



# 'Building Leaders for the Greater Good'

New Creighton Online Degree  
Program Has Jesuit Influence

By Pamela Adams Vaughn  
Features Editor

In the board game “Jenga,” players try to remove sections of an assembled tower ... without sending the structure crashing to the floor. Those who keep their towers standing can win.

Creighton’s Isabelle Cherney, Ph.D., likens good leadership to this board game: shaping and adapting the organization in ways to improve it — without damaging, and, even better, while enhancing, the whole.

Cherney, professor of psychology and director of the Honors Program at Creighton, is also director of the new Interdisciplinary Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) Program in Leadership, which debuted at Creighton this spring.

Cherney is enthusiastic about the new degree and the students it is attracting. And she believes the new doctorate not only will be a good fit with Creighton’s mission, but that it also will break new ground in the field of leadership training.

Probably the program’s greatest strength and, indeed, its distinctiveness, Cherney says, is its tie to the Jesuit mission: preparing graduates to lead wisely for the greater good.

“True leaders do more than just help an organization become successful,” the program overview reads. “They institute and lead changes that benefit society.” Cherney heartily concurs.

It’s a program that she and a team of colleagues have been putting together for the past two years.

Pulling together Creighton faculty and an array of national standouts from the fields of arts and sciences, business, pharmacy and health professions, medicine and law, the new doctorate

has been designed to be strongly interdisciplinary in its teaching of leadership.

And that, Cherney believes, is another strength of the program: Its interdisciplinary nature encourages a broadened, socially aware perspective across the curriculum. In a globalized society facing financial, environmental, and social hardships, farsighted and ethical leaders devise strategies for growth and change that merge with goals for the common good.

Graduates of the new doctoral program have open to them many possibilities across the broad fields of education, business and health care, Cherney points out.

“The Interdisciplinary Ed.D. Program in Leadership was specifically developed as a diverse, generalist degree that can be applied to any occupation. The possibilities are endless,” Cherney says.

In education, for instance, opportunities include but are not limited to careers as school principals or superintendents, deans or vice presidents; in business, directors of human resources, or program managers; in health care, directors of clinical education or clinical residency





programs, department chairs, or program directors.

Covering 60 credit hours, the program is reaching out to an array of people who are “learning from each other,” Cherney adds.

Almost exclusively online (students will come to campus to meet in the summer and again at the close of the program), the new doctorate will allow students to solve problems not only within their own organizations, but outside of their areas of expertise.

“For example,” Cherney says, “if I’m an educator, I’ll have to work with the health care or business part of

Isabelle Cherney, Ph.D., left, is the director of the new Interdisciplinary Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) Program in Leadership.

## Students Come from Varied Backgrounds

Two are assistant principals in middle schools, one in Baltimore, another in Springfield, Ohio.

One is a Jesuit priest from India whose work among the tribal people of the Himalayas will draw him back when his studies are complete.

Still another is head of school at a large Omaha Catholic high school for girls.

Another is creating a forum for dialogue on the issues of privilege and race that are prevalent in her Virginia community.

They all have thrown their hats into the ring of the new Interdisciplinary Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) Program in Leadership that opened this spring at Creighton.

And whether they hail from down the street, across the country or halfway around the world, all are joined together in the camaraderie that comes with good teaching, openness to learning and the

advantages of going to school online.

“I really do feel connected with the Creighton community, even though I am miles away in York, Pa.,” says Denise Butts.

An assistant principal at an alternative middle/high school in Baltimore, Butts has more than eight years of school leadership experience.

But her teaching career began back in 1993 with the Teach For America AmeriCorps program. Her special area of concern? Urban youth and developing curricula for at-risk young people.

“There are very few administrators and teachers at the K-12 level with a doctorate,” Butts says. “My goal is to set myself apart and become more marketable as a school leader.”

Meanwhile, Susan Toohey is practically down the street from Creighton, yet she credits the leadership program’s flexibility as a major bonus for her.

As head of school at Marian High School, with its more than 700 students, Toohey has to work with flexible options in order to add things to her already packed schedule.

She says her choice of the Creighton program is three-fold:

“One, I love school and learning and have always wanted to work for my doctorate.

“Two, I have never been educated in the Jesuit tradition, and that was a draw for me.

“Finally, the flexibility of the program was a real draw,” she says.

