Professional musicians sometimes play with pain out of fear of losing their seat. Amy Roisum Foley, music education and conducting professor and director of bands at Minnesota State Mankato, teaches techniques aimed at pain relief and injury prevention during music performance and works with others to change attitudes about getting relief.
The College of Graduate Studies and Research at Minnesota State University, Mankato recognizes and celebrates the many research and scholarly activities made possible through the generosity of private and foundation gifts. This issue of FRONTIERS highlights a few of the ways our students, faculty, region, and state benefit from their support.
Supporters of the newly established Undergraduate Research Center hope to get Minnesota State Mankato recognized as the premier undergraduate research institution in Minnesota and the Midwest. Donations from the Foundation Board and others help move the URC closer to that goal.

PERFORMING WITHOUT PAIN
Amy Roisum Foley, director of bands and music education and conducting professor at Minnesota State Mankato knows what it is like to perform with pain. Her experience fuels her mission to educate others about body health and alignment techniques aimed at pain relief and injury prevention during music performance.

PRESERVING FORGOTTEN ART
It isn’t surprising to learn that Minnesota State Mankato art professor Gina Wenger visits art museums when she travels. However, what she found during a visit to a Japanese American internment camp museum in Utah surprised her.

STANDING OVATION FOR RESEARCH
With only four weeks to rehearse the 2010-2011 season opener, Paul Finocchiaro, associate professor of theatre and dance, needed to be organized and have a clear vision of how the show would proceed. A faculty research grant from the Nadine B. Andreas Endowment helped him prepare to make his vision a reality.

CUSTOMIZING TRAINING FOR TRIBAL OFFICERS
As her interest in what makes some people rule makers, some people rule followers, and some people rule breakers grew, Tamara Wilkins developed a specialty in law enforcement training curriculum. Now, as an associate professor of law enforcement, Wilkins is busy working on a new curriculum aimed at helping tribal officers better understand the needs of people with disabilities.

FIGHTING BUCKTHORN
The Ney Nature Center in Henderson, Minn. hopes to eliminate nonnative plants in its prairie restoration areas. Geography graduate student Michelle Bridges has volunteered to create a ten-year management plan for common buckthorn. “The problem is massive,” said Bridges. “But I think it is manageable.”

SHARING THE GIFT OF HISTORY
Ronald Schirmer, professor of anthropology, and his students have been conducting research in the Red Wing, Minn. area for years. They are working to uncover and document clues to how the environment shaped early Native American culture and how cultures interacted and exchanged ideas and practices. Since 2007, their research has been supported by a $100,000 donation from the Prairie Island Indian Community.

FRONTIERS
GROWING THE CULTURE OF RESEARCH

The 2010-2011 academic year marked a significant change in the culture of undergraduate research at Minnesota State Mankato. And according to Marilyn Hart, director of the newly established Undergraduate Research Center (URC), it is just the beginning.

One goal of the URC is for Minnesota State Mankato to be recognized as the premier undergraduate research institution, certainly in Minnesota if not the Midwest. “I really think that we can achieve that,” said Hart. “Our faculty is accessible, approachable, and deeply committed to students.”

The Undergraduate Research Conference has been a staple on the Mankato campus for more than eleven years. Initiated and supported by faculty, undergraduate research is showcased through student presentations during a two-day celebration of scholarship each spring.

More than 200 students participate, but it is still only a fraction of the student population. “We firmly believe that participation in undergraduate research will transform a student’s educational experience, allow them to engage with other students, and build strong faculty collaborations, confidence, and their view of themselves and the world,” said Hart. “Part of my job is to make sure students are aware of the opportunities. It is made easier by our faculty’s commitment and devotion to scholarship and mentoring.”

In addition to faculty support, the center also enjoys solid and ongoing support from the Alumni Foundation. “Their generosity provides research and travel grants to students who otherwise would not have the means to participate,” said Hart. “Without the Foundation, we would be very limited in what we are able to do.”

