Entomologist named Presidential Fellow at Auburn for 2012

Henry Fadamiro, Alumni Professor in the College of Agriculture’s Department of Entomology and Plant Pathology, has been named Auburn University’s Presidential Administrative Fellow for 2012.

The Presidential Administrative Fellowship Program is designed to help individual faculty members gain senior administrative experience while applying his or her faculty experience to issues and programs that impact a broad segment of the university community.

Fadamiro, who is also the integrated pest management coordinator for the Alabama Cooperative Extension System, will serve two semesters on a half-time appointment with the Office of the President, where he will work with administrators, staff and faculty in the offices of the Provost, Diversity and Multicultural Affairs, International Education and the dean’s offices of Auburn’s colleges and schools.

As the Presidential Administrative Fellow, he will build on an extensive international background and experience to develop a plan to help the university expand its ties with institutions in developing countries of Asia, Africa and other global regions where there is potential for mutually beneficial growth.

The Auburn professor’s project is titled “International Programming Initiative to Facilitate Academic Exchange and Research Cooperation with Developing Countries.”

“There are many people involved in international programs in academics, research and outreach or extension at Auburn, but much of the effort is random,” Fadamiro said. “There is at present no apparent mechanism to help people in one part of the university’s mission, such as teaching undergraduates, get together with others who have similar goals for international programming but work in a different mission area, such as research or outreach.”

He continued, “I will be working with faculty and administrators in all these areas to establish a mechanism to facilitate cooperation in identifying opportunities to develop an international programming initiative.”

Toomer’s Corner tradition to continue under new plan for future of its trees

The tradition of rolling Auburn’s oaks will continue even if the trees do not survive being poisoned in 2010.

President Jay Gogue this week accepted the recommendation of the Committee to Study the Future of Rolling Toomer’s Corner, which proposed replacing the troubled oaks – should they die – with one or more large trees and using a temporary structure to celebrate victories until the new trees have established roots.

Auburn horticulture and forestry experts will evaluate the current oaks this spring. They are not expected to survive. Development of a timetable to replace them is under way.

“It’s a bittersweet moment for those of us who love Auburn,” said the committee chair, Debbie Shaw, vice president for alumni affairs. “We dearly love the live oaks that have served us well for so long, but we now must focus on creating an environment that future generations can enjoy.”

To assist the committee in its decision, more than 1,200 alumni, faculty, staff, students and friends of Auburn responded to a survey in December, indicating their preference for the future of the corner.

“After reviewing the comments, it is clear that the rolling tradition at Auburn University must continue,” said Shaw. “We are thankful to those who took the time to read and respond to the survey. Their ideas and suggestions illustrate how passionate they are and how much they love Auburn.”

Survey respondents were given four options: plant small oak trees; plant large living trees; move the rolling tradition to a permanent structure in the intersection at Toomer’s Corner; or design an artificial structure that would be located at the current site of the oaks. Based on feedback and the expertise of its members, the committee proposed the large
New plan for Toomer’s Corner

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Keever said there would be several options for replacing the oaks. “The live oak is not native to this area, so we will consider a different species of oak,” Keever said.

“Either way,” he said, “we want to make sure that we plant an attractive and long-living tree, one that would enhance the beauty and character of our campus.”

– Mike Clardy

Presidential Administrative Fellowship

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ties for international programming and build on those opportunities.”

Fadamiro said such efforts could lead to stronger graduate programs at Auburn through vibrant international exchange and cooperation programs with leading institutions in developing countries.

He added that opportunities also exist for Auburn faculty to work more closely with Alabama’s 1890 land-grant institutions – Alabama A&M and Tuskegee – in establishing ties with institutions in Africa, where they already have a strong presence.

He also suggested the need to examine the mechanisms for international programming at universities around the nation that achieved success in such endeavors.

A faculty member at Auburn since 2003, Fadamiro holds a Ph.D. from Oxford University in England, where he was a Rhodes Scholar, and is a native of Nigeria, where he earned two degrees. In addition to work in entomology and pest management at Auburn, he maintains collaborations with faculty in several universities and research institutions in China, England, Israel and African nations.

He also led the successful effort to establish International Academic Interchange Agreements between Auburn and two universities in Africa.

At the national level, earlier this month, the board of directors of LEAD21 – Leadership for the 21st Century selected the Auburn professor to participate in its leadership development program for 2012-13, “Linking Research, Academics and Extension.”