She also says Creighton’s personal attention to students sealed the deal. “I feel connected to the professors and the students — in no small part due to Dr. Cherney!”

Meanwhile, in Ohio, Milton Folson, an assistant principal at a middle school, is responsible for student discipline, conducting staff evaluations, organizing professional development, and leading the day-to-day operations of the building.

In other words, day in and day out, Folson is in the “real world.”

He says he liked the Creighton program because he could “put educational theories to work in the real world” right away.

He also says he was after the doctor of education rather than the doctor of philosophy degree.

“The flexibility an Ed.D. provides,” he believes will “open opportunities at

my organization.”

This is the practicum portion of the program, Cherney explains. “We want the students to reach out of their comfort zones and their backgrounds to work on something that needs changing” for the better.

The leadership program is divided into eight-week modules online. The first seven modules are in sequence, followed by a more open schedule.

From the beginning, students are in touch with each other online, but they’ve also scrutinized themselves.

The first course, Cherney explains, involves finding one’s own strengths. Leaders must know themselves before leading others, she believes.

Only then do you learn how others work best, and that’s where the second

course, Applied Ethics, comes in.

Cherney believes these first two courses already show the indelible stamp of a Jesuit education. “They are reflective and self-scrutinizing, which is very much a part of the Jesuit tradition.”

Because the degree is online, students will be working while they’re taking the courses. This means that their day-to-day experience is also a laboratory to put into practice what they’re learning at Creighton.

Which begs the question: Is a person a born leader or is leadership essentially learned?

Cherney would opt for the latter, and believes that the times are ripe for good leaders.

Today, a successful leader, she asserts, must understand the different social

backgrounds that come together in a given organization.

She also believes that good leaders today must work with limited financial resources and be able to prioritize the lists of needs within strained budgets.

They must also make good employment decisions and understand how new technology can change social relationships at work.

Legal issues and new regulations from government, including those in health care, also are affecting the workplace today, says Cherney, and shaping the decisions leaders make.

For more information on the new Interdisciplinary Doctorate in Education (Ed.D.) Program in Leadership, visit [creighton-online.com](http://creighton-online.com) or call 866.717.6365 to speak with an admissions representative.

the K-12 level, as well as post-secondary (two-year and four-year college) levels.”

Folson was also attracted to the interdisciplinary features of the Creighton program, features that might “open doors in the private sector, specifically in the area of professional development.”

Another student is the Rev. Anand Pereira, MS’10, a Jesuit priest from India.

A graduate of Creighton’s master’s degree program in counseling, Fr. Pereira is an associate pastor at St. Mary Magdalene Church in downtown Omaha and chaplain for both the Magis teachers in Creighton’s education department and the students at Kiewit Residence Hall.

But the work he will return to — among the tribal people in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains in northeast India — is at the heart of his decision to enroll in the doctorate.

In particular, Fr. Pereira is fascinated — and troubled — by the disconnect between the educated people in his part of India and the plight of the region’s poor.

“From what I have seen, despite the effort of the government of India to provide free and compulsory education up to the age of 14, many are unable

to benefit from this opportunity. As importantly, many of those who have access to a good education utilize it to accumulate wealth by depriving the poor of their rightful share.

“As an educator, I am confused by this paradox. As a Jesuit it pains me. How

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**“Creighton University’s philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of social justice and incorporates a spiritual approach, closely matches my personal philosophy.”**

**– Elisabeth Nichols**

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is it that the educated, who should be the more enlightened, are in fact the oppressors?

“My dream therefore, is to gradually effect a change in the education system in India. I am aware that this is a

gigantic task and, so, would like to begin in a small way by becoming a school administrator who can motivate teachers to imbibe values and transmit them to their students. I hope some day that, along with my colleagues, I will be able to prepare students to become agents of social change.”

Elisabeth Nichols of Virginia is motivated by the same kind of hope.

While drawn to the “interdisciplinary approach and the well-rounded and interesting course schedule,” Nichols says her attraction to the program is more personal.

“Creighton University’s philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of social justice and incorporates a spiritual approach, closely matches my personal philosophy.”

And she looks to Creighton for an educational foundation that will improve her ability to affect social justice issues.

“The Doctor in Educational Leadership program will allow me to reach my goal of creating a forum for dialogue concerning issues of privilege and race that are prevalent in my community.”