Private donations help raise the profile of the University. And, perhaps more importantly, donations impact the lives of the students—studying everything from art to biology—who benefit from the research support.

For example, biology students Crystal Taylor and Susan Gerbensky presented their research on hypertension at the National Council of Undergraduate Research annual meeting. They are two of twenty-five Mankato students who presented at the national conference.

In addition, Taylor and Gerbensky are one of only seventy research teams nation wide selected to present at the Council of Undergraduate Research Posters on the Hill in Washington, D.C. This is the second consecutive year Minnesota State Mankato student research has been chosen for this prestigious conference.

Taylor talked about how the Foundation grant and the undergraduate research experience impacted her life. “We used the money from the Foundation grant to buy supplies and complete our research project,” said Taylor. “And completion of the project gave me new confidence in my ability as we enjoy the results of our hard work.”

Mentor and biology professor Penny Knoblich agreed the Alumni Foundation makes a huge impact on students and faculty. “Undergraduate research promotes scientific thought and reasoning, helps develop data organization and presentation skills, and contributes to the future success of students in the job market,” said Knoblich. “My students and I are very grateful for their generosity.”

“The Foundation Board knows that top-quality research experience not only ignites passion in students, it prepares them to think broadly and solve problems in the real world,” said Doug Mayo, vice-president for University Advancement. “The Undergraduate Research Center and the Undergraduate Research Conference are invaluable parts of our campus culture, and the Foundation Board is proud to support them.”
Amy Roisum Foley, director of bands and music education and conducting professor at Minnesota State Mankato, knows what it is like to perform with pain. Initially a music performance major, she endured three surgeries before she expanded her studies to include music education. Her experience playing with pain motivates her to help others perform without pain. And a faculty research grant from the Nadine B. Andreas Endowment helped fund the research that enabled Roisum Foley to begin teaching others body health and alignment techniques. The techniques are aimed at pain relief and injury prevention during music performance.

Roisum Foley had been thinking about the way conducting is taught and the way conductors move on the podium. Then her first student in the graduate conducting program at Minnesota State Mankato had neck and lower back problems. Roisum Foley wanted to find a way to teach musical movement and conducting without making things worse for her student. But before making changes in her teaching techniques, she needed to more fully understand body mechanics, skeletal alignment, and gravity’s effect on movement.

A faculty research grant from the Nadine B. Andreas Endowment allowed Roisum Foley to take classes through the Postural Restoration Institute based in Nebraska. The institute’s philosophy teaches that people develop patterns of body mechanics that shift their body alignment, which can lead to tension, pain, and/or injury over time. These conditions tend to show up more quickly and severely in cases of repetitive movement.

“I don’t think that repetitive stress injuries need to exist,” said Roisum Foley. “I think we can do all the things we do for as long as we want. We just need to do them in positions that are skeletally and muscullarly aligned.”

And so in her quest to prevent tension, pain, and injury during musical performance and conducting, Roisum Foley began to teach some postural restoration techniques with conductors. “The techniques were successful as long as they continued the exercises. But people are people,” she said. “And we don’t always continue the exercises.”

Roisum Foley thought about more effective ways to raise general awareness for conductors and musicians. The key, she thought, was to help them recognize when they fell into negative patterns and to understand how those patterns affected their health and their ensembles.

Most people, even those who are left-handed, Roisum Foley explained, live in the right side of their body. That means that they support the majority of their weight, reach from, and carry heavy items most often on their right side. The goal is to get people out of those patterns and back into proper body alignment. “If we live at least twenty percent of our day in the left side of our bodies,” said Roisum Foley, “we can begin to see a difference.”

Through her position as music education professor and chair of the College Band Directors National Association task force for conductor health, Roisum Foley uses various forums such as state conventions, association meetings, and her classes to reach musicians. She continually works to help future and current teachers think about how they are teaching and how much they teach their students about body health and alignment. “Gradually,” she said, “I am building user-friendly body awareness techniques for music teachers and performers.”

