

# *THE Current*

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## **Melvyn Semmel of Gevirtz Graduate School of Education At UCSB Is Awarded Distinguished Emeriti Professorship**

Melvyn Semmel of UC Santa Barbara's Gevirtz Graduate School of Education has been awarded the prestigious Edward A. Dickson Emeriti Professorship for 2008-09.

Semmel and his wife, Dorothy Semmel, also an emeritus faculty member, founded the school's special education program in 1978. The 2008-09 academic year marks the 30th anniversary of this doctoral research and teacher education program, which is now called the Special Education, Disabilities, and Risk Studies Program.

The Dickson professorship provides \$10,000 in funding for research-related activities. During the award period, Semmel plans to conduct special doctoral research seminars for Gevirtz School students and continue his collaborative international research at Tel Aviv University and in Jerusalem. He will also assist the Department of Education chair and faculty colleagues in planning the 30th anniversary celebration of the special education program.

"The Dickson Emeriti Professorship will permit me to complete collaborative research abroad, work with doctoral students on campus, and play a leadership role in the celebration of the 30th anniversary of the founding of special education at UCSB,"

Semmel says. "It is significant to observe that Professor Michael Gerber – who was one of the first faculty members invited to join the new program in the School of Education – is now the chair of the Department of Education. His leadership appointment, when coupled with my Dickson award, reiterates the acceptance of special education as an academic discipline on this campus."

Semmel's career spans the modern history of special education. He built research centers on language and disabilities at the University of Michigan and on technology and disabilities at Indiana University before coming to UCSB, where he created another highly productive research center (now the Center for Advanced Studies of Individual Differences). Since retiring in 1994, Semmel has continued to be active in national and international policy research and publication related to individual differences among school children. He was psycho-educational consultant and keynote speaker for the Japanese National Institute of Special Education and keynote speaker for the 17th annual UNESCO seminar of The Asia and Pacific Program of Educational Innovation for Development (1997).

He was an invited scholar at the Symposium on Developmental Disabilities, Humbolt University, Berlin, Germany (1996) and served as program chair, in collaboration with Charles University, for the Prague International Conference on Human Rights for Persons with Mental Handicaps (1997). Semmel also was an invited member of the provost evaluation review committee, University of Massachusetts Boston (1996).

In addition, he served as senior faculty tenure reviewer at Tel Aviv University, Israel (2007) and is currently a member of the international scientific advisory committee for Shalva, a prominent educational program in Jerusalem for children with disabilities.

Semmel continues to mentor doctoral and postdoctoral scholars. He presents colloquia and lectures at major universities and other venues. Since his retirement, he has co-authored more than 18 journal articles and book chapters. In 1995, he received the Lifetime Achievement Award for Research in Special Education from the American Educational Research Association. He is also the recipient of the 2007 Distinguished Alumnus Award from George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.

"Professor Semmel has had and continues to have a tremendous influence on the field of special education," says Jane Close Conoley, dean of the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education. "The Gevirtz School is honored that he will return for doctoral

research seminars and delighted that our current students will have the great advantage of learning with him."

The Dickson Emeriti Professorship is named in honor of Edward Dickson, who served as a regent of the University of California from 1913-1946. His vision is credited with helping to make the Los Angeles campus a reality. The Dickson Emeriti Professorships, which exist at each of the UC campuses, were established by a philanthropic gift from Dickson, the longest-serving UC Regent.

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## **About UC Santa Barbara**

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.