Panel members say

AU gained more than a president during search

The chairman and two faculty representatives on AU’s presidential search advisory committee told faculty members last week that the search produced a number of pleasant surprises along the way to finding Auburn’s next president.

Speaking at a public forum hosted by the AAUP, Committee Chair Charles McCrary and faculty members Cindy Brunner and Conner Bailey said the search produced an ideal leader for Auburn in Jay Gogue, who will become AU’s 18th president on July 16. The three were part of a nine-member committee that recommended Gogue to the Board of Trustees, which voted on March 23 to name Gogue as AU’s next president.

The most pleasant surprise, the members said, was that the overall quality of candidates exceeded their already high expectations. Among other positive developments, they cited the favorable impact of the Fisher Report and the enhanced working relationships among faculty and trustees on the panel.

Although the three said they would not want to be part of another high-level search, McCrary, an AU trustee, and the faculty representatives said trustees and faculty members on the committee learned to trust and respect each other. “One of the most satisfying outcomes was to have common goals and the opportunity to spend time with these faculty members,” said McCrary.

McCrary, Brunner and Bailey said they would have preferred a more open search but that type of search would not have attracted candidates such as Gogue, who is president of the University of Houston and chancellor of the UH System, or others with experience as the head of major institutions.

Sustainable development expert to speak at Auburn

An international authority on sustainable development, L. Hunter Lovins, will speak at AU on April 17 as part of the Littleton-Franklin Lecture Series.

Lovins will discuss “Natural Capitalism: Finding the Competitive Edge” at 4 p.m. in the auditorium of the Sciences Laboratory Center in the College of Sciences and Mathematics.

The president of Natural Capitalism Inc., which helps companies implement sustainable development in their business operations, Lovins has written nine books and spoken on the topic in 15 nations. Citing her environmental record, Time magazine in 2000 named her “Hero of the Planet.”
Logans contributing $1.2 million to mathematics endowed chair

Upcoming Events

Art Exhibition

TELFAIR PEET GALLERY “Transmutations,” abstract art by Kyle Braund, through April 30

Tuesday, April 10

JAY SANDERS FILM FESTIVAL Winners of Movie Girl Taxi Video Competition, 7:30-9:30 p.m., auditorium, AU Hotel

CHORAL CONCERT AU Men’s Chorus, AU Women’s Chorus and AU Concert Choir, 7 p.m., Lakeview Baptist Church

AU THEATRE “Metamorphoses,” based on Ovid’s classic works, 7:30 p.m., Telfair Peet Theatre; same time Tuesday-Saturday and April 25-27, 21 and 23, 30 p.m. April 15; Box Office: 944-4154

Wednesday, April 11

CONSTRUCTION AWARENESS Exhibits highlighting AU construction projects, 10 a.m.-2 p.m., Haley concourse

Thursday, April 12

CHAMBER MUSIC CONCERT Aksakim String Quartet, 7:30 p.m., Goodwin Music Hall; call 826-2797 or 887-9379 for ticket information

AU 100TH ANNIVERSARY COFFEE AU College of Veterinary Medicine, Thursday-Sunday, AU Hotel and CVM campus

Sunday, April 15

PUBLIC LECTURE “Where the Wild Things Are,” Jim Fowler, former host of “ Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom,” 10 a.m., AU Hotel

Monday, April 16

NEXT AU Report

GINN LECTURE “Teaching Performance and Its Relationship to Research Performance,” Way Kuo, dean and distinguished university professor, University of Tennessee College of Engineering, 3:30 p.m., McMillan Auditorium, Ross Hall

Tuesday, April 17

LITTLETON-FRANKLIN LECTURE “Natural Capitalism: Finding the Common Good,” John Hunter Lovins, 4 p.m., auditorium, Sciences Laboratory Center

President’s search

continued from page 1

“This is not a process I would have designed,” said Brunner, but added that it was the best way to proceed for the just-concluded search. “If we had made this search open, we would have lost the majority of high-powered candidates.”

McCrory, who is president and CEO of Alabama Power Co., said he could understand why the heads of large institutions might be reluctant to submit to an open search. He noted that top executives who are named in a search and do not get the job may find their own jobs in jeopardy when they return home to face their governing boards.

Committee members said the executive search firm Korn-Ferry played an essential role. By serving as a buffer between candidates and the committee, Korn-Ferry enabled the committee to abide by the state’s open-meetings law and still protect the identities of the candidates.