Roisum Foley finds plenty of work to do. “There is a pretty heavy stigma with professional musicians that if you start talking about an injury or take time off for treatment, there is a fear of losing your seat;” she said. But she sees progress. “Individuals and professional associations are working to acknowledge the stigma, change it, and do things differently.”
It isn’t surprising to learn that Minnesota State Mankato art professor Gina Wenger visits art museums when she travels. However, what she found during a visit to a Japanese American internment camp museum in Utah surprised her.

While looking inside a display case, she noticed some papers that looked like artwork. She asked to see them and they turned out to be a stack of children’s art created at the camp. “It was just sitting there,” Wenger said, still amazed.

Her research has always been tied to the history of art education. “I love teaching about contemporary artwork while keeping a critical eye on historical perspectives,” said Wenger.

Wenger’s interest in the internment camp children’s art began after she gave a related art appreciation assignment to one of her art education students. “The student’s grandparents were internment camp survivors. Wenger had the opportunity to visit with them. Their story fascinated her and she felt a sense of urgency to research similar stories. “They were more than eighty years old at the time,” said Wenger. “I think the thing that struck me then was that if I didn’t research this subject right away I would lose the possibility.”

Currently, Wenger is on sabbatical. She is traveling to each of the World War II Japanese American internment camp locations (Camps were located in California, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Utah, Wyoming, and Idaho), visiting local museums, and interviewing people in the community. “While at the sites and museums,” said Wenger, “I compile photo documentation of the area and objects.” She has approximately 10,000 images so far.

In addition, Wenger attends significant events related to her research. For example, she accompanied camp survivors on a five-day pilgrimage to Tule Lake, California, visited the Art of Gaman exhibit of adult arts and crafts from the internment camps at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., and attends various Japanese American Citizens League events.

Since so little of the children’s art was kept, Wenger interviews teachers and survivors to find out as much as she can about the art and the camp experience. As a service to the community, Wenger presents her findings and her research methodology to community groups, university classes, and almost anyone who asks. She shares what she has learned about the camp experience through the artwork made in camp and the art education programs offered at the camps.

“Tin doing this because it hasn’t been done and I’m learning a lot more about education, politics, history, and the human experience,” said Wenger. “Sometimes the things I learn are very difficult to hear.”

Although the work is sometimes difficult, Wenger is grateful for the support she enjoys from her colleagues and the University. She received funding from the Nadine B. Andreas Endowment, faculty research and improvement grants, and a National Art Education Foundation grant. “I cannot express how grateful I am to the University administration, my dean, and especially the Department of Art. They are picking up the slack, covering my classes, and making it possible for me to be away,” said Wenger. “I am greatly indebted to them and honored to be in their ranks.”

Between interviews, library research, presentations, and special events, Wenger keeps busy working on a couple of manuscripts she hopes to publish in the field of art education. “It is hard to say where this research will go in the future. There is still a great deal to do. I have a feeling that there might be more collections of children’s art hidden in someone’s attic somewhere,” said Wenger. “I just need to talk to the right person to find out. For now, I will continue to research and write. I think the story has just begun.”

Preserving Forgotten Art

Gina Wenger, art education professor, is traveling to each of the World War II Japanese American internment camp locations, visiting local museums, and interviewing people in the community. She is preparing an exhibition of artworks based on her research of the Japanese internment camps as they stand today. The exhibition will be presented at Minnesota State Mankato in the Centennial Student Union Gallery in late August to September 2011.

Designed and created by Teruyo Kishi (pictured inset), a student living at an internment camp, the mural was one of eight panels depicting the student’s perspective of the story of the internment, from Pearl Harbor to relocation outside the camps. Photo courtesy of the Vogel/Gould Collection, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies.
The Tony Award-winning musical Chicago topped Minnesota State Mankato’s Department of Theatre and Dance audience wish list for several years. Because the show regularly toured in Minneapolis, rights were unavailable for Mankato for more than four years. So when permission was finally granted, the department wanted to make sure it was worth the wait.

