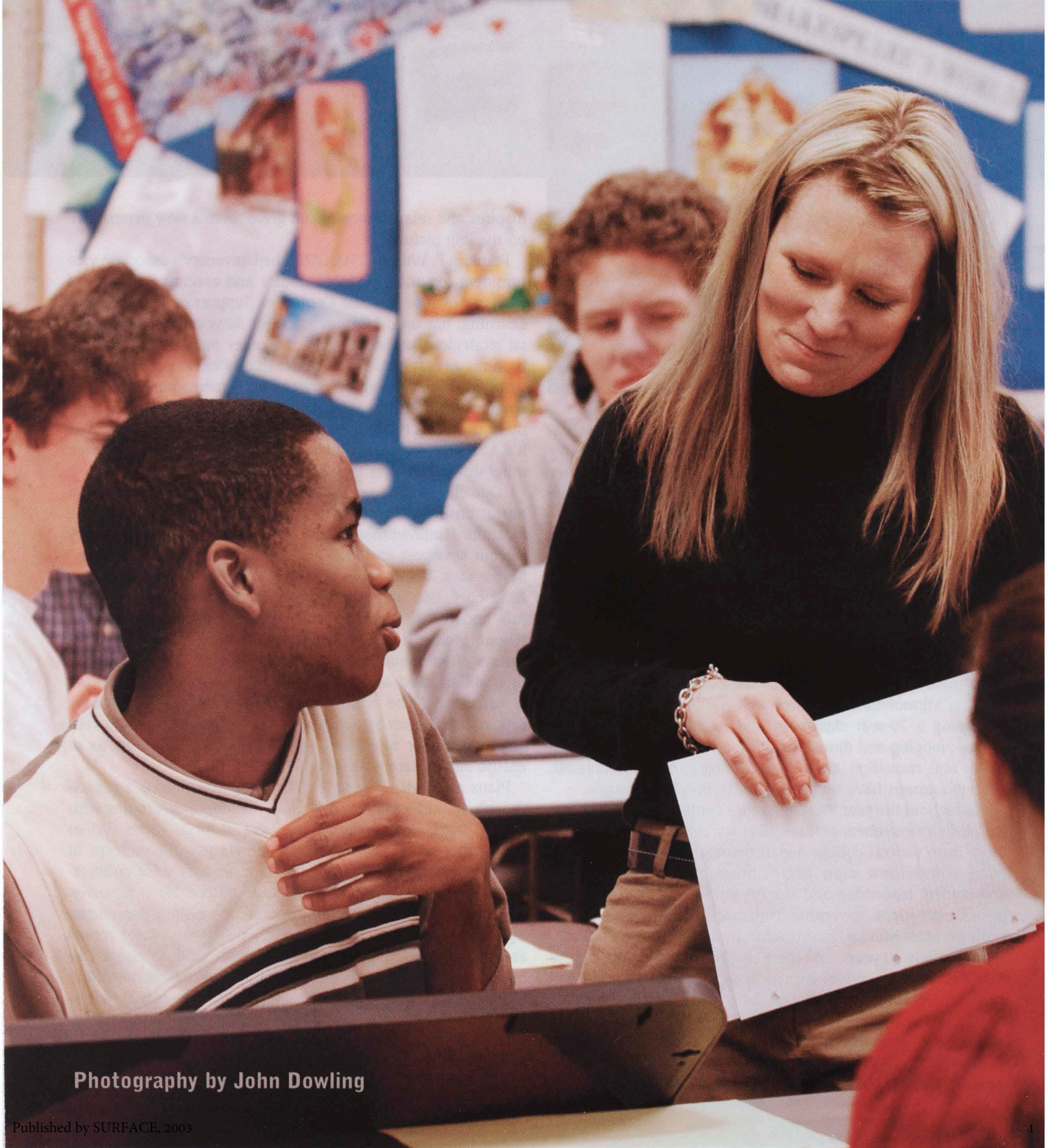


# SHARPENING Young Minds



Photography by John Dowling

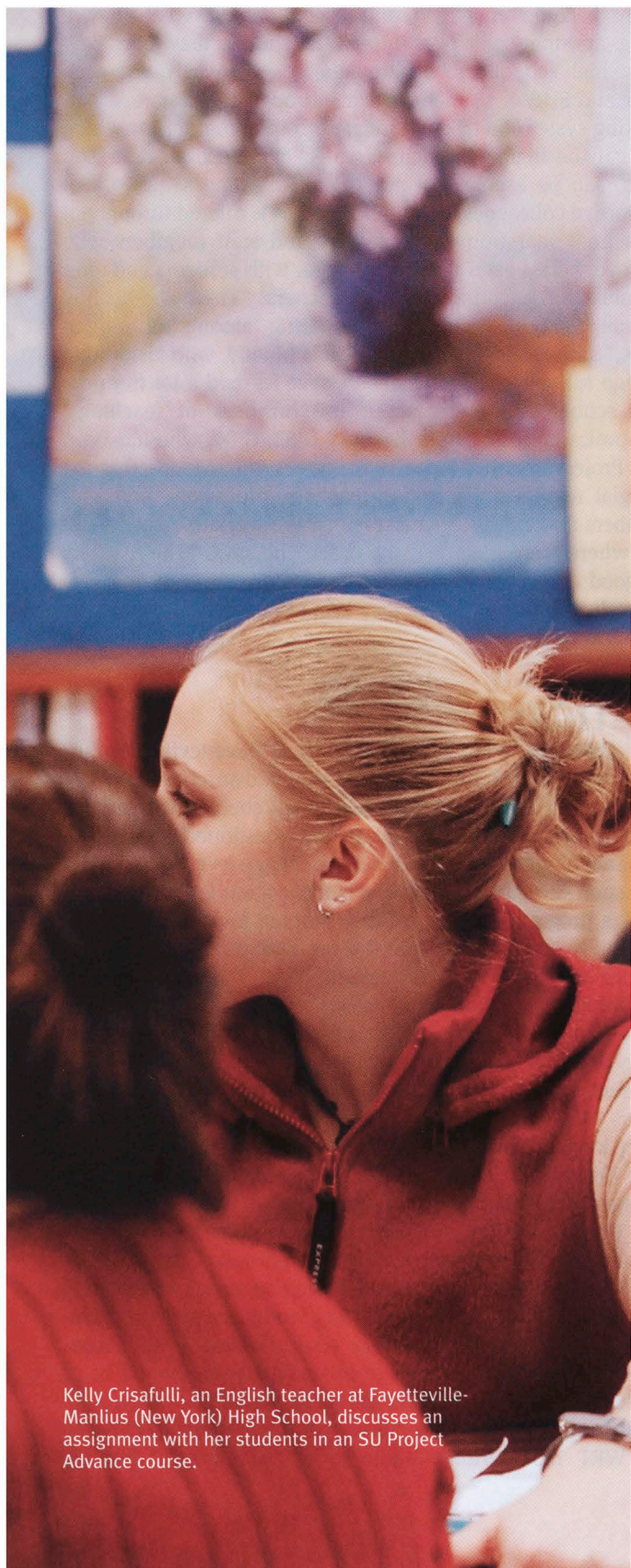
## PROJECT ADVANCE serves as a national model for cooperative education between high schools and colleges—and rescues students from slumping into ‘senioritis’

By **CHRISTINE YACKEL**

The ailment known as “senioritis” afflicts adolescents just as they are about to begin their final year of high school. Also called “senior slump,” this condition usually hits after all graduation requirements have been met and college admission is assured. Figuring that their high school careers are over, many students feel entitled to relax, party, and engage in all forms of frivolous activity throughout their senior year. But the mind is like a muscle, and a year of senseless diversions can turn a young mind to mush. Fortunately, there is a cure for senioritis in the form of Syracuse University’s Project Advance (SUPA), a program that offers credit-bearing college courses to high school seniors. “If young people don’t use their brains for almost a year, they get out of practice, and it’s hard for them to get back into the academic swing of things once they get to college,” says Margaret Bonesteel, associate director of SUPA. “By moving college courses into high schools to keep seniors challenged and involved throughout the school year, Project Advance helps bridge the gap between high school and college.”

Project Advance began to take shape in 1972 when representatives from seven Syracuse-area high schools asked the University to explore the possibility of developing a program offering college courses to qualified high school seniors. This idea struck a chord with then-Vice Chancellor John Prucha, who had raised 10 children and was well aware of the “disconnect” between high school and college. “John mixed and mingled with a lot of adolescents and knew how easy it is for young people to fall into bad study habits and waste time during their senior year of high school,” says Franklin P. Wilbur G’70, G’76, associate vice president for undergraduate studies and executive director of Project Advance and the Center for Support of Teaching and Learning. “With that in mind, we created Project Advance as a way to strengthen study skills, increase self-confidence, and provide a sense of direction.”

