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Endowment helps support Academic Skills Center

By **Liz Lent**, contributing writer

For Jon Froemke, learning didn't end in the classroom. As an Oakland University mathematics professor, he saw how hard students work to find their way through a math problem and how they take on challenges in order to learn and learn well. He knew, too, how important it was to make those challenges surmountable, which is why he was a steadfast advocate of Oakland's **Academic Skills Center** (ASC) and the tutoring services it provides.

Froemke's widow, Judy, has created an endowment fund to ensure his devotion to the ASC will help students for years to come.

"The peer tutoring offered by the skills center is a wonderful service that the university provides," said Judy Froemke, a 1989 graduate of Oakland University's masters in counseling program. "I think our sons (David, a graduate student in mathematics in Washington, and Robert, a neuroscience post-doctoral student in San Francisco) and their friends benefited from this love of teaching. Jon also got a lot of satisfaction from helping Oakland students hired to be peer tutors at the skills center learn how to give supplemental help academically to other students. He spoke highly of the ASC staff committed to this service and enjoyed working with them."

The Jon Froemke Endowed Graduate Assistantship Judy Froemke created is intended to help support a graduate student who gives supplemental instruction (tutoring) in a typically difficult undergraduate math class working with and assisting the math professor.

OU Mathematics Professor Jerry Grossman believes the assistantship is an ideal way to remember Jon Froemke, a colleague and close friend.

"Jon was very much a student-oriented professor and was very concerned about finding ways to help students succeed in learning mathematics," Grossman said. "The assistantship not only benefits the graduate student who holds it, by financing his or her education, but also is designed to help improve the mathematics peer tutoring available at the Academic Skills Center. In a sense, the recipient of this assistantship will be carrying on the work that Jon did with the ASC." That work was expansive with Froemke volunteering not only his time but also his expertise as an educator and administrator. He was instrumental in authoring a grant for Supplemental Instruction (SI), bolstering a program that was still in its infancy.

The ASC works with hundreds of students each year, helping them improve their overall learning skills as well as their comprehension of specific course material. Tutoring is available free of charge to all OU students for most 100- and 200-level courses with walk-in assistance available for a slightly more limited number of courses. In addition to Supplemental Instruction in everything from accounting to biology to math and statistics, the ASC offers a writing assistance program intended to enhance students' writing and reading abilities across the curriculum as well as learning strategy seminars that help students learn time management, testing techniques, memorizing techniques, and studying and note-taking skills. Students applying for scholarships or grants offering domestic or international study can find a helping hand at the center, where they can receive assistance in filling out applications for such top-rated programs as the Fulbright, Marshall and Rhodes scholarships.

More importantly, the center offers dramatic success for students willing to put in the extra time and effort. For Supplemental Instruction alone, OU research has shown that students who regularly attend earn one-half to a full grade higher than those who do not.

"The more resources we can put into helping our students succeed in the difficult classes, such as mathematics classes, the better success we will have in accomplishing that goal," Grossman said. "Supplemental Instruction is offered at no additional cost to the students. It's as if they are getting two courses for the price of one."

The tutors themselves often benefit from the increased focus necessary to help other students. "Tutoring mathematics is difficult," Grossman said. "Helping the SI leaders and other tutors become better teachers is invaluable to all students. It was a wonderful and generous gift that set up the endowment for this assistantship, and we all owe Judy a great deal of appreciation."

For Judy Froemke, the focus remains on the young men and women of OU helping their peers to learn and succeed. For years, Jon and Judy Froemke invited students to their home, and Judy continues this tradition.

"These tutors are some of the brightest, most creative, nicest people you'd want to meet," she said. "There are students tutoring in everything – language classes, history, physics – whatever is needed. Some of OU's ASC tutors have won awards at the state level for their tutoring skills. If alumni want to benefit the university with a tax-deductible donation, this would be a great program to support."

For information on how to contribute to the Jon Froemke Endowed Graduate Assistantship fund, contact Dennis Sheridan, director of Planned Giving, at (248) 370-3700 or dsherida@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

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