Student putting plans for dental school on hold for graduate study at Oxford as Rhodes Scholar

Jordan Anderson, a senior in biomedical sciences, has been named a Rhodes Scholar for study at Oxford University in 2010, signaling first-year success for a new program to encourage Auburn students to apply for the nation’s most prestigious scholarships and fellowships.

Anderson is a pre-dentistry student from Roanoke, Va., with a 3.91 grade point average, and he is captain of Auburn’s NCAA national championship swim team.

He has also been an undergraduate research fellow in the College of Sciences and Mathematics, a coach at swim camps, leader of a weekly Bible study and a volunteer with several foundations and campaigns for medical research and relief.

Among the most prestigious awards for seniors and new graduates of American colleges and universities, the Rhodes Scholar program selects 32 students in the United States each year for graduate study at Oxford University in England.

The Rhodes Scholars program, the oldest international fellowship, was created in 1902 with a bequest from philanthropist Cecil Rhodes. Through a rigorous selection process, students must demonstrate high academic attainments, personal integrity and high moral character, leadership and the ability to use one’s talents to the fullest.

Jordan Anderson receiving the Rhodes Scholarship demonstrates the quality and caliber of student that Auburn University attracts to its academic programs,” said Provost Mary Ellen Mazey. “We are proud of Jordan and his academic and athletic accomplishments and know he will represent Auburn with distinction as he pursues his educational career at Oxford University.”

Anderson will study in Oxford’s global health sciences program as part of a long-range plan to participate in medical mission trips in the United States and abroad. While a student at Auburn, he was named an “Unsung Hero” by the Virginia Health Care Foundation for assisting his hometown dentists in extending dental care to low-income families.

“The long-term goal is to give me a better understanding of the problems in countries that I want to one day work in,” Anderson said. “With the help of a future dental degree, I’d like to develop medical solutions from a dental perspective.”

He is the fourth person from Auburn to be selected for the highly competitive award. Previous winners were Hugh Long, Ed Gentle and Susan Karamanian.

Auburn’s National Prestigious Scholarships Program, which was launched in fall 2008, played a key advisory role in guiding Anderson through the selection process. Although within the Honors College, the program is available to all high-achieving students, whether they are in the Honors College or not.

“Jordan’s winning the Rhodes Scholarship is a brilliant testimony to the tremendous commitment our university’s leadership has been making in recent years to foster the richest and most profound academic experience possible on a college campus,” said Honors College Director Jim Hansen.

“It’s a tribute to the administration, the faculty and staff, Jordan’s fellow students and to our Board of Trustees,” Hansen continued. “But most of all, of course, it’s a tribute to the extraordinary character and extraordinary abilities of Jordan Anderson, himself, and to the values his family nurtured in him.”

Paul Harris, associate director for national prestigious scholarships, said Anderson initially sought guidance during the summer in applying for a scholarship to dental school.

Upon viewing the scholar-athlete’s credentials, Harris suggested Anderson expand his horizon. “We all felt that Jordan exemplified the ideal of the Rhodes Scholarship and was a worthy candidate,” Harris said.

“He had excelled in academics, in undergraduate research, in sports and in public service,” Harris recalled. Although those qualifications made the COSAM student an ideal candidate, Anderson faced a rigorous selection process as competitive as any he had encountered as either a student or an athlete: A regional selection committee had narrowed a list of qualified candidates to 12 finalists from Alabama, Tennessee and Florida, but only two scholarships would be awarded from the district.

In addition to his letter of application to the Rhodes Trust and letters of nomination and support from faculty members and others, Anderson prepared for two rigorous days of interviews with the selection committee by attending interview sessions with Auburn faculty members, administrators and others, including 1975 Rhodes Scholar Ed Gentle.
Campus Calendar

CHANGE IN PUBLICATION SCHEDULE DURING DECEMBER, the Auburn Report departs from its regular two-week publication schedule due to the approaching end of fall semester. Look for the next Auburn Report on Friday, Dec. 11, instead of Dec. 18, graduation day. The Dec. 11 edition will be the final issue of fall semester. The first edition of spring semester will be delivered on Jan. 15.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 5
CONCERTS Tiger Strings community youth orchestra, 4 p.m., Choir Room, Goodwin Music Building; Auburn University/Community Orchestra conducted by Howard Goldstein, 7:30 p.m., Telfair Peet Theatre

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 9
FINAL EXAMS Also Dec. 10, 11, 14 and 15
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11
FINAL Auburn Report of fall semester
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 18
GRADUATION 2 p.m., Beard-Eaves-Memorial Coliseum

MONDAY, DECEMBER 21
HOLIDAY BREAK Offices closed until Monday, Jan. 4; classes resume Monday, Jan. 11

TUESDAY, JANUARY 12
MEETING University Senate, 3 p.m., auditorium, Broun Hall

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15
FIRST Auburn Report of spring semester

MONDAY, JANUARY 18
HOLIDAY Observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Road to Rhodes Scholarship

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All the Auburn participants provided feedback and offered encouragement, Harris said.

