Plan for International Hunger Institute wins approval of trustees

The Auburn University Board of Trustees agreed on Feb. 3 to establish the International Hunger Institute, providing the university with another tool to use in the fight against domestic and global hunger.

The proposal from the College of Human Sciences was based on the college’s ongoing relationship with the United Nations World Food Programme and the university’s role as a land-, space- and sea-grant institution.

“No other institution is as well positioned to create an international hunger institute as Auburn University,” said June Henton, dean of the College of Human Sciences.

Henton and Harriet Giles, director of external relations for the college, were instrumental in starting Auburn’s role in the global war on hunger. In 2004, they spearheaded a partnership with the WFP and established the War on Hunger campaign on campus. As the effort grew and various hunger and sustainability initiatives began throughout campus, Henton and Giles led another charge between Auburn and WFP to develop a global movement, Universities Fighting World Hunger. There are now more than 200 colleges and universities worldwide following Auburn’s model in the fight against hunger and malnutrition at home and abroad.

“Our unique relationship with the World Food Programme, a focus on both domestic and global hunger, a student grassroots campaign coupled with an academic agenda, and our multi-sector partnerships will provide the institute with the leverage needed to build the power of collective engagement in the fight against hunger,” said Henton.

Since its inception, Auburn’s War on Hunger has had a role in every school, college and major student organization on campus. Multidisciplinary cross-college efforts have been occurring in such areas as fisheries, geography, management, industrial design, pharmacy, engineering and nutrition.

Led by Douglas Coutts, WFP senior advisor on a four-year assignment at Auburn, many faculty members have either contributed to the introductory and capstone courses in the hunger studies minor or used courses in their own departments to present the concept of hunger within the context of their respective disciplines.

“Establishing this institute will build the infrastructure for securing greater levels of extramural funding, and enhancing the already existing strong collaborations among various colleges at Auburn University and across the region, nation and the world,” said William Batchelor, dean of the College of Agriculture and director of the Alabama Agricultural Experiment Station.

Panel selects nine for seats on Board of Trustees, subject to Senate vote

The Auburn University Trustee Selection Committee named nine persons Monday to serve on the university’s Board of Trustees.

Gov. Robert Bentley, who chairs the committee, will send the appointments to the Alabama Senate, which confirms new members. Appointees can take their seats on the board only after Senate confirmation.

The 14-member Auburn Board of Trustees entered the new year with two vacancies, and the terms of seven trustees end in early 2012, leaving just four appointed trustees and Gov. Bentley if the positions go unfilled.

The nominees include current trustees Jimmy Rane of Abbeville, a member since 1999, and Sarah Newton of Fayette and Charles McCrary of Birmingham, who have served since 2004. The other six nominees are B.T. Roberts of Mobile, Clark Sahlie of Montgomery, Bob Dumas of Auburn, Jimmy H. Sanford of Prattville, Elizabeth Huntley of Clanton and Jim Pratt of Birmingham.

Roberts was nominated to fill a position that has been vacant since the death of Jack Miller of Mobile in 2009, and Huntley was chosen to fill the seat formerly held by Paul Spina of Birmingham, who rotated off the board in 2010.

The other first-time nominees were selected to fill seats held by four members who are due to rotate off the board by May. Those trustees are Bobby Lowder of Auburn, Virginia Thompson of Montgomery, Dwight Carlisle of Tallassee and Byron Franklin of Birmingham.

The selection committee reviewed the nominations of 170 people and interviewed 35 of those nominees before selecting nine.

In addition to the governor, the selection committee consists of Auburn Alumni Board members Bobby Poundstone, Nancy Fortner and Howard Nelson and Auburn Trustees Raymond Harbert and John Blackwell.
Auburn adopts longer-term outlook for setting rates for student housing

Under a plan approved by the Board of Trustees on Feb. 3, Auburn University students and their parents will have a clearer, longer-term picture of what to expect in housing costs during their time at the university.

Instead of approving a one-year increase in rates for student housing for 2012-13, as in the past, the board approved a three-year pricing policy through 2014-15. Depending on location and occupancy type, the rates are scheduled to increase from 4.6 percent to 11.1 percent per year during that period.

The new prices also reflect a move by the university to set student housing rates in the middle range of housing prices in the Southeastern Conference after years of being near the bottom in that category.

Executive Vice President Don Large said the three-year plan with higher rates would enable the university to address deferred maintenance for campus housing in a timely and cost-effective manner, help finance the first year or two of planned renovations and reassure bond markets when financing is needed for major renovations to student housing beyond that period.

With a three-year pricing schedule, students and parents would also be able to plan for housing costs over a longer period, he added.

