Auburn to honor faculty for top achievements

AU will present its top awards for teaching, research and outreach and recognize other major academic achievements on Thursday.

The 5 p.m. ceremony at the AU Hotel marks the second time these annual awards have been presented in a combined, formal ceremony.

Among those receiving awards are Pamela Boyd, associate professor of curriculum and teaching in the College of Education, and Roland Dute, professor of biological sciences in the College of Sciences and Mathematics. Both will receive the Gerald and Emily Leischuck Endowed Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching.

Zhanjiang (John) Liu, Alumni professor and director of the aquatic genomics unit in the College of Agriculture, and Mona El-Sheikh, Alumni professor of human development and family studies in the College of Human Sciences, will receive AU’s Creative Research and Scholarship Award.

Christa Slaton, professor of political science and associate dean in the College of Liberal Arts, will receive the Award for Excellence in Faculty Outreach.

In addition, recipients of this year’s Alumni Undergraduate Teaching Excellence Awards will be recognized. These awards honor faculty for outstanding teaching of undergraduates. A committee of retired faculty selected the recipients after receiving nominations from department heads, deans, alumni and students.

Awards will also go to the 2007 Alumni Professors, a group of faculty who receive five-year non-renewable professorships that are sponsored by the Auburn Alumni Association with funds endowed from Auburn Annual Giving. These awards are presented for research, publishing and teaching.

President Jay Gogue will host the event, and Norman Godwin of the College of Business will be master of ceremonies.

Auburn gets NSF grant to join universities in wireless group

The National Science Foundation has awarded a $250,000 grant to AU to join a consortium of universities forming the Wireless Internet Center for Advanced Technologies.

Prathima Agrawal, director of the Wireless Engineering Research and Education Center at AU, is the principal investigator on the five-year project, during which Auburn will participate in wireless research on cross-layer optimization of coexisting systems.

AU is the first university in the nation with an undergraduate degree program in wireless engineering.
President Jay Gogue examines dozens of holiday card designs developed by graphic design students over the past few weeks. A panel of faculty, students and professional staff have chosen finalists, from which the president and First Lady Susie Gogue will select four AU First Family cards for 2007. The winner and runners-up, who will be announced later, will receive a total of $2,000 in awards.

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, October 17

MEETING Staff Advisory Council, speakers include President Jay Gogue and representatives from Payroll and Employee Benefits, 3 p.m., Foy 213

Thursday, October 18

WORKSHOP Multicultural Education, “Cross Cultural Communication,” Kristen Haelz, 2 p.m., Foy 213

CEREMONY Honoring recipients of AU’s top teaching, research and outreach awards for 2007, 5 p.m., auditorium, AU Hotel

FARMERS MARKET Locally grown produce and other farm goods, 3 p.m.-6 p.m., Ag Heritage Park

Monday, October 22

NEXT AU Report

Tuesday, October 23

FACULTY SEMINAR “Learning Communities at AU,” Sharon Roberts and panel, 1:15 p.m., Foy 203, contact Biggio Center, 844-6350

DOCUMENTARY Film “Prisoners Among Us: Italian American Identity and WWII” by Michael DiLauro, 4 p.m., discussion to follow, Jule Collins Smith Museum; part of Italian American Heritage Month

Thursday, October 25

FREE CONCERT “Sounds of Auburn,” AU instrumental and vocal ensembles, 7:30 p.m., Coliseum

Art Exhibitions

BISGAIN GALLERY “Indo Indica,” India-inspired artworks by Fulbright Scholar Julia Kjelgaard, through Nov 2

JULE COLLINS SMITH MUSEUM “Tales and Stories: A Portrait of Southwestern Writers,” portraits by Finland-based photographer Curt Ruds- ter, through Nov 30; “Roger Brown: Southern Exposure,” works by a leading figure of Chicago’s Imagist Movement of the 1970s and 80s, through Jan 5

Embassy officials to speak on role of Italians in U.S.

Two officials from the Italian Embassy in Washington, D.C., will participate in a program at Auburn University’s Jule Collins Smith Museum on Tuesday, Oct. 23, as part of AU’s observance of Italian American Heritage Month.

Luigi de Sanctis, education officer at the Italian Embassy, and Joseph Lupo, president of the Council for the Promotion of the Italian Language in American Schools, will discuss the role of Italians in modern American history.

Their presentation will follow the 4 p.m. showing of the documentary film “Prisoners Among Us,” directed by Michael DiLauro, the film chronicles the assimilation of Italians into American culture from early 19th century immigration through World War II.

The film, Sanctis and Lupo will join AU professors Anthony Cadzow of Political Science and Larry Gerber of History in a panel discussion of “Italians in America: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.” Also, during their visit to Auburn, Sanctis and Lupo will meet with local educators to discuss expanding foreign language and cultural programs in local schools.