Anderson said many people played a role in helping him win the honor. “I would not have made it this far without the help of the Auburn education I’ve received and the great and influential people at this university that have helped me obtain this level of maturity.”

In his home college, Sciences and Mathematics, Associate Dean and Professor Larry Wit said Anderson has excelled in many areas. “There are no easy courses and no easy semesters in his major; two to three science courses per semester is the norm. How Jordan has been able to maintain such a spectacular GPA while being involved in so many other things is a testimony to his unusual intellect and remarkable time management skills. He personifies the goals to which all college students should aspire. That is, to excel academically while complementing academics with other worthwhile activities.”

Wit noted that Sciences and Mathematics Dean Stewart Schneller had predicted that one of the college’s students would be named a Rhodes Scholar. “In the recent past, Dean Schneller has encouraged COSAM to imagine lofty goals both individually and collectively. One of the examples he used was to imagine a COSAM student traveling to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. Imagination has now become reality, and Jordan is the realization of what we had only previously dared imagine.”

Athletic Director Jay Jacobs added, “Jordan is an accomplished scholar and a tremendous competitor in the pool. He embodies all of the Rhodes Scholar criteria, including scholastic attainment, use of his athletic talents to the fullest, strong character and an instinct to lead.”

Anderson’s head swimming and diving coach said the entire team was pulling for him. “I am so happy for Jordan,” Coach Brett Hawke said. “This is an amazing accomplishment, and I’m very proud to have him as the team captain and leader in the classroom and in the pool. He is a fantastic kid and is very deserving.”
Profiles in Excellence

Students, graduates, colleagues say professor’s extra effort helps students beat the odds in class, careers

A common theme emerges when students, former students and colleagues describe the teaching style of Mechanical Engineering Professor Sushil Bhavnani: He goes the extra mile to ensure that students understand concepts and gives them confidence to enter the professional world.

Bhavnani has been a faculty member in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering since 1987. He has received many top teaching awards while at Auburn, including an Alumni Professorship from 2003-08 and the 2001 Walker Superior Teaching Award, formerly known as the Birdsong Teaching Award, the highest honor awarded an engineering professor at Auburn. In 1992, Bhavnani was the first assistant professor at Auburn to receive the Birdsong award.

This year, Bhavnani has been selected as one of two recipients of Auburn’s Gerald and Emily Leischuck Endowed Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching, the university’s highest teaching honor. The other recipient was Mary Mendonca of the College of Sciences and Mathematics.

Nominating Bhavnani for the Leischuck Award was Quina Distinguished Professor Jeff Suhling, chair of the Department of Mechanical Engineering. In describing Bhavnani’s widely acclaimed teaching performance, Suhling wrote: “He is outstanding in the classroom; goes above and beyond in service to the department, college, university and community; and is a well-recognized researcher. At the same time, he is a national leader for change and improvement in engineering education.”

Dayne Aldridge, a former Auburn professor and dean emeritus of engineering at Mercer University, worked with Bhavnani to develop an interdisciplinary teaming course to teach students skills in interpersonal relationships, crisis management and objectivity in response to engineering accreditation guidelines that emphasized the importance of teaching students to work collaboratively. “Throughout the project, he kept the best interest of the students in focus and offered innovative approaches to specific pedagogical needs,” said Aldridge. “His contribution to the project was outstanding.”

Colleagues say Bhavnani has also completed significant research to introduce and maintain technology in the classroom. Through long-term collaboration with researchers from the universities of Maryland and Minnesota, he has been instrumental in developing a course on thermal management of electronics, the first live full-duplex internet course taught at any of the partner universities. The course is now in use at several universities, including Georgia Tech and Villanova.

Bhavnani received the 2008 ASME Clock Award for outstanding contributions in research regarding thermal management of electronics. While making strides as a researcher, Bhavnani says his main focus is on students. “Students must gain enough confidence to enable them to tackle problems dealing with course content,” he said. “Rather than overwhelm the course content with bells and whistles, I strive to insert modern technological innovations wherever I feel they will not detract from the primary mission of teaching.”

Instead of viewing students as the only ones with expectations placed upon them, Bhavnani says professors share a responsibility to students. One is to make the course interesting by using question-and-answer frameworks to introduce new material, replying to all student questions politely and using effective communication techniques to respond. “An enthusiastic presentation of the material serves to help the learning process,” he said.

Bhavnani said students need and deserve consistent behavior from teachers. “This is an extremely challenging task,” he said. “It requires consistency in the classroom, in the level of difficulty of tests and homework assignments, grading and in individual discussions in office hours.”

This focus on student success in learning difficult material is echoed in former students’ responses to Bhavnani’s nomination. “He was a constant guide, mentor and friend,” said 2007 graduate Michael Taylor. “He encouraged me to take on tasks even if I was unsure of myself, and by doing so, he helped me gain the self-confidence to tackle problems, even if I didn’t know where to start.”