The active phase of the search began last summer, after the Board of Trustees had commissioned a study of AU governance by consultant James Fisher and then addressed Fisher’s recommendations, adopting many of them.

As described by the committee members, the search attracted approximately 65 candidates who met the university’s criteria. The list was gradually whittled to approximately 16. Then Korn-Ferry arranged for small-group interviews with a smaller number of finalists whose names appeared most frequently on lists submitted individually by committee members.

In the weeks leading to the selection, the top candidates individually met in private sessions with two or three committee members at a time. Eventually, the process left Logan as the chosen candidate. Logan described the process and was the unanimous choice of both the advisory committee and the AU Board.

Committee members said that once Gogue entered his name, he rose to the top tier of candidates. Bailey recalled that at least three other top candidates had moved on to other jobs near the end of the Auburn search. By then, he said, a gap had developed between the top three candidates, of which Gogue was one, and the rest of the candidate pool.

After falling behind, the remaining top candidates refused to participate in public interviews without the assurance of a job, Brunner said she saw no use in bringing candidates with good but significantly lesser qualifications to be considered along with Gogue.

McCrory said it would have been “intellectually dishonest” to do so, and Bailey said he did not favor asking long-shots to put their jobs in jeopardy under those circumstances.

UT dean to speak at AU on link between teaching and research

The dean of the College of Engineering at the University of Tennessee will speak at AU on April 16 as part of the Gunn Distinguished Lecture Series in Samuel Gunn College of Engineering.

Way Kuo, who also holds the rank of university distinguished professor at the Knoxville campus, will speak on “Teaching, Research, Peers, and Its Relation to Research Performance,” at 3:30 p.m. in McMillan Auditorium of Ross Hall.

Secluded spots

In addition to the prominent displays of spring color along College Street, the Auburn campus sports several park-like areas that are both colorful and secluded, such as the area bounded by Dudley Hall, Telfair Peet Theatre and Graves Amphitheatre.

These areas provide a serene respite for students, faculty and staff in nearby buildings.

Media attention often focuses on success enjoyed across the board in certain industries, such as oil firms, and the ‘wows’ of others, such as airlines. However, an Auburn professor has helped demonstrate that industry membership matters little for success.

Using data from more than 1,000 firms, a study in the February issue of the Strategic Management Journal finds that less than 1.5 percent of the changes in firms’ stock market performance is explained by industry membership. It is even less of a factor in regard to likelihood of bankruptcy.

In both situations, differences in resources and leadership account for more than 90 percent of the variability among firms.

“These findings make it clear that stockholders should not accept difficult industry conditions as an excuse for poor performance,” said Dave Ketchen, study co-author and Lowder Eminent Scholar in the AU College of Business.

“A firm’s fate is almost entirely driven by executives’ decisions. Executives should not be allowed to play the blame game when the firm struggles. They need to be held accountable through pay cuts or, in some cases, dismissal.”

Ketchen said the study’s results should encourage boards of directors to follow Home Depot’s recent example.

“Home Depot’s former CEO was taking home tens of millions of dollars a year even though the firm’s stock performed poorly. Stockholders were upset, and they should have been,” Ketchen said.

“Their new CEO is guaranteed less than a million dollars a year, but he has stock incentives that will raise his compensation dramatically if the company does well. This is exactly the kind of alignment between pay and performance that our research supports.”

The study used a technique called variance decomposition to analyze performance data on 1,165 firms across seven years. Co-authors on the study were Jeremy Short of Texas Tech University, Timothy Palmer of Western Michigan University and Thomas Hull of Michigan State University.

Business professor at AU identifies universal value of leadership skills

Spirit of Excellence

Each month AU presents Spirit of Excellence Awards to four staff members for outstanding performance.

Winners for February were, from left, Leslie Kent of Rugby Science, Tony Wolfe of Facilities Mgmt, William Florencio of the Facilties Carpentry Shop and Debbie Allen of the Office of Development.

AU Report Editor Roy Summerville. Contributing editors and writers: Katie Wilder and Charles Martin, AU Communications; and Otto Kanevel, College of Business. Photography: Jeff Etheridge and Melissa Humble, AU Photographic Services; Executive Director of Communications & Marketing: Donnie Dover. The AU Report is published by the Office of Communications and Marketing at Auburn University. Issues appear each Monday during fall and spring semesters and every two weeks in summer term, except on the Monday of or the Monday after some major U.S. holidays. Copies are distributed free by campus mail to full-time faculty and staff at campus locations. Deadline for delivery of items for publication is 4 p.m. on Tuesday of the week the issue is published. AU Report subscribers are encouraged to forward or distributing copies to coworkers.