– Roy Summerford

Provost seeks nominations for Leischuck Awards

The Office of the Provost is seeking nominations for the Gerald and Emily Leischuck Endowed Presidential Awards for Excellence in Teaching for 2012-13. The awards are the top honors for teaching awarded each year by Auburn University.

Two awards, plus $10,000 each, will be presented to Auburn University faculty who have demonstrated a commitment to student success through effective and innovative teaching and through advising and mentoring inside and outside the classroom.

Information and nomination packets can be found online at https://sites.auburn.edu/academic/provost/awards/LeischuckAwards/. The nomination deadline is March 1.

Barth to present at Copenhagen project on world’s challenges

James Barth, Lowder Eminent Scholar in Finance, has been invited to participate in the Copenhagen Consensus 2012 project which investigates the best solutions to 10 of the world’s biggest challenges.

Barth has been invited to write an economic perspective aimed at identifying the best solutions to the pressing global challenge of a malfunctioning financial sector.

Economic research papers on 10 of the world’s biggest challenges together with 20 economic perspective papers will form the basis for a ranking of solutions across the challenges according to their potential to do the most good in the world.

The ranking will be done by a group of Nobel Laureates in economics and other leading economists in Copenhagen, Denmark, May 7-11.
Mark Byrne in Auburn University’s Samuel Ginn College of Engineering has emerged as a nationally prominent researcher in the fields of chemical and biomedical engineering, with his role in scientific breakthroughs being reported by major broadcast networks and newspapers across the United States. Yet, on campus, Byrne is widely recognized as one of the university’s top teachers as well as one of its top researchers.

In 2011, as Byrne and his research team were receiving national attention for developing a new method of delivering controlled release of eye medication through contact lenses, the chemical engineering faculty member also received the Gerald and Emily Leischuck Endowed Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. With that award, Byrne was honored along with Leonard Bell, a highly regarded food science professor in the College of Agriculture, as the university’s top teachers for the 2011-12 academic year.

Although he teaches in a complex, challenging discipline, Byrne, who is the college’s Daniel F. and Josephine Breeden Associate Professor in Chemical Engineering, wins praise from colleagues and students for an infectious “can-do” spirit that inspires students to succeed, sometimes even against their own expectations. In a typical comment supporting his nomination for the Leischuck Award, one former student said, “Dr. Byrne would come into the class like a man on a mission. It was obvious that he was a very good teacher and really enjoyed the opportunity to be able to instill young engineers with the problem-solving abilities and work ethic needed to complete a long and difficult curriculum.”

Another wrote, “I really believe that the drive that pushes him to do his best work carried over to the students in the classroom and pushed us to do our best work.”

In nominating him for the award, Chemical Engineering Department Chair Chris Roberts noted that Byrne is an effective teacher in the lab as well as in the classroom. “Dr. Byrne is world class in his ability to engage and challenge undergraduate research students to reach their potential,” he added.

One of Byrne’s undergraduate researchers, David Harris, received a nationally competitive Gates Cambridge Scholarship in 2011 as well as another highly competitive award, a Goldwater Scholarship, in 2010, based on scholarly work performed in the engineering professor’s lab. The engineering professor also mentored Auburn students who won first place in undergraduate research at the 2006 and 2008 American Institute of Chemical Engineers annual meetings.

For his mentoring of both undergraduates and graduate students, Byrne has also received the Provost Award for Excellence in Fostering Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship and the Auburn University Graduate Mentorship Award.

Whether in the classroom or a teaching lab, Byrne, an Auburn faculty member since 2003, says he tries to set an example for his students. “For the most part, students want to be challenged to do their best,” he explained. “I cannot ask students to do their best without me doing my best. I believe in a disciplined, challenging environment that should be both interactive and evaluative.”

He noted that one of the most important challenges engineering students must overcome is the need to learn and follow an established discipline in problem-solving. Once they master that skill, they are ready to advance in the classroom and the lab, he said, explaining, “Students who rise to the challenge are more satisfied with what they have accomplished.”

In order for students to learn the material, Byrne said, he makes sure he knows the subject matter thoroughly before he steps into the classroom. “I make sure I know how things fit together in my lesson plan so the class is engaged,” he explained.

But that is only part of the equation. “It is not enough for me to know the material. I try to learn and use their names, and I take a personal interest in their progress. I want them to do well,” he said. “If students know you have their best interests at heart, they will do better.”