Daniel Pate, who studied under Bhavnani as an undergraduate and graduate student, testifies to the success of Bhavnani’s teaching methods. “While working together on projects, he cheers students on with a reluctant hands-off approach, but if they get too close to the edge, he will nudge them back in the right direction,” said Pate. “He believes in his students and their own abilities to overcome obstacles; he encourages their self-sufficiency.”

Bhavnani’s attempts paid off for Rory Jones, who graduated in 2003 with a bachelor’s degree in mechanical engineering: “Much of his praise can be attributed to his preparedness, not only toward his classroom lecture, but also in guiding his students. Dr. Bhavnani has an uncanny ability to capture the students’ attention and bring forth the best of their abilities.”

Besides being a student advocate in the classroom, Bhavnani serves students as the academic adviser for more than 700 undergraduate mechanical engineering students. He took the position 11 years ago in response to an overwhelming need in the department. “Bhavnani attempts to understand students’ needs and proactively provide administrative help,” said Suhling. “He takes great pride in providing this service.”

In coordination with academic advising, Bhavnani also serves on the General Engineering Scholarship Committee. “He is very fair and accomplishes his tasks of awarding scholarships to mechanical engineering students in the fairest way possible,” said Mary Lynn Saidla, coordinator of scholarship programs for the College of Engineering.

Bhavnani is also the director of the Sol of Auburn Team that is currently in the process of building a biofuel-solar-electric hybrid commuter vehicle named TIGER, an acronym for Transporter Transportation Integrating Green Energy Resources. He serves on the advisory board of the Office of Sustainability, has served on the Auburn Presidential task force on general education and currently serves on sub-committees of the Alabama State Permanent Joint Legislative Committee on Energy at its state headquarters in Montgomery.

Former students say Bhavnani’s student-focused approach to teaching difficult subjects helped prepare them for challenging careers. “His classes are very rigorous and require a high level of student participation,” said 2003 mechanical engineering graduate Matt Varagona. “Both classes I took were excellent learning experiences — they not only taught the subject matter, but also encouraged the kind of analytical thought that is required of an engineer.”

“I attempt to educate every student in the class,” said Bhavnani. “The material presented is done so from the students’ point of view and at a level most conducive to their learning.”

Saying he feels a responsibility for students’ success in learning and retaining the materials he presents, Bhavnani added, “It is more important to teach rather than merely inform.”

— Cassity Hughes
To support local relief agencies

United Way asks for help from campus community

Campus volunteers are making a final appeal for contributions to the 2009 United Way campaign before the end of fall semester and the onset of the holidays.

As of Dec. 1, the campus campaign had received more than $130,000 in pledges and donations, approximately 93 percent of the campaign’s goal. The campus campaign is a major part of the Lee County United Way campaign, which is seeking $1 million for the support of local charities and nonprofit social services.

College of Business Professor Bill Sauser, chair of the campus campaign, said the campaign needs less than $10,000 to reach its goal in an economy hurt by recession. He noted that each year some faculty and staff members make or increase their donations after Thanksgiving. Beneficial even in good years, those final commitments are especially important this year, he said.

“I know how much Auburn people care about their fellow citizens, and I appreciate the generosity they continue to display as they give to support United Way,” he said. Asking members of the campus community to submit or increase their gifts, Sauser said, “During this time of economic distress, the need is severe.”

The campus campaign becomes more critical for the countywide campaign this year due to the closing of the county’s largest manufacturer, BFGoodrich, which in the past accounted for up to 20 percent of Lee County United Way support.

The tire plant closing and related job losses during the economic recession have added to demand for aid from local relief agencies funded by the campaign. In mid-November, the county campaign was at approximately 60 percent of its goal, leaving 33 local organizations with the prospect of significant cuts in their budgets at a time of increasing need for their services.

Repeating for emphasis statements he made at the start of the 2009 campus campaign, Sauser said, “Even in more prosperous times, these local agencies do a world of good for young people, the elderly and less fortunate in our midst.”

He added, “In times like these, many people who have been part of the giving community in the past are not only no longer able to give, but are, themselves, hurting and in need. If we don’t act together to help our neighbors, who will?”

Auburn University/Community Orchestra, Tiger Strings youth orchestra to present free concerts on Saturday

Auburn faculty and students will lead and participate in two free musical concerts Saturday.

Tiger Strings, a community youth orchestra sponsored by the music education program, will perform at 4 p.m. in the Choir Room of the Goodwin Music Building. The program, in its first year, features children in grades 3 through 12 in local schools.

The youth orchestra will perform folk, baroque and Celtic musical selections. The Tiger Strings director is Kathy King, a music education graduate assistant in the College of Education.

At 7:30 p.m. in Telfair Peet Theatre, the Auburn University/Community Orchestra, led by Howard Goldstein, will present the winners of its 2009 Concerto Competition.

Featured soloists for the evening performance are Jordan Hatford on piano, Pedro Paz on horn, Courtney White on clarinet and Wesley Ballew on piano.

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