Christine Ashby appointed Director of the School of Education’s Institute on Communication and Inclusion

June 20, 2012

School of Education Dean Douglas Biklen has announced the appointment of Professor Christine Ashby as Director of the Institute on Communication and Inclusion (ICI), effective July 1, 2012. The ICI, formerly the Facilitated Communication Institute, conducts research, training and dissemination of information on communication strategies for individuals with disabilities who are non-speaking or who have limited speech. All of its work focuses on enhancing participation of people with disabilities in inclusive school and community settings.

Ashby has served as the ICI’s Director of Research from 2009 to 2012. In 2011 she was the principal organizer of a scientific and methods conference on facilitated communication sponsored by the Nancy Lurie Marks Family Foundation and the John P. Hussman Foundation, held at the M.I.T. Media Lab in Cambridge, MA.

In announcing Ashby’s appointment, Dean Biklen says, “Professor Ashby brings enormous talent as an educator and researcher to the leading international center focusing on strategies of communication and participation for people with autism and related developmental disabilities. She is widely known for her ground-breaking research and has exceptional administrative talents. The field is fortunate to have her in this new leadership role.”

Ashby’s research challenges traditional conceptions of intellectual disabilities and underscores the importance of considering the voice of individuals with significant disabilities. Her research has appeared in numerous scholarly journals, including the International Journal of Inclusive Education, Disability and Society, Teacher Education and Special Education, Equity and Excellence in Education and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. In addition, she is well known for her educational consultations with school districts and families on topics of inclusive education reform, supports for students with autism, access to general education, and facilitated communication.

The work of the Institute on Communication and Inclusion, and previously, the Facilitated Communication Institute, has been featured nationally in publications such as the New York Times, Time Magazine, People, and Newsweek, academic journals in education, communication and disability studies, as well as on numerous television shows. Faculty and staff at the Institute have collaborated on documentary films about their work, including the recent documentary Wretches and Jabberers (2010) and the 2004 Academy-Award nominated documentary Autism Is A World.

The Institute was founded by Biklen in 1992 at the School of Education and has since served as director. He will continue to participate in the ICI’s work as a senior researcher.