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**For Immediate Release**

## Governors State University professor receives grant to research multicultural literature

University Park, February 4, 2005 – Governors State University professor Nina Nilsson has received a grant to research the teaching of multicultural literature to schoolchildren in grades K to 12.

The grant, titled "A Framework for the Study of African American Literature," is funded by the Illinois Association for Teacher Education (IATE).

The research will target African American literature.

"It's an exciting opportunity," Nilsson said. "Research clearly shows that children who may lag behind other students in reading rebound significantly when they read books that are contextually familiar to them."

Nilsson, who has a Ph.D. in reading, said that makes this kind of research critical.

"If we can get kids reading well when they're young, we've given them the most important tool for future academic success," Nilsson explained. "The effective teaching of multicultural literature makes that happen."

Nilsson's work will update a 2001 framework designed for teaching multicultural literature.

The framework is a five phase process that begins with the introduction of books that are built on oral traditions.

"These books include folktales, fables, myths, and legends," Nilsson said. She explained these types of stories allow children to pick up on a culture's values.

The second phase incorporates traditional tales from one or more specific regions. The third phase introduces historical biography and other non-fiction. Phase four adds historical fiction, and phase five contemporary fiction, biography, and poetry.

"Once students progress through the framework, they gain a solid understanding of the culture and an appreciation of its contributions," Nilsson said. "But, more important, in the final analysis, the approach teaches reading in a way that helps more students read and read well."

Nilsson explained there are obstacles to this kind of teaching and framework.

"Multicultural books tend to be printed by small firms," she said. "So they often go out of print quickly."

Part of Nilsson's goal is to identify and use award-winning literature that stays in print longer. She is also assembling newer, multicultural multimedia, including online books.

Books and multimedia materials purchased with grant funds will be displayed at an IATE conference in fall 2005.

Afterwards, the materials will be donated to The Literacy Zone, a reading clinic sponsored by GSU's Master of Arts in Reading program. There, the books and materials will be used for tutorial instruction with children who struggle with reading.

Ultimately, the research will be used by teachers in the classroom as an up-to-date process of teaching multicultural literatures.

Nilsson has already updated the framework with award-winning Latino/a literature. Longer term, she hopes to expand her research to include Asian and Native American literatures.