Noting that demand exceeds capacity for the 4,200 beds in campus housing, Large said a gradual increase in prices would help the university address its housing needs without causing spots to go unfilled.

In other action, the board authorized establishment of the International Hunger Institute and the Aquaculture and Fisheries Business Institute; approved renaming the Ph.D. in Management to a Ph.D. in Business; approved an accelerated bachelor’s/master’s degree in hotel and restaurant management; and approved plans for renovation of Watson Field House and relocation of remaining programs in the coliseum to that building. The board also approved the selection of Sasaki Associates as consultants for development of a new campus plan; Sasaki previously helped the university draft its 2002 master plan and its 2007 update.

Faculty members in two Auburn colleges recently published in separate journals their findings and analyses regarding the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

In the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering, Associate Professor Joel Hayworth and Feagin Professor Prabhakar Clement of the Department of Civil Engineering partnered with the Dauphin Island Sea Laboratory to publish a peer-reviewed paper on Alabama beaches impacted by the oil spill. Their paper, published in the journal “Hydrology and Earth System Sciences,” outlines potential long-term environmental and ecological challenges associated with the event.

Meanwhile, College of Agriculture researchers published a study showing how tar balls that accumulated on Gulf Coast beaches after the Deepwater Horizon oil spill act as reservoirs for human pathogens.

Associate Professor Cova Arias, Assistant Professor Ash Bullard and graduate student Zhen Tao from the Department of Fisheries and Allied Aquacultures collected tar balls from Gulfport, Miss., to Orange Beach, Ala., after the spill and analyzed them for bacterial counts and the presence of the human pathogen Vibrio vulnificus. This pathogen is abundant in the Gulf Coast environment and capable of causing severe wound infections by contact with contaminated surfaces. Numbers were significantly higher in tar balls than in sand and seawater samples.
Profiles in Excellence

For professor, successful teaching combines challenge for students to succeed, providing access beyond class

In two colleges at Auburn University, Food Science Professor Leonard Bell has developed a reputation among students and colleagues as a challenging teacher who is among the university’s most effective classroom instructors while also being one of the most accessible professors outside the classroom.

Former colleagues and students in the College of Human Sciences and present ones in the College of Agriculture say it is this combination of Bell demanding a lot of students and helping them succeed that place him among Auburn’s best teachers. Their opinion was confirmed last fall, when Auburn University presented him with the Gerald and Emily Leischuck Endowed Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching.

With that award, Bell was honored along with Mark Byrne of the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering as Auburn’s top teachers for the 2011-12 academic year.

Bell, who played a key role in developing the food science curriculum in the Department of Nutrition and Food Science in Human Sciences throughout the past decade, led the program through its move in 2010 to the Poultry Science Department in the College of Agriculture. “Although one might think this would be a simple task, it was very challenging,” said Tung-Shi Huang of Poultry Science.

“He led the entire process,” Huang, an associate professor, said. “The final outcome was an improved curriculum that better prepares our food science undergraduates and graduate students for their careers.”

Susan Hubbard, associate dean and professor in Human Sciences, said Bell has distinguished himself through a total commitment to his academic field and its students. “His commitment to students and genuine concern for their educational advancement goes above and beyond expectations,” she said, citing his success in helping students master the material in the classroom, plus numerous hours outside of class serving as academic adviser to food science majors and faculty adviser to the Food Science Club.

Another colleague, Doug White, who was Bell’s department head from 2004-09, noted, “He has the reputation among students as being a tough teacher with high expectations, but he also earns the respect of the students in his classes. In their comments, many students have stated that Leonard was their favorite teacher at Auburn University.”

Students overwhelmingly give him high marks on teacher evaluations and several wrote to support his nomination for the Leischuck Award. In a statement that echoed the remarks of others, one student wrote, “Dr. Bell has a sincere passion for the subject matter that he teaches, and he has instilled the same passion in me and many other students. One can clearly see the enthusiasm that he has for food science and teaching through the way that he instructs, and he does an excellent job of conveying his abundance of knowledge to his students.”

Bell, a second-generation college professor, says he “inherited” his commitment to students from his father, who was for many years a chemistry professor at Virginia Tech, and his grandfather, who was a superintendent of public schools in rural Kentucky. From them, he learned that successful teaching involves as much effort outside the classroom as in it.

A key component of his teaching philosophy is to teach at the student’s comfort level. “We all need a little bit of humility,” he said. “I try to achieve a balance in my teaching, not speaking down to students, but presenting material in language they can understand.”

