

Frank K. Lester, Jr.

Chancellor's Professor of Curriculum and Instruction

A velvet made-to-measure cap, a rare opportunity to dress in white-tie formal attire, and a ceremonial sword will fittingly mark the occasion next month when Frank K. Lester, Jr. is awarded an honorary doctorate at Abo Akademi University in Turku, Finland, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to mathematics education worldwide.

Frank grew up with his firefighter father, stepmother, older sister, and younger brother in a post-World War II housing development in Jacksonville, Florida. First in his family to attend college, he initially studied engineering at Georgia Tech, but soon decided he was more interested in pure mathematics than its applications. Transferring to Florida State University (FSU), he majored in mathematics, played on the FSU baseball team, and became an avid tennis player—a passion he pursued for more than 30 years. After earning bachelor's and master's degrees in mathematics, Frank was eager for more study. But the Vietnam War was raging, and student military deferments looked likely to be phased out. So Frank sought a teaching deferment—and, in the process, discovered his passion and talent for teaching.

Frank's migration to the Midwest began in 1969, when he enrolled in the doctoral program in mathematics education at The Ohio State University. He first set foot on Indiana soil in 1972, on his drive to Bloomington to begin work as an IU assistant professor. Frank truly thought he might live three, or at the most five, years in Bloomington. But as he tells it, "The place grows on you!" He is both amazed and delighted to have spent his entire academic career at IU.

Frank's research spans a variety of topics in the teaching and learning of mathematics, but he is best known for his work on the teaching of problem solving at the elementary and middle school levels, and for his work in preparing elementary teachers to teach mathematics. During his career, he garnered nine NSF grants—including three during the Reagan era of the 1980s, when funding for education was extremely hard to come by—collaborating often with now-retired IU colleagues John LeBlanc (education) and Dan Maki (mathematics), and many others. Their research and curriculum development efforts helped show that students at all levels can acquire basic skills at the same time they are working on nonroutine problems and, in the process, become even better problem solvers than was previously assumed to be possible.

Among Frank's passions is traveling to work with teachers and researchers around the world. In addition to numerous international visits and consultations over the years (Japan, Thailand, South Africa, Portugal, and Macedonia, to name just a few), Frank has been a visiting faculty member at universities in Brisbane, Australia (1977); London, England (1980); Calgary, Canada (1982); Recife, Brazil (as a Fulbright scholar, 1986); and Gothenburg, Sweden (1998).

An excellent classroom teacher at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, Frank has directed the dissertations of more than 45 students who are now scattered throughout the world, often in leadership positions in universities, professional organizations, or state departments of education. Frank will, no doubt, continue his involvement in mathematics education after retirement—in the role he has always taken most seriously—as advisor, editor, mentor, and confidant for young researchers.

Frank is also well known for his work as an editor, and as a key contributor and advisor to the 100,000-member National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). He served from 1992 to 1996 as editor of NCTM's *Journal for Research in Mathematics Education*, after previously editing their research monograph series (1987–1991). In 1999 Frank was elected to NCTM's board of directors, and he also served on the council's Research Advisory Committee and as a member of their important Standards Impact Research Group. Frank's most recent major project was editing NCTM's two-volume (1,300 page) *Second Handbook of Research on Mathematics Teaching and Learning*, published last year. *The Handbook* is expected to be the definitive guide for research in the field for the next decade. Having personally read and edited each and every page of the handbook, Frank likes to joke that he may not be the very best mathematics education researcher in the country, but he certainly is the very best informed.

Frank's accomplishments and reputation have been recognized both here at IU and beyond. Based on the recommendation of a faculty committee in the School of Education, he was appointed to a five-year term (2000–2005) as the Martha Lea and Bill Armstrong Professor of Teacher Education. That was followed, in 2006, with appointment to the rank of Chancellor's Professor of Education. At the national level, Frank recently received two distinct honors: the first-ever Award for Excellence in Scholarship in Mathematics Education from the Association of Mathematics Teacher Educators, and the prestigious Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics.

Those of us who know Frank have a hard time believing that retirement will mean slowing down. Frank has declared his intention to do even more travel, but we also suspect he will continue, right here in Bloomington, to promote the "Thursday seminar," an intellectual and social gathering that since 1981 has recruited faculty from various departments to meet at local watering holes. Frank has always had an innate curiosity about other disciplines and fields of study, from art and music to history and the humanities. Friends marvel at the breadth of his reading but also at his wit, wry sense of humor, and compassion. In addition, Frank's curiosity about people from diverse cultures and places has long been evident. His generosity toward international students and their families serves as a model to us all. The kindness he has shown to strangers in a strange land should not go unrecorded, and it typifies his considerate ways toward family and friends, colleagues, and students. His brother once offered this unsolicited comment to one of Frank's closest friends: "Frank is the best person I have ever known." For all of Frank's justly deserved academic achievements, this nicely captures the man in full.

Peter Kloosterman, Diana Lambdin, and William Reese