For additional information, contact Giovanna Summerfield in AU’s Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at summerg@auburn.edu or 844-6359.

Rare rainbow

A light early evening mist last Tuesday was the closest thing to actual rain to fall on Lee County in the first half of October, but it was enough to create a brief rainbow over Auburn. The rare October rainbow is seen here over the University Chapel.
Profiles in Excellence

Humor helps professor break down students’ mental barriers to science

Godzilla has a way of popping up in unexpected places, first to wreak havoc on Tokyo in 1950s movies, randomly on late-night television since the 1960s and, more recently, in biology classrooms at Auburn University.

The iconic monster of science fiction movies is one of several imaginative analogies Biological Sciences Professor Roland Dute periodically invokes to help freshman students grasp scientific principles in his core curriculum biology classes in AU’s College of Sciences and Mathematics.

“I have found the use of outrageous examples to be a useful teaching tool,” he explained. “I have had students who, years after they took one of my courses, recite an example from class with a complete understanding of the underlying biological principle.”

Godzilla is one of those analogies with staying power, as Dute learned when encountering a former student years later. The Auburn graduate shouted “Godzilla” in greeting his former freshman biology professor and then proceeded to repeat the example Dute had used to describe terrestrial food pyramids, otherwise known as food chains. In that example, he tells students to imagine many acres of rice as the bottom of the pyramid, and, above that, the population of Tokyo. At the top of the pyramid is Godzilla. “Such examples are silly but effective,” says Dute, who notes that students remember humorous examples far longer than they remember the more mundane examples in most textbooks.

Dute’s use of unorthodox examples and innovation in his lectures has helped thousands of students to grasp the complexities of the biological sciences during his 25 years on the faculty of the College of Sciences and Mathematics.

Widely recognized for the quality of his teaching by students and colleagues in the sciences at Auburn, Dute is one of two winners of the 2007 Leischuck Awards for Excellence in Teaching. Established by emeritus administrators Gerald and Emily Leischuck in 2005, the annual awards recognize the university’s best teachers, as recommended to AU’s provost and president by a committee of faculty, administrators, students and graduate students.

The other Leischuck Award recipient for 2007 is Pamela Boyd of the Department of Curriculum and Teaching in the College of Education. Boyd and Dute will be recognized — along with new Alumni professors and recipients of the university’s top awards for research and outreach — at a 5 p.m. ceremony Thursday at the AU Hotel.

Although he has taught many classes since arriving at Auburn in 1982, Dute tries to bring new material to each class session. For every hour in the classroom, he spends several outside of class reading to stay current on new technologies, theories and discoveries in the sciences. “I have to do a lot of reading to stay on top of the discipline,” Dute explained. “I find that students respond well when I introduce topics that are in the news.”

Dute’s teaching style evolved over the years as he adapted to the educational needs and learning styles of his students, who differ widely in knowledge of and appreciation for the biological sciences. Many freshmen and sophomores had limited exposure to the sciences in high school and may not see a connection between science and their life beyond college. One advantage of teaching biology courses in Auburn’s core curriculum, Dute said, is the opportunity to get students thinking about how science will affect their lives as well as their careers.

“I enjoy teaching large lecture sessions of first-semester freshmen,” he said. “Of all the biology courses, the first course is the most important in a student’s career. It is here that minds are won or lost to the science of biology.”

Early in his teaching career, Dute adjusted his teaching style to reach students with little background or interest in science. “I cover material more slowly now to give them a chance to grasp the concepts, and I use more examples to illustrate basic principles,” he said, citing the Godzilla analogy as an example of that approach to teaching difficult material. The point, he added, is not to make the example funny but to make it interesting so that the student will learn from it.

“I try hard not to leave any students behind,” Dute said. “I want them to learn the material well instead of gaining a superficial knowledge and then forgetting it after they complete the class. Basic principles are extremely important.”

M.K. Smith honored by, named head of state group

Melvin K. Smith of the Office of Career Development Services at Auburn University, has been named president of the Alabama Association of Colleges and Employers.

The association also recently presented Smith with the AACE Success Award as the Outstanding Placement Professional of 2007.

Smith is special events coordinator in Career Development Services. Before joining AU in 1989 as an alumni placement counselor, he taught in Auburn City Schools. He is a graduate of Auburn High School and holds a bachelor’s degree and two master’s degrees in education from Auburn.

The AACE is a statewide network of personnel in educational institutions, businesses, industries and government agencies working together to help Alabama’s college graduates make a successful entry into their careers. Before becoming AACE president this summer, Smith held several posts with the association and served last year as vice president for colleges.

Smith has also held several positions with the Southeastern Association of Colleges and Employers and is a past president of the Southeastern Association for Employment in Education.