With his extensive experience in dance—three national tours, eleven years on stage in Las Vegas—Paul Finocchiaro, associate professor of theatre and dance, became the obvious choice for director.

The production of Chicago has a rich history including plays, films, and musical theatre. The most recognized story is a musical satire of the corruption of the criminal justice system in Chicago during the Prohibition-era, directed and choreographed by Bob Fosse.

With only four weeks to rehearse the 2010-2011 season opener, Finocchiaro needed to be organized and have a clear vision of how the show would proceed. The script offers guidance, but there is much more to putting on a show than simply reading dialog. And as a musical production, Chicago had unique challenges, similar to putting up a dance concert.

Finocchiaro enthusiastically accepted the challenge. His ambitious vision for the show blended elements from different versions of the production: stage, tour, and movie.

“My vision was to use a combination of choreography from the original production, current Broadway production, and choreography and image work from the 2002 movie, which was very successful,” said Finocchiaro. “I think it was a really daunting task, but I took it on with gusto and passion.” A faculty research grant from the Nadine B. Andreas Endowment also helped.

Lowell Andreas and David and Debbie Andreas pledged $7.5 million to Minnesota State Mankato and established the Nadine B. Andreas Endowment in Arts and Humanities in 2007. “The Andreas Endowment was a transformative gift, the effect of which almost cannot be exaggerated,” said Walter Zakahi, dean of the College of Arts and Humanities. “It funds three major college initiatives: faculty research, graduate assistants, and visiting artists and scholars. It is truly wonderful.”

Months after Chicago concluded, Finocchiaro still radiated enthusiasm for the opportunities afforded him through the private grant. The funding made it possible for him to conduct primary research in preparation for the show.

“After class, I was able to talk with her in depth about Fosse, his style and his way of rehearsing. She gave me some great insight.”

Next, he went to Chicago to visit the Cook County Jail. “I was hoping it was old and run down, but it is modern and as lovely as a jail can be—lots of glass and high tech,” he said. “But there was a lot of historical perspective. I was able to research articles on the original case and the trial.”

The last part of Finocchiaro’s journey included private tango lessons in Los Angeles with Rubin Atanasov, choreographer from the Oxygen network’s Dance Your Ass Off and coach for Dancing with the Stars. “It was such hard work. I have a video of the lesson. I was able to bring it back to students who were cast and show them what the tango looks like,” said Finocchiaro. “They were able to see how I learned it. It was a pretty cool experience.”

Finocchiaro said the monies he received really enhanced what he could do on stage. “Because I was able to explore in more depth, I could explain to the kids what I went through to have my vision fulfilled,” he said. “That really helped the whole project.”

If an audience reaction is any indication of the perceived value of a faculty research grant, rave reviews and standing ovations for every show of Chicago indicate a great investment.
As her interest in what makes some people rule makers, some people rule followers, and some people rule breakers grew, Tamara Wilkins developed a specialty in law enforcement training curriculum. Now, as an associate professor of law enforcement at Minnesota State Mankato, Wilkins is busy working on a new curriculum aimed at helping tribal officers better understand the needs of people with disabilities.

When Wilkins came to Mankato for her job interview in February 1999, the winter climate and scenery was quite a change from Florida. Although she was ready for a change in seasons, it was the warmth of the people in the department that sealed the deal. “I instantly fell in love with the people in the department, their personalities, their drive, their desire to be all they could be for the students,” she said. “There was no arrogance among faculty, just a determination to get the job done right.”

In addition to the faculty, she was impressed with the curriculum. “Minnesota is the only state that requires a college (two- or four-year) degree for police officers,” added Wilkins, “which I consider a fundamental requirement for people who want to work in a position of authority.”