After soliciting campus and community input, Project Advance was conceptualized by Robert Diamond, former director of the Center for Instructional Development (now the Center for Support of Teaching and Learning). In 1973, SU partnered with local high schools to pilot the project as a non-profit concurrent enrollment program created to train high school instructors to teach college-level courses. Initially, only gateway courses in English, writing, and social science were offered. Today, college-level courses in 15 subject areas are taught by more than 400 teachers. In addition to the gateway topics, SUPA includes courses in biology, calculus, chemistry, computer engineering, economics, French, information studies, public affairs, psychology, religion, Spanish, and forensic science. Some of the courses offered through SUPA, such as forensic science and computer engineering, are unique to



Kelly Crisafulli, an English teacher at Fayetteville-Manlius (New York) High School, discusses an assignment with her students in an SU Project Advance course.

Syracuse University. “Project Advance remains lively and vital because we are always looking to improve our course offerings,” says Wilbur, who has been with the project since its inception. “Our high school teachers and faculty members work together regularly on refreshing courses to reflect best practices, topical updates, and philosophical changes. Collective wisdom results in better courses.”

From the start, Project Advance grew rapidly by word of mouth as teachers changed jobs and moved to other schools throughout the Northeast. Now in its 30th year, SUPA serves more than 4,000 students annually in 120 high schools in New York, New Jersey, Maine, Massachusetts, and Michigan. “This was such a crazy and radical idea that no one thought the project would last more than five years,” says Gerald Edmonds, director of Project Advance since 2002. “Could high school teachers teach college-level courses? It seems so natural now.”

## BEST PRACTICES

To qualify as a SUPA instructor, a high school teacher must have a master’s degree or equivalent experience in the subject area, at least five years of successful teaching experience, and be recommended by the school’s principal and department



SU English professor Patricia Moody talks with a Fayetteville-Manlius (New York) High School student during a Project Advance site visit.

chairperson. Depending on the subject area, the teachers attend a one- or two-week summer institute on campus (for a modest fee) to prepare them to teach regular freshman courses offered by the College of Arts and Sciences and the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science. Workshop sessions, taught by SU faculty members, emphasize the adaptation of campus-designed courses to the high schools’ smaller class sizes, longer semesters, and more frequent class meetings. Participants may earn graduate credit and receive certification as SU adjunct faculty after completing the summer institute and, in some cases, submitting a course adaptation plan for approval. “The workshop sessions are intense,” says Bonesteel, who administers the English program in all five states where SU courses are offered. “Participants wear three hats—student, teacher, and curriculum developer.”

SUPA teachers must also attend fall and spring training seminars on campus and may pursue additional professional development opportunities at advanced topic weekend retreats. At these gatherings, participants discuss the latest works of writers, theorists, and scientists who are experts in their disciplines and skilled in the art and science of teaching. “These are the few times during the school year when teachers can spend a whole day talking with other teachers about content-specific curricula and new research,” Edmonds says. “They become energized and excited about what they’re doing, and that spills over into all the courses they teach.”

The high school teachers are linked electronically with each other and SUPA’s 13-member staff through DocuShare, a networking system that Xerox donated to the program. Anything that can be digitized, such as video clips, charts, or lesson plans, can be exchanged and shared, creating a network of supportive colleagues. Academic support is offered throughout the school year from SUPA faculty and staff members who visit every class each semester to meet with students and offer guidance and encouragement to teachers. “There is a healthy amount of professional advice-sharing among all participants,” says English professor Patricia Moody, who visits 10 to 15 high schools each semester. “I have learned a lot from my high school colleagues about the business of teaching.” Economics professor Jerry Evensky G’82, G’84, who has been with Project Advance since 1988, agrees with Moody that the collegial relationships among teachers, professors, and staff members make SUPA so successful. “We work to create a culture where there is no pecking order,” he says. “The teachers are good educators and good people. Once they get the core curriculum concepts down, they bring their own sparkle to the class and own it.”

## CRITICAL THINKING

Kelly Crisafulli was teaching English at Fayetteville-Manlius (New York) High School when the school district asked her to participate in Project Advance. Although she had six years of teaching experience, Crisafulli at first questioned her worthiness and felt nervous about teaching college-level courses. Her fears soon vanished, however, when she attended the summer training program at SU. “I was welcomed into an intellectual and family environment that put me right at ease,” she says. “Before long I was saying to myself, ‘Sure, I can do this!’”

