



News Release

Tuesday, January 24, 2012

Last modified: Tuesday, January 24, 2012

Printing, cursive, keyboarding: What's the difference when it comes to learning?

IU neuroscientist Karin Harman James to discuss research with Indiana senators

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan. 24, 2012

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. -- Indiana University neuroscientist Karin Harman James is involved at both a state and national level this week in raising awareness about the role of handwriting in the learning process. Interest in her research in this area has gained attention as states and schools nationwide debate whether handwriting instruction, particularly cursive, still fits within the curriculum.

On Wednesday, Jan. 25, James is scheduled to testify before the Indiana Senate Committee on Education and Career Development regarding Senate Bill 83, which would require public school corporations to include cursive handwriting instruction in their curricula. On Monday, Jan. 23, she participated in a national summit in Washington, D.C., called to examine the issue of handwriting and the learning process. The first-such meeting, "Handwriting in the 21st Century? An Educational Summit," involved educators and researchers from across the country and was held in response to the growing debate.

On Wednesday, James will give a brief presentation about her research, which used brain imaging technology to document how significant changes in the brain occur depending on whether preschool-age children learn letters by printing or typing. The findings point to the formation of a literary system used for reading -- that is, when letters are printed.

"These kinds of findings point to there being something really important about printing and potentially also about cursive," said James, associate professor in the Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences. "These are both fine motor skills, so they might be equally important in understanding cognitive development in children."

Her preliminary research involving cursive writing found that college students remembered information better one week later when they transcribed a paragraph in cursive, compared to printing it or using a keyboard.

She is quick to note, however, that scientists have not determined the benefits of teaching or not teaching cursive. This was a key part of Monday's summit, the understanding that more research is needed before

the impact of teaching or not teaching cursive can be determined.

"Once we find the impact, then we can make a contribution to educational decisions about what will happen in the school systems," James said.

The summit was sponsored by Zaner-Bloser, a publisher of educational materials, in partnership with the American Association of School Administrators.

James can be reached at 812-856-0659 and khjames@indiana.edu. The Department of Psychological and Brain Sciences is in the College of Arts and Sciences.

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IU News Room

530 E. Kirkwood Ave., Suite 201

Bloomington, IN 47408-4003

Email: iuinfo@indiana.edu

Web: <http://newsinfo.iu.edu>

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