priority through STEM content and related areas.

Gifted education is a relatively small field with very scarce funding. There is only one federal grant program, the Javits program, which is not funded consistently. Dr. Gilson and I have applied multiple times for Javits funding, but so far have not been successful; the hiring of additional tenure-track personnel would greatly increase our ability to secure this support. Javits and other grant funding would help our recruitment of doctoral students, an area into which we have put a great deal of effort recently. Prior to Dr. Gilson's hire we had one doctoral student in the AIG concentration in our highly ranked Ph.D. program in Special Education. We since have increased this enrollment to three, and just this month we admitted for fall 2021 four additional doctoral students to the AIG concentration. With additional personnel and resources we could continue to build toward national eminence, particularly in preparing personnel to work with students identified as twice-exceptional, i.e., who qualify as AIG but concurrently also have a special education disability. Few (if any) other graduate programs emphasize this priority.

## **Alignment with Regional and National Priorities**

Our focus on preparing educators and scholars for diversity and inclusion in gifted education aligns squarely with UNC Charlotte's mission as the state's urban research university meeting the educational and social needs of the greater Charlotte region. It also is consistent with the state's priority to increase the number of highly qualified teachers in North Carolina schools. As the largest of the 20 programs in the state that offer AIG coursework, over just the past 12 years our graduate programs have prepared nearly one in ten of ALL NC teachers who currently hold AIG add-on licensure. Our program faculty are highly engaged in research; though some other programs also have faculty with national leadership experience, they do not offer multiple graduate degrees focused on gifted education or a clear pipeline into doctoral study in the field.

In addition to meeting all the standards of the accrediting bodies for the College of Education, Drs. Gilson and Matthews align all AIG coursework closely with relevant [national standards for teacher preparation](#) from the National Association for Gifted Children and the Council for Exceptional Children, and also with the recently revised [North Carolina AIG Program Standards](#). Our faculty also meet the [Standards for Faculty in Gifted Education Teacher Preparation Programs](#), which were coauthored by Dr. Matthews. Furthermore, four of our courses are Quality Matters certified, and we are preparing two more courses for this distinction.

In addition to preparing teachers to work effectively with students identified as AIG, our research foci and priorities also align with other strengths in the Cato College of Education. Specifically, we have established working relationships with students and colleagues in Special and Early Childhood, STEM, Counseling, Educational Leadership, Urban Education, and the Honors College. With additional resources, which might include interdisciplinary faculty lines that include gifted education, we also would expect to continue to develop these partnerships.

Name	Title	Contribution and Expertise
Michael S. Matthews	Professor and M.Ed. Concentration Director for AIG Co-Editor, <i>Gifted Child Quarterly</i>	Author, editor, broad experience as member of nonprofit boards of directors and university and college-level committees. Leadership experience in elected positions for the National Association for Gifted Children and the American Educational Research Association. Dr. Matthews' research interests in gifted education include equity in assessment and identification, policy, STEM, motivation and underachievement, and parenting and homeschooling of high-ability children. His work has been recognized with awards from the NAGC, AERA, Texas Association for the Gifted & Talented, and the North Carolina Association for the Gifted & Talented. He has presented internationally in South Korea and Australia.
Cindy M. Gilson	Associate Professor and AIG Graduate Certificate Program Director	Author, professional development provider, mentor, and broad experience as member of university and college-level committees. Leadership experience in elected positions for the National Association for Gifted Children. Dr. Gilson's research interests center on gifted education curriculum, differentiation, classroom discourse, and STEM high schools. Her work has been recognized with awards from NAGC and special honors from the UNCC Center for Teaching and Learning. She has been invited to speak nationally at state-level gifted education conferences.