Financial Education
Making an Impact
To assure a secure financial future, it is critical that young adults develop the skills necessary to effectively manage their finances. For the past five years, the University of Illinois Center for Economic and Financial Education (CEFE), in direct partnership with U of I Extension, has offered a series of statewide financial education training conferences.

Last fall, 80 educators from throughout Illinois gathered in Bloomington to receive hands-on training related to the current financial crisis. These educators received curriculum resources and training on numerous activities, including online games and simulations to use with their students and clients. In addition, guest speakers from the financial industry discussed the recent fiscal crisis and key economic and financial issues facing U.S. consumers.

Program participants included K-12 teachers and financial education providers who work with youth and limited-resource audiences.

As a result of this training, it is estimated that participants will reach 24,000 youth in Illinois this year alone!

Funding was provided by the National Council on Economic Education, Citi Foundation, and Illinois CIBER (Center for International Business Education and Research). For more information about upcoming events and educational resources, visit CEFE’s new website at http://financialed.ace.uiuc.edu.

Saving and Investing in Turbulent Times
Dow falls. Dow rebounds. Dow hits record lows. The volatile stock market has people asking, “What should I do with my money?”

In response, a statewide teleconference program, Saving and Investing in Turbulent Times, reached out to Illinois consumers in over 30 counties to provide timely, research-based information about investing. A panel of fiscal and banking experts helped consumers of all ages understand how to minimize their long-term investment risks.

Between 59% and 69% of participants completing the evaluation said they are:
- better able to manage their investments in a turbulent market,
- more aware of how diversification can help meet goals,
- more able to avoid investment fraud,
- more confident in their ability to choose a financial professional, and
- have a better understanding of asset allocation.

This seminar was offered as part of the Getting Through Tough Financial Times initiative—www.ToughTimes.illinois.edu.

4-H Great Debate Amplifies Speaking Skills
While many teens were “sleeping in” on a recent Saturday morning, 49 high school 4-Hers were already debating bills on the floor of the Illinois House of Representatives as part of The Great 4-H Debate.

This two-day conference provided teens from 22 Illinois counties the opportunity to participate in training, to practice debating and persuasive speaking, and to gain a better understanding of legislators’ roles and responsibilities.

As a result of this experience, participants reported changes in both attitudes and career plans, reinforced by responses like:
- “I have a better understanding of what goes on in the House of Representatives and have a new confidence in public speaking.”
- “I will be more outgoing and maybe pursue a career in government.”
- “I will consider both (sides of) arguments before stating my opinion.”
- “I will be more informed and enthused to learn about political issues.”

Participants reported an improvement in debate skills (83%), the ability to communicate (76%), confidence at making friends (73%), understanding the legislative process (70%), decision making skills (68%), and leadership development (65%).

Visit http://web.extension.uiuc.edu/mclean/greatdebate.
**Jr. Master Gardener Reaps Benefits**

When Joshua Greene, a 13-year-old from Jefferson County, became involved in the Jr. Master Gardener (JMG) program, he expected to learn about gardening and the environment. However, as a result of his keen interest, the Bluford teen won the National JMG Youth Excellence Award for his exceptional community service. This competitive award was given to only one individual from the 37 states and Canada who completed applications.

Greene’s leadership skills were enhanced when he was also selected to be a presenter at the Midwestern Herb and Garden Show teaching classes on vermicomposting and container gardening to both adult and youth audiences.

While serving as a bee spotter for the University of Illinois, Greene identified a bee uncommon to Illinois and helped the university collect data on bumble bee pollinators crucial to plant survival.

Greene also worked with his JMG group to design a Spooky Garden Walk, providing local pre-school children with a safe, non-scary Halloween activity.

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**Male Forum Offers a Healthy Foundation**

University of Illinois Extension’s Urban Leadership Center partnered with healthcare professionals and community leaders to form the Male Forum Committee to address health issues plaguing a vulnerable segment of the community.

The committee’s purpose is to inform medically underserved communities about health issues and preventive measures. Chicago Department of Public Health Commissioner Dr. Terry Mason serves as the honorary committee chairperson.

Since its inception in 2004, over 4,500 residents have participated in seminars highlighting prostate awareness, diabetes, nutrition, sexual dysfunction, and other topics. Surveys indicate that 93% of participants now have annual prostate screenings as a direct result of involvement with the Male Forum. Also, a growing number of participants now include exercise in their daily routine and many have changed their eating habits.

Participants continue to benefit from a broad continuum of research-based information provided by University of Illinois Extension.

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**Inmates Develop Work Place Skills**

Kane County Master Gardeners recently won the 2009 International Search for Excellence Award for their inmate garden mentoring project. For several years, Extension Master Gardeners and the Kane County Sheriff’s Department have partnered to mentor female inmates in building not only their food production abilities, but their work place skills and self-esteem as well.

Weekly lessons focusing on the “what, how, and why” of good gardening, combined with a real garden to plant and hands-on mentoring sessions, made this project a success. During the summer, 45 inmates work in the garden every day, learning new skills, nurturing plants, and gaining self-confidence.

When the inmates were asked to state one thing they learned about themselves working in the garden, the responses included: “Having a job is fulfilling,” “I learned I can work well with others,” and “That a job is not just for money, it is for building confidence.”

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**STEM Team Develops Teacher Skills**

The Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Team provides unique teacher training workshops in math and science that meet the Illinois Math and Science Standards requirements. Teachers can obtain Continuing Professional Development Units (CPDUs) while learning through inquiry-based, interactive, hands-on instructional and laboratory activities that provide a wide range of practical materials for classroom use.

Training programs delivered to over 400 K-8th grade teachers, as well as a combined teacher/student professional development program throughout Cook County reached over 7600 students. Participating teachers have had great things to say about the workshops, including: “It is nice to be in a seminar that gives you lessons/activities that a teacher can actually use!”, “Listening to suggestions from other teachers is also beneficial,” and “I enjoyed the activities and will implement these during ISAT.”