E-mail: rsumm@auburn.edu

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Journalism Advisory Council honors five for achievements in mass media fields

The Journalism Advisory Council for the Department of Communication and Journalism in AU’s College of Liberal Arts honored five veterans of Alabama journalism on Friday. The council presented the Distinguished AU Journalism Alumnus Award to Jerry E. Brown, who is dean of the University of Montana’s School of Journalism. Brown spent 20 years as a faculty member with AU’s Department of Journalism, where he served as department head for seven years. At the University of Montana since 1999, Brown is stepping down as dean in June but will remain on the faculty.

Alvin Benn, a 25-year reporter and columnist for The Montgomery Advertiser, received the Distinguished Alabama Community Journalist Award. As bureau chief for United Press International in Birmingham in the 1960s, Benn covered some of the most momentous events of the Civil Rights Era. In the years that followed, Benn became a writer, photographer, editor and publisher at newspapers in Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia. He retired in 2003 but continues to write columns and handle other duties at The Montgomery Advertiser.

The advisory council presented the Distinguished Alabama Community Sports Journalist Award to John Pruett, who has been sports editor of The Huntsville Times for 32 years. “He has been a fixture in the Huntsville athletic community,” wrote Pruett’s nominator.

Ed Mullins received the Distinguished Special Achievement in Journalism Award. Mullins retired in December as chair of the Department of Journalism at the University of Alabama but he continues to teach. He has had a 30-year tenure as an educator and has been a full-time reporter or editor for newspapers in Georgia, North Carolina and Texas. Mullins is also the author of two books on reporting and editing and numerous papers, book chapters and articles on journalism and mass communication.

The Distinguished Mass Media Achievement award went to political analyst Bob Ingram, a 1949 graduate of Auburn. The syndicated columnist spent 15 years as chief political writer and columnist for The Montgomery Advertiser in the 1950s and early ’60s. He also published Alabama magazine for 13 years and spent 16 years as a political analyst and editorial director of WSFA television in Montgomery.

Recipients for the annual awards are selected from nominations received from across Alabama.

Ex-‘Wild Kingdom’ host to speak Friday

Jim Fowler, a pioneer of wildlife-education shows on television, will be a keynote speaker Friday during the AU College of Veterinary Medicine’s 100th Annual Conference.

He will present a public discussion of “Where the Wild Things Are” at 10 a.m. in the auditorium of the AU Hotel and Dixon Conference Center.

Fowler has presented information about wildlife to the American public on television for more than 40 years. He first served with Marlin Perkins as co-host and later became host of “Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom,” and also hosted “Mutual of Omaha’s Spirit of Adventure.” He has been the wildlife correspondent for NBC’s “Today Show” since 1988 and was a regular on the “Tonight Show with Johnny Carson.”

“We invite the community to join our veterinary alumni for the opening session,” said Gary Beard, assistant dean in the college. “Jim has spoken here before and is always an entertaining speaker.”

The annual conference will be Thursday-Sunday at the hotel and the CVM campus. Veterinary Dean Emeritus Tom Vaughan will open Friday’s activities at 8:30 a.m. by discussing the history of the College of Veterinary Medicine, which was established in 1907. The college has awarded more than 5,700 doctors of veterinary medicine degrees since 1909.

The academic foundation for the college was laid in the late 19th century. “The teaching of veterinary medicine at Auburn actually dates back to 1892,” noted Beard, “making it the oldest veterinary program in the South and the sixth oldest in the country.”

Jay Sanders Film Festival set for Tuesday at AU Hotel

Short films from the 2007 Movie Gallery Student Video Competition will be featured Tuesday at AU during the Jay Sanders Film Festival.

The Auburn Film Society and the Department of Communication and Journalism in AU’s College of Liberal Arts will show the videos from 7 p.m.-9:30 p.m. in the auditorium of the AU Hotel and Dixon Conference Center. Admission is free.

“The submissions we receive for the film festival are always creative and energetic,” said Hollie Lavenstein, the festival’s director. “Sometimes it’s difficult to narrow them down, but we try to represent all genres so the audience gets a good idea of how talented these filmmakers can be.”

Guest judges will pick the best videos during the festival and the winners are awarded cash prizes, provided by an endowment to the university by Movie Gallery.

Last year’s first-place College Division winner, Jeff Doiron, took a bus from Connecticut to Auburn to see the audience’s reaction to his short film, “We Do Flat Tops,” a story about a blind barber.