



University of Missouri

MIZZOU

The magazine of
the Mizzou Alumni Association

[Home](#) » [Fall 2011](#) » [Around the Columns](#) » Staying connected

Around the Columns

Staying connected

When Kristin Lierheimer finishes her doctorate at the College of Education in 2011, she will have completed a rare trifecta: bachelor's, master's and doctorate all earned at Mizzou. But even more unusual is the opportunity to attend college with her eldest child, Anna Neal. Neal is one semester shy of a bachelor of arts, and although she plans on transferring to a different university to finish a degree in Japanese, mother and daughter have been able to share some quality time on campus.

"We're waiting to see where I'm going after I graduate," says Lierheimer, a single mother whose 17-year-old daughter, Elsa Neal, is also shopping for colleges. "It's not necessary for us to all be at the same place. But as a mom, it would be nice."

Wherever her career takes her, Lierheimer will continue to work with children with autism and conduct research to help them. As a teacher with Columbia Public Schools and local private schools, she noticed the scarcity of autism data early in her career.

"In my second year of teaching middle school, I had my first student with high-functioning autism. I had no idea what it was, and there wasn't much information out there," Lierheimer says.

Now she works with several programs that focus on social competency, including [iSocial](#), an immersive 3-D learning program created by Janine Stichter, professor of education, and Jim






Laffey, professor of information science and learning technologies. The program helps students with autism strengthen social skills by interacting with instructors and other students over the Internet.

One of Lierheimer's research topics focuses on facial expression recognition. Children with autism often struggle to identify and respond to facial expressions, and that can result in many social and educational challenges. "I'd like to develop an application so students could use an iPhone or iPad to look at facial expressions and manipulate them with the touch of a finger," Lierheimer says.

Raising two daughters has provided insight into how today's young people stay plugged in.

"My children and the children I work with have never not known about technology," Lierheimer says. "It's a huge part of receiving an appropriate education, and if students aren't able to use it, they are really limited."

[More 2011 Around the Columns »](#)

 [Follow us on Twitter](#)  [Join us on Facebook](#)  [Subscribe to our feed](#)

Published by MIZZOU magazine, 109 Reynolds Alumni Center, Columbia, MO 65211 | Phone: 573-882-5916 |
E-mail: Mizzou@missouri.edu

Opinions expressed in this site do not necessarily reflect the official position of MU or the Mizzou Alumni Association.

Copyright © 2021 — Curators of the [University of Missouri](#). All rights reserved. [DMCA](#) and other [copyright information](#).

An [equal opportunity/affirmative action](#) institution.

Last updated: Feb. 15, 2013