Wilkins’ work developing police training curriculum began in earnest about seven years ago. She and Nancy Fitzsimons, professor of social work, developed Shadow Victims: Crimes Against People with Disabilities. Shadow Victims is an online curriculum, funded by the federal government, designed to educate Minnesota law enforcement officers on the unique considerations for people with disabilities who may be victims of crime. Now a grant from the Force Science Institute is allowing Wilkins to revamp the Shadow Victims curriculum to better meet the needs of tribal nations.

“It is a passion of mine that we all understand that people with disabilities are people,” said Wilkins. “The medical identifier of disability should not be paramount to who a person is.”

“Shadow Victims is a teaching curriculum. Many officers lack basic understanding of various disabilities; what behavior a person is responsible for; what is contagious and what isn’t,” Wilkins explained. “Some officers may think that if there isn’t a wheelchair or a white cane, there isn’t a disability.”

In 2009, Wilkins noticed a potential void in tribal officer training regarding people with disabilities. She took a class on Native American cultures. After learning more about the storytelling culture, it occurred to Wilkins that modifications in the Shadow Victims training curriculum might make it more useful to tribal officers.

“Many tribal officers are not interested in online training. My goal became to create a reader curriculum rather than a linear curriculum,” said Wilkins. “The modifications are designed to meet the cultural learning styles of tribal nations.” Unlike Shadow Victims, which was developed primarily for Minnesota peace officers, the new curriculum will be marketed nationwide to tribal officers.
Michelle Bridges, geography graduate student, received a grant from the James F. Goff Geography Graduate Research Endowment. The grant provided Bridges with a laptop computer, a global positioning system, and travel expenses to and from her home in Mankato to the Ney Nature Center.

Top left: Common buckthorn, a nonnative shrub, is invading the prairies of the Ney Nature Center in Henderson, Minn.

Bottom left: While working as an intern at Ney Nature Center, Bridges led educational nature walks for children.

With support from the James F. Goff Geography Graduate Research Endowment, Michelle Bridges plans to make an impression in the buckthorn problem around the Ney Nature Center in Henderson, Minn. According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, buckthorns are nonnative shrubs or small trees that have become a problem in Minnesota’s woodlands and wetlands. Left unchecked by natural controls, the shrubs crowd out native plants, and, consequently, native wildlife.

Bridges is a graduate student in Minnesota State Mankato’s Department of Geography. A Waseca, Minn., native, she began her college career studying geology in Texas. Once she had children of her own (now 10-year-old twin boys) she convinced her husband to move back to Minnesota to raise their family. “I just have such fond memories of growing up in Minnesota,” said Bridges, “and I wanted that for our boys.”

After she earned her undergraduate degree, her husband encouraged her to apply to graduate school. But with juggling school, work, and family, Bridges has been around the geography department longer than she originally intended. “I think they are afraid I will set up shop permanently,” she joked.

Bridges will complete her coursework this spring. She explained that time at the University has allowed her to explore and expand her interests from geology to geography to prairie education and preservation. “My advisors kept telling me I had to narrow my focus,” said Bridges. “But I am interested in so many things.”

A connection with the director of the Ney Nature Center eventually helped Bridges narrow her focus to buckthorn control. The Ney is a 446-acre environmental learning center and county park located on the bluffs of the Minnesota River. Bridges and Becky Pollack, director of the Ney, were undergraduate students together. Pollack asked Bridges for some help comparing the differences between the Ney’s restored prairie and the spontaneous prairie.

Since she began her internship, Bridges’ projects have evolved. “I like it there,” she said of the Ney. “If I think of something to do, I can just do it.” One thing she and nature center staff decided they needed was a comprehensive buckthorn assessment and a long-range plan to address it.

Bridges applied for the James F. Goff Geography Graduate Research Endowment grant to help get the ball rolling. The grant provided Bridges with a laptop computer, a global positioning system (GPS), and travel expenses to and from her home in Mankato to the Ney Nature Center.

