KU News Release

KU researcher named to National Institutes of Health advisory council

LAWRENCE — A University of Kansas professor has been appointed to the advisory council of the National Institute of Deafness and Other Communication Disorders Institute by U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Michael Leavitt.

Mabel Rice, the Fred and Virginia Merrill Distinguished Professor of Advanced Studies, will join a group of 18 appointees that includes 12 leading scientists in the areas of deafness and communication disorders.

Her four-year term begins June 1.

The council advises the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service, the director of the National Institutes of Health and the director of the NIDCD on matters relating to the conduct and support of research and research training, health information dissemination and other programs with respect to disorders of hearing and other communication processes.

“This is a significant honor and a well-deserved tribute to Professor Rice’s international standing and visibility in the field of language and communication disorders,” said John Colombo, interim director of KU’s Life Span Institute.

Rice’s research focus has been a disability called specific language impairment. She is conducting a large study of twins with researchers in Australia, England and Nebraska to look for a genetic component of the disorder in tandem with a longitudinal study of non-twin children in Kansas and Missouri.

In 2001, Rice and Kenneth Wexler, a professor of linguistics and cognitive science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, developed the first test to diagnose the impairment, the Rice/Wexler Test of Early Grammatical Impairment. The language disability often escaped traditional testing and treatment. The test is being used in school districts across the country as well as in research.

Rice directs three research centers at KU’s Life Span Institute: the Merrill Center for Advanced Studies, the Biobehavioral Neurosciences in Communication Disorders Center and the Child Language Doctoral Program.

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The Life Span Institute comprises 13 centers and more than 120 programs and projects located on the Lawrence campus, the medical center in Kansas City, Kan., and Parsons, Kan., as well as other locations.

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