The effort starts at the beginning of the semester with learning each student’s name and treating each person as an individual rather than one of many. “Being approachable is important to me as a teacher,” he added. “I want students to realize that they are here to learn and I am here to teach, not just to lecture. When students take the extra initiative, going the extra mile, I do the same.”

Bell said he emphasizes to students that they can ask any relevant question in class and can contact him at any time, without regard to formal office hours, when they have a question or need assistance. In their evaluations of his classes, many students cite his accessibility both in class and out as one of his greatest strengths as a teacher.

“The most important responsibility within the university is undergraduate classroom instruction,” Bell said. “To be successful in my classes, undergraduate students must not only understand the basic facts and principles of the course, but they must also be able to apply these concepts to solve problems within the student’s profession. As an educator, it is my responsibility to teach these basic principles and demonstrate how to apply them so that upon graduation, our alumni can function competently.”

One of the great benefits of teaching, he said, is the chance to know students as individuals and not just part of a class. Sometimes such knowledge can be of special help to the student, as one former student recalled. In a letter supporting Bell’s nomination for the Leischuck Award, the former student, a 2008 graduate, recalled how during a class, Bell, knowing she was diabetic, saw her displaying early symptoms of elevated glucose level and asked a classmate, who was a close friend of the ailing student, to take her home immediately so she could take some insulin. After class, he checked to be sure she had recovered. “To be frank,” she wrote, “he saved me an emergency room visit, a hospitalization and possibly worse by his understanding and handling of the situation.”

Bell said few situations involving students are that dramatic, but every student deserves the best efforts of his or her professors. “As much as we like to think that research is the driving force, students are the essence of the university. It is important that we, as teachers, connect with our students.”

--- Roy Summerford

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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.
Campus News Briefs

ADEM announces environmental grant for work along Parkerson Mill Creek

The Alabama Department of Environmental Management has announced a grant for the Parkerson Mill Creek Watershed Project in the southwest area of campus. The $179,810 in federal funds will be matched by non-federal funds.

The project is designed to improve the water quality of Parkerson Mill Creek and is a cooperative effort among ADEM, Auburn University, the City of Auburn, Alabama Cooperative Extension System, the university’s Water Resources Center and other local stakeholders. The project will also provide outreach opportunities for local citizens to learn about protecting water quality.

“Controlling stormwater runoff is an important piece of what we try to do to improve water quality,” ADEM Director Lance LeFleur said.

Parkerson Mill Creek was named for the Parkerson family grist mill, which was in operation until the late 1800s. Parkerson Mill Creek is approximately 10 miles long, Brantley said.

“As the city of Auburn grew up around the creek, it started to become impaired as no one was watching after its needs,” said College of Agriculture Dean Bill Batchelor. “The creek has been since listed as an impaired water body by the state of Alabama.”

Parkerson Mill Creek flows through the Auburn campus and under Interstate 85 before emptying into Chewacla Creek, which ends up in the Tallapoosa River.

Harris speaks at Georgia program examining Jewish history in America

Paul Harris, associate director of the Auburn University Honors College, presented the public lecture “Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses: Celebrating 160 Years of Jewish Immigration to the United States” at the Augusta, Ga., Jewish Community Center in January.

His presentation was part of the Emma Lazarus: Voice of Liberty, Voice of Conscience Exhibit and the Dr. Martin Luther King Day Celebration.

The Augusta center was chosen by the American Library Association as one of 18 sites across the country to hold the “Emma Lazarus: Voice of Liberty, Voice of Conscience Exhibit.” The traveling exhibit of the poet’s life and work is presented in partnership with Netbook Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to supporting Jewish literature and art.

Auburn ranks high nationally in latest report on National Merit Scholars

Auburn University is ranked second nationally out of 145 public institutions in enrollment of National Merit Scholars. The rankings are included in the recently released 2010-11 National Merit Scholarship Corporation Annual Report.

Auburn is first in the Southeastern Conference among public institutions and second, behind Vanderbilt, among all Southeastern Conference institutions. Auburn ranked ninth overall out of the 359 institutions where these scholars are enrolled, with Chicago, USC, Harvard, Northwestern, Vanderbilt, Washington-St. Louis, Oklahoma and Yale ranked higher. Only Oklahoma was ranked above Auburn among all public institutions.

Auburn enrolled 181 new scholars last summer and fall, which is a 35 percent increase over the previous year’s number. Auburn moved up from third in the SEC and 16th overall last year.

Auburn’s 181 National Merit Scholars are from 23 states and are enrolled in all of the university’s 10 undergraduate colleges and schools. Auburn also enrolled a record 45 National Achievement Scholars from 19 states, an 80 percent increase over last year.