Bridges aims to do a 10-year buckthorn management plan for the 446-acre nature area. “The problem is massive,” said Bridges. “But I think it is manageable.” Using GPS, she will map the invasive species, volunteers will cut the shrubs and treat the stumps, and staff and volunteers will revisit the treatment sites.

In addition to the buckthorn management research, Bridges contributes to the nature center in other ways. She developed a resource library for weed control, helped choose more than 300 trees ordered for planting, and taught children’s summer education camps.

Bridges’ curiosity about her environment and her passion to share information with others will keep her involved in education, even after she earns her graduate degree and moves her last boxes out of the geography department.
Home to an extraordinarily rich archeological record, the Red Wing area in Minnesota holds the highest concentration (more than 3,000) of ancient Native American burial mounds in North America. Near Lake Pepin, 750 mounds have been documented on the outskirts of a single village. “The area is extremely important,” said Ronald Schirmer, professor of anthropology at Minnesota State Mankato.

Schirmer and his students have been conducting research in the area for years. And since 2007, the research has been supported by a $100,000 private donation from the Prairie Island Indian Community.

Individuals and groups support research for different reasons, sometimes because of personal interest in a subject, sometimes as a way to honor a loved one. In the case of the Prairie Island gift, it was an ongoing desire to learn about and preserve the past along with the recognition of quality research and trust in Schirmer’s techniques.

As an anthropologist, Schirmer specializes in research into the interrelationships between people and their environment, specifically Native American cultures prior to the arrival of Europeans. He works to uncover and document clues to how the environment shaped early Native American culture and how cultures interacted and exchanged ideas and practices.

Schirmer routinely involves undergraduate and graduate students in his research. He described the work they do as “untangling the mysterious knot of the evolution of the ancient Native American cultures in and around Red Wing.”

Schirmer’s relationship with the Prairie Island Indian Community began in 1999. While conducting his pre-doctoral research at the Anderson Center for Interdisciplinary Studies near Red Wing, Schirmer noticed that a culturally significant site was being destroyed by routine gravel excavation. “I wanted to preserve information before the site was destroyed,” he said.

He approached the Prairie Island Tribal Council and asked permission to conduct archeological research and preservation. Schirmer wanted to excavate the ancient refuse site that was being destroyed.

The effort made an impact on the council that Schirmer did not expect. “After that, an elder actually visited me,” he said. “That just doesn’t happen; you visit elders, not the other way around.”

The council provided their blessing along with a letter of support. “That first meeting marked the beginning of a long-term relationship of mutual respect and trust. Now Schirmer regularly meets with council members and tribal elders to keep them apprised of his plans and findings. A tribal representative blesses each site before work begins and elders provide information and additional meaning to Schirmer’s findings.

“I can only tell so much about a pot by looking at it,” he explained. “Elders often provide deep cultural context. The stories I hear from direct descendants of people who made and or used the pieces.”

Schirmer and his students plot and excavate ancient Native American sites near Red Wing. And the Prairie Island gift supports student summer research, necessary field equipment, and high precision radiocarbon dating.

Analysis of stone tools, pottery, and plant and animal remains uncovered at the sites provide clues to their production and use. In addition, it aids the development of theories about identity, ethnicity, and interactions of various Native American cultures across the region.

In these challenging budgetary times, Schirmer understands the need to stay relevant. “Anthropology can be seen as terribly esoteric. But everything we do is applied,” he said. “The gift from Prairie Island makes it possible for us to continue the research around Red Wing and work closely with the descendent communities. In addition, students have access to world-class sites.” Schirmer continued, “We are truly fortunate. It is a joy to share what we do, to share the gift of history.”

Sharing the Gift of History
This image of the former hospital boiler chimney at the Heart Mountain Relocation Center in Wyoming is one of thousands of images captured by Gina Wenger, art education professor, while researching the history of the Japanese internment camp experience. The Heart Mountain Center was one of ten Japanese internment camps in operation during World War II. The site opened in 1942, reached its maximum capacity of 10,767 internees in 1943, and closed in 1945. Photo by: Gina Wenger.