

Nelson leads the planning for Ambassadors program, Governor's Camp

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For most of the year, Dr. Trudi Nelson is an assistant professor in the School of Education at the University of South Dakota.

But for two weeks each summer, her time is devoted exclusively to overseeing the annual South Dakota Ambassadors of Excellence Program and Governor's Camp.

The first program began July 16 and the second began July 22. Both concluded Friday.

"I think there are still a few people out there who think we come a day and a half before camp and throw it together - we literally start (planning for next year) eight days after camp ends," Nelson said. "It takes a lot of coordination. I have part-time workers all summer (who) work around the graduate classes ... and they come in a day or two each week and do

different tasks."

The Ambassadors program just completed its 24th year, while the Governor's Camp finished its 29th.

The programs offer gifted South Dakota high school and middle school students the opportunity to take advanced courses, complete projects and interact with like-minded peers.

These courses involve areas including theatre, art, science, literature, writing and technology, and are taught by volunteers from the university and outside professional fields.

"We try to provide a really optimal experience for these gifted campers so they have academics that they don't get in school, that they have a very supportive environment so they'll try new things, and that they have a good social environment so they can meet with other camps and realize they ... have common experiences," Nelson said.

Each of the more than

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300 campers was nominated to attend by an official from their respective school.

Paperwork including brochures and permission forms are sent to South Dakota schools each February, Nelson said.

"It takes a tremendous amount of time and a lot of organization," she said.

But the end result is definitely worth the work. "We get stories back from schools every year about kids, that all of a sudden they go from not trying anything, almost shutting down, to ... saying, 'What can I try now? What can I learn

now?' I'm getting that from parents and teachers," Nelson said.

This is Nelson's fifth year working with the camp, and her fourth running it.

She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education from Augustana College in 1994, and spent time working as a middle school teacher.

She earned her Master's in Technology for Education and Training from USD in 2005, followed by her Ed.D. in Curriculum & Instruction in 2008.

Working with the



gifted programs is one of the most rewarding parts of her job, Nelson said.

"I want the campers to walk out of here more confident that they can be who they are, that they can pursue things that they are good at, that they will take a risk and try new things, that they will realize that they are not

alone and that they ... have some responsibility to help the people around them," she said.

Above all, Nelson said she wants the campers to stretch their abilities.

"We really tell them to push themselves," she said.



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