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From Student to Dean: Hanner Retiring After Long, Distinguished Career

Jun-24-2011

Mary Anne Hanner has experienced many emotional moments in her long and distinguished career at Eastern Illinois University, but it's the thought of her first day as an EIU student in 1968 that still makes her misty-eyed.

"The first day I drove here as a student, I felt very special -- very privileged to have the opportunity to go to school," she said. "The first day I drove to work here, I thought of how privileged I am. I get teary thinking about it."

More tears are likely to fall as she leaves campus on June 30, as her retirement ends a phase of her EIU affiliation that has included earning two EIU degrees, teaching as a faculty member, and ultimately serving as dean of the College of Sciences.

Growing up in a large family in rural Oakland, Hanner always knew she wanted to be a teacher. Her high school guidance counselor first steered her toward speech-language pathology. Hanner was familiar with the field through family members' experiences.

After graduating as valedictorian of her Oakland High School class, Hanner began summer courses at EIU. Her first class was held on the second floor of Old Main -- the same floor that now houses her office.

She graduated from EIU in 1972 and became the speech-language pathologist for the Altamont and Beecher City school districts. After earning her master's degree in 1974, she began teaching in the Arcola school district.

Hanner had no plans to leave the K-12 school setting until she received a call from former EIU classmate Jill Nilsen, who encouraged Hanner to look at an opening on the EIU faculty.

So, in 1981, Hanner headed back to her alma mater as an assistant professor, a position that allowed her to continue to deal with school-age children while molding future professionals in a clinical setting.

At the same time, she served as student teaching coordinator, giving her the opportunity to travel to area schools to oversee EIU students' work in the classrooms while interacting with her professional colleagues.

"Teaching all of those prospective professionals in the classroom, and sharing the enthusiasm and commitment for speech-language pathology, was just a joyful thing to do," Hanner said, adding that she still sees many of them at conferences and other professional events.

Since she began her career, the speech-language pathology field has become more complex, and Hanner evolved with it. At the encouragement of her department chair, she taught a voice and voice disorders course that opened new professional opportunities and proved very rewarding.

Some of the biggest highlights of her career were quiet milestones -- "those moments that nobody knows about except the client and the students working and me, when we used therapy that was especially effective," she said.

Hanner first moved into an administrative role in 1985, when she was named director of EIU's Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic.

She earned her doctorate from Indiana State University in 1994 and continued to climb the EIU administrative ladder when she was named chair of the department in 1997. That was "the golden time" of her professional life, she said, because as department chair she was teaching and interacting with students and faculty every day.

So, when she was asked in 2000 to consider becoming the dean of the College of Sciences, she was taken off-guard.

"That was not on my radar," Hanner said.

But she accepted the challenge, and looking back at the past 11 years, she is proud of the professional growth she experienced and what the College of Sciences has accomplished under her guidance.



Mary Anne Hanner

During her tenure, the College of Sciences has experienced a proliferation of faculty-mentored research; an increase in study abroad participation; the addition of honors programs for every major in the COS; a rise in funding for increasingly vital areas such as equipment and computer labs; an increase in student involvement through the Student Advisory Board; and the establishment of mentoring programs for women and minorities.

"I've done things I didn't know I would be able to do," she said. "Not on my own, certainly, but because there were a lot of great people around to help along the way. With great collaborators, it's so much easier to get things done.

"We have just been able to provide so many more opportunities for our departments and our faculty," she said, giving credit to partnerships with departments, other deans, the "incredible" faculty and Provost Blair Lord, who in turn praised Hanner's contributions.

"During her 10-plus years in the COS dean's office, Dr. Hanner effectively promoted the quality of her college, advanced its programs, managed its substantial budget during difficult times, solved personnel challenges, and gave wise and thoughtful counsel to me and her colleague deans," Lord said.

"Her skill, wisdom and humor added enormously to the effectiveness and smooth functioning of my administrative team. I will miss her and so will Eastern."

Although she's now more removed from the therapy side of her profession, her contribution to the field lives on, especially through publications such as the Language Processing Test she co-authored with EIU colleague Gail Richard in 1985. The materials are now in their third editions and still regularly and frequently used by professionals.

She has also given back to the field through performing extensive committee work at the state and national levels.

She plans to continue to serve as a reaccreditation site visitor for the American Speech-Language Hearing Association, while also continuing to provide independent accreditation consulting services.

As she reflects on a list of accomplishments, service and awards that fill several pages, Hanner expresses gratitude for the opportunities she's been provided.

"I'm very fortunate to have had a fulfilling career at a university 20 miles from my hometown," she said, adding that having her family close by allowed her, as a mother of two, to "do some things in my career that I would not have been able to do."

She also praised her husband Dale, her high school sweetheart with whom she just celebrated 40 years of marriage, "who is very tolerant of my very busy schedule."

He shouldn't expect her calendar to free up too much, though, as she plans to increase her volunteer activities with the area Catholic Charities and CASA organizations. She serves as a board member for both.

She's also looking forward to being able to see more of her five grandchildren and their school events, soccer games and ballet recitals.

Although there is some uncertainty about what the future may hold, she is looking forward to new challenges.

"I just keep thinking about all the good times behind me," Hanner said. "There have been other times in my life I haven't been sure what lie in front of me, and it turned out to be a great adventure."