One of the hardest things for high-achieving students to learn, he said, is the inevitability of failure somewhere along the line. Even excellent students will sometimes earn a low grade on an assignment or watch an experiment fail, but Byrne urges them to learn from such setbacks. “I try to teach them to build on failure, not give up. And, they should not get too comfortable with success if they want to accomplish something. It takes a great deal of effort even for very good students. But they have to grasp the concepts in order to achieve their goals.”

Starting early in each semester, Byrne monitors his students’ progress, and his own, through regular formal and informal assessment and interaction. “Meeting with students individually or in smaller groups allows me to understand their learning process and how they are thinking about their content knowledge,” he said. “In many cases, I use these interactions to gauge my teaching effectiveness and make changes to my courses or advising immediately.”

In addition to classroom success, the chemical engineering professor is one of Auburn’s most active faculty members in introducing undergraduate students to significant research projects alongside graduate researchers. “Despite the many hours working in the lab, many students did better in their classes,” he said, recalling past undergraduates who went on to graduate school after working with him in the lab. “I also believe all students learned just as much about themselves and what it takes to succeed, which begins with a belief that they can accomplish anything if they put their mind to it and put forth significant effort.”

Students regularly cite Byrne’s high energy level, but he said they help to bring it out. “I am passionate about the things I do, whether teaching or creating new knowledge or products,” he said. “I try to get students passionate about the work, as well. Teaching provides vitality. Helping students succeed drives me tremendously. Seeing them succeed, I get excited by it all, whether in the classroom or in research activities.”

--- Ray Summerford

Editor’s Note: Profiles in Excellence is a periodic feature of the Auburn Report presenting Auburn University faculty who have been honored by the university or nationally for the top level of achievement in teaching, research or outreach.
Area couple wins first War Eagle Wedding; students submit designs in new competition for bridal dress

Two Valley residents, Slade Ponder, 23, and Katie Oliver, 24, have won the online voting contest for Auburn University’s first War Eagle Wedding.

The website www.wareaglewedding.com is accepting votes this week only on three choices for the bridal gown. The dresses were designed by Auburn apparel design students Lauren Mellor, Heather Hall and Eloise Faber.

The three designs were selected for the competition by a committee that reviewed wedding dress designs from students in the competitive design class offered through the Department of Consumer Affairs in the College of Human Sciences. Professors Lenda Jo Connell and Pam Ulrich altered the goal of the class to accommodate the needs of the campus wedding and provide students with a unique challenge.

“The students know the setting will be on Samford lawn, but they don’t know the bride,” said Ulrich. “Nevertheless, the dress has to be fun, feminine, elegant and appealing.”

Katie and Slade will tie the knot on May 26 on the lawn in front of Samford Hall with a reception following at The Hotel at Auburn University. The event is sponsored by Auburn’s Office of Communications and Marketing, The Hotel at Auburn University, Opelika-Auburn News, WRBL and through contributions from the local community.

Students in the competitive design class generally spend the year-long course vying for a chance to show their competitive designs at the annual meeting for the International Textile and Apparel Association, the leading professional organization for professors of clothing and textiles. Connell said the show is highly competitive, with students from around the world trying to earn a coveted spot.

But the course objective changed once Ulrich learned there were plans to host a wedding on campus. And Connell agreed: “This is a chance for us not only showcase Auburn’s fashion design program, but the talent of our emerging fashion designers,” she said. “It’s one thing to design for the runway. It’s another to design for the aisle.”

Other students in the class have been developing designs for the bridesmaid dresses. Online voting of the top three designs begins Monday, Jan. 30.

The unique chance to have their bridal gown design used for the big day is not lost on the future designers.

“The wedding dress is what everyone – especially the women – notice at a wedding,” said Faber. “And it’s not just if we like the dress, but the overall look and how the dress accentuates the bride’s best qualities and makes her look exquisite.”

Mellor appreciates the opportunity to be a part of a university-sponsored wedding, but more importantly, to highlight Auburn’s apparel design program.

“It just proves how amazing our teachers are and how hard they have worked to make our design program so successful,” she said. “To be a part of something like this for our university is so exciting for all of us.”

For Hall, it’s an experience like this that she said can set Auburn students apart from those at the elite design schools across the country, such as the Fashion Institute of Technology and Parsons in New York.

“We compete with them for jobs and the more experience we can get doing projects, like the War Eagle Wedding, the better off we are upon graduation,” she said.

Sieu Tang Wood, who created outfits for former Alabama First Lady Patsy Riley, will craft the bridal gown from the winning design. Wood is the owner of Tang’s Alterations in Montgomery and five other locations across the Southeast.

— Amy Weaver