Crisafulli brings that same “can-do” spirit into the classroom, where she helps young minds stretch to a higher intellectual plane. She says that at the beginning of the school year, many of her students—who are considered the “cream of the crop”—think: “What can you teach me that I don’t already know?” Before long her students discover that they must read and think more deeply, work at an accelerated pace, and learn how to manage a workload similar to one they will experience in college. One of her students, Bem Atim, learned through SUPA how to write research papers and create portfolios. “My ETS 141 class [Reading and Interpretation: From Language to Discourse] gave me a broad view of the literary world and solid preparation for any English class I may take in college,” Atim says. “Now that I’ve been exposed to college material, I won’t be in absolute shock when I attend college in the fall.”

Atim says some of the required reading material in ETS 141 and WRT 105 (Writing Studio I) is “very dense,” but his

teacher helped break it down. “I remember one reading assignment, an essay called ‘The Death of the Author,’ which focused on the relationship between the reader and the writer,” he says. “To add levity to this serious subject, Mrs. Crisafulli outlined the shape of a dead body on our classroom floor with red duct tape.” For another assignment, students were asked to bring in a print advertisement or artwork. Working in groups, the students then analyzed and interpreted how they were affected by the images. “Through this activity we became familiar with the terminology of semiotics [the interpretation of signs] and how systems of relationships are constructed,” says Minerva “Minnie” Muzquiz, who took Crisafulli’s ETS 141 class. “It’s a great feeling to know I have already completed college-level work and have a clear understanding of what is expected of me in a college setting. I know my transition to college will be smooth.”

SU student Jessica Blank ’05, a television-radio-film major in Newhouse, took SU courses in English and Spanish during her senior year at W.T. Clark High School in Westbury, New York. She thought she would be bored in regular classes and wanted to do more critical thinking within the comfort zone of working with her high school teachers and classmates. Blank found herself engaged by both of the yearlong SUPA classes. “I wanted the challenge of the courses and wasn’t really aware of the college credits,” she says. “But I entered college with a 3.8 grade point average and transferred 12 credits toward my SU degree. My parents obviously thought it was worth the money to start me off on the right foot.”

Tuition for courses offered through SUPA is less than 12 percent of what similar courses cost on campus. Earned credits are transferable to most colleges in the country, giving students the option to accelerate their programs of study, reduce graduation requirements, or take additional courses toward major or minor areas of concentration. In fact, a recent study shows that 92 percent of Project Advance students receive full credit for their concurrent enrollment courses. U.S. Air Force Major Dan Marticello, who graduated from Central Square (New York) High School, says his SU courses in digital logic design helped him get into the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado, where he pursued an electrical engineering degree. Today he is a flight test engineer at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. “By the time I arrived at the academy, I had already taken Boolean algebra, computer programming, and computer language courses,” Marticello says. “My SUPA experience laid the foundation for a good performance at the academy, eased my apprehension about college, and built my confidence. It gave me an edge.”

## TIRELESS ADVOCATES

Wilbur and Edmonds know they must keep SUPA at a manageable size; with too much expansion it could fall victim to its own success. Bigger is not always better, and if expenses continue to increase and budgets shrink, the program risks

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compromising its commitment to high-quality standards and affordable tuition, especially for students from underrepresented populations. “Syracuse does not have an unlimited capacity to offer concurrent courses,” Wilbur says. “Growth is not our goal. Our focus is on continuously improving quality and promoting Project Advance as a model to help other universities establish similar programs.”

The SUPA team collaborates with peer institutions to help the concurrent enrollment movement expand in quality and quantity. For instance, Project Advance has served as a model for similar programs at such institutions as Indiana University, the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, the University of Pittsburgh, the University of Wisconsin, and as far away as Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan. Under Syracuse University’s leadership, the National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships was formed to establish national standards by offering peer reviews and accreditation for programs throughout the country. Syracuse’s program will be among the first to be reviewed for certification. “We want to encourage the movement to grow by establishing a national and international concurrent enrollment research center here at Syracuse,” Wilbur says.

In recognition of Syracuse University’s leadership role, Project Advance has received awards from the National Commission on Excellence in Education, the National Institute of Education, the American Association of Higher Education, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. And in honor of SUPA’s 30th anniversary, a resolution from the New York State Legislature recognized the program for being “heralded by prominent educators and national organizations as one of the most successful models for high school-college cooperative programming in the country.”

Over the past 30 years, Syracuse University’s Project Advance has touched the lives of more than 100,000 high school students and contributed to the development of the concurrent enrollment movement more than any other institution. Looking toward the future, the high school teachers, college professors, and staff members who have made Project Advance such a success for so many years will continue to serve as role models and advocates for similar cooperative education programs around the world. Patricia Moody speaks for many of her colleagues when she says, “Project Advance is my love and my passion—it’s like a religious conviction.”