Auburn developing program to help students improve their writing skills

A nationally prominent authority on the teaching of academic writing will visit Auburn this month to discuss ways to implement an intense, comprehensive program to upgrade the writing skills of AU students.

In a report to the Board of Trustees last week, Provost John Heilman said Joseph Harris, director of the Duke University Writing Program, will advise faculty and administrators as they develop an expedited program to raise the writing skills of Auburn students. The goal is to enable AU students to surpass their peers on a national standardized assessment of writing skills within four years.

The author of textbooks on the teaching of writing and critical inquiry, Harris has also edited a series of books on the subject, as well as the refereed journal College Composition and Communication. The AU Board set the target for writing improvement in a resolution on June 29. Heilman and faculty leaders Richard Penaskovic and David Cicci said Thursday that, as long as faculty are fully involved in developing the plan, they expect it to have widespread faculty support.

Heilman said he expects to have a prospectus ready by the board’s Feb. 1 meeting. With most board members present, Trustee Jack Miller, chair of the Academic Affairs Committee, said he expects the board to find the funds if it receives the framework for a program that will produce results.

Such a program, Heilman said, would likely include freshman courses involving intensive, individualized instruction in writing technique and critical thinking, with class size limited to 15 students.

Beyond the writing-intensive course, Heilman said the proposal in February will address ways to include writing assignments as part of the course requirements in all disciplines.

Starting with the 2009 freshman class, Auburn will require all prospective students to take a test of writing ability as part of their college entrance exams. Although it is too late to require the tests for the 2008 freshman class, Wayne Alderman, dean of enrollment management services, said the university will recommend the test for next fall’s prospective students.

In other board activity, trustees Friday approved an $839 million AU System budget for the 2007-08 fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1. If growth continues at the present pace, Executive Vice President Don Large said, the university budget is on course to reach $1 billion in two or three years.
Auburn University. Issues appear each Monday during fall and spring semesters and Wednesday through Sept. 21.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, September 4
MEETING University Senate, 3 p.m., auditorium, Broun Hall

Wednesday, September 5
DISCOVER AURUM LEONARD Geoffrey Hill of Biological Sciences, author of “Ivorybill Hunters: The Search for Proof in a Flooded Wilderness,” 3 p.m., Special Collections and Archives Department, D Angus Library

Friday, September 7
WOMEN’S STUDY PANEL “Raising Feminist Children in a Conser-

Tuesday, September 10
NEXT AU Report

Wednesday, September 19
STUDY ABROAD FAIR Displays and information on opportunities for

Thursday, September 27
THEATRE “Deadwood Dick or A Game of Gold,” 7:30 p.m., Telfair Peet Theatre; also Friday and Saturday; box office 844-4154

Sunday, September 30
THEATRE “Deadwood Dick or The Game of Gold,” 2 p.m., Telfair Peet Theatre; box office 844-4154

Tuesday, October 2
MEETING University Senate, 3 p.m., auditorium, Broun Hall
LITTLETON-FRANKLIN LECTURE Thomas Friedman, New York Times columnist and author of “The World is Flat,” 4 p.m., College of Liberal Arts Theatre, “Deadwood Dick or A Game of Gold,” 7:30 p.m., Telfair Peet Theatre; also Wednesday-Friday; box office 844-4154

Art Exhibit
BEGIN GALLERY “Facing Pages,” artist books by proprietors of independent or collegiate presses and their students or alumni, through Sept. 21

Grant supports MRI study

The National Institutes of Health have awarded a $340,000 grant to AU Engineering Professor Stan Reeves and Don Twigg of the University of Alabama in Birmingham to develop a new way to collect and assemble a special type of MRI imagery.

This new type of MRI gives diagnostic images of specific chemical concentrations in tissues and organs in the body. The research will focus on developing a faster method than existing technology to capture these images while improving patient comfort and reducing imaging costs.
Technology Transfer Office helps launch four start-up companies

The AU Office of Technology Transfer has announced the formation of four start-up companies based on technologies developed within the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering. Two of the start-ups will be based in the Auburn area.

“Historically, we have helped launch two start-ups per year, but we have only done two purely engineering-based companies to date,” said Technology Transfer Director Jan Dowdle Thornton. “To ramp these up so quickly, and have all of them come out of the College of Engineering is truly an unprecedented event for Auburn University.”

The four new companies are:

- **Aunigma Communications Technologies, Inc., Atlanta.** Based on wireless engineering research in the labs of John Wu and David Irwin of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Aunigma is launching next generation network security solutions. The technology will address new and expanding communication pathways and related Internet security threats. Aunigma’s flexible and efficient protocols bring to the marketplace multiple threat protection while achieving unmatched performance compared to competing security offerings. Aunigma was founded by Auburn graduate Ken Garrard.

- **Modular Carpet Recycling Inc., or MCR, Auburn.** Using a carbon dioxide-based process invented by Chris Roberts of Chemical Engineering, MCR will provide turn-key plants for efficient recycling of nylon from used carpets on a local and regional level. The company has initiated efforts to raise capital to demonstrate the technology in a pilot plant. A team led by Paul Swamidass of the Thomas Walter Center for Technology developed an Alabama Launchpad award-winning business plan for the company.

- **Applications Quest LLC, Fairfax, Va.** With recent U.S. Supreme Court rulings placing affirmative action under fire, mechanisms are needed to provide solutions to allow universities to realize their diversity objectives in a manner that is both effective and in conformity with legal standards. Applications Quest clustering software developed by Juan Gilbert of Computer Science and Software Engineering provides this capability by comparing application pools in their entirety, thereby allowing multiple factors such as income, race, gender and geographical location to be considered without any one of them becoming a deciding factor.

- **OcuMedic Inc., Auburn.** Co-founded by Mark Byrne of AU Chemical Engineering, OcuMedic is a drug delivery and medical device company with proprietary technology that creates new polymer films to allow increased loading and delayed release of drugs. Byrne and his group have invented a number of novel contact lenses to deliver medications to the surface of the eye, improving therapy over standard eye drop formulations. Part of OcuMedic’s mission is to create a product line of therapeutic contact lenses to deliver medication for extended periods to address the considerable unmet need for more effective ocular drug delivery. Brian Wright, associate director for commercialization in the Technology Transfer Office, attributed the increase to support from the Ginn College of Engineering. “Dean Larry Benefield and the college have significantly supported technology transfer efforts, including analysis and marketing efforts which have contributed directly to the development of these new companies,” Wright said. “And, of course, tremendous credit goes to the researchers, for not only creating the licensed inventions, but for also being supportive of the start-up process.”

Thornton said a contributing factor has been the inaugural Alabama Launchpad event, a university-centered statewide business plan competition. Auburn placed two teams in the finals of the events, MCR and OcuMedic, the winner of the $100,000 competition.

“There’s no question that Alabama Launchpad had a big impact on our start-up activity this year. OcuMedic was launched directly from its involvement in the competition, and MCR, the carpet recycling business, certainly received a big boost in recognition and contacts,” Thornton said.

Larry Benefield, dean of the Ginn College of Engineering, said the commercialization of intellectual properties developed by Auburn faculty represents a significant funding component for the college. “The technologies on which these companies are based represent truly innovative and forward-focused research with real-world applications,” he added.