Auburn joins forces with Southern Union to offer GED classes for underemployed

Auburn University and Southern Union State Community College have joined forces to help educationally disadvantaged members of the community improve their education and employment prospects.

Through a partnership with Southern Union, Auburn has opened a Graduate Equivalency Diploma program that will be housed in Wallace Hall, with courses offered free of charge on a first-come, first-served basis. The GED program will open educational and employment opportunities to area residents who lack high school diplomas.

James Witte, an associate professor and coordinator of the adult and higher education program in Auburn’s College of Education, said the GED program will make a profound difference in the lives of those who choose to enter it. While Auburn’s unemployment rate is low – 7.9 percent in September, according to the U.S. Department of Labor – in comparison to many other communities, Witte said many individuals with jobs may be underemployed as the result of not having obtained a high school diploma.

“‘It’s an opportunity to develop a stronger workforce and, for those who participate, will provide the gateway into further skill training at Southern Union, the opportunity to pursue higher education, or just to complete a high school diploma,” Witte said.

GED program

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Gingerbread campus

An emerging holiday tradition in Auburn is the gingerbread village at The Hotel at Auburn University, which hotel staff members place in the lobby each December. Two of the hallmark structures are the University Chapel, above at left, and Samford Hall with Santa on top, above at right. Chefs at Ariccia contribute a new building or two each year. For a look at this year’s major addition to the campus gingerbread collection, see Page 2. The village will be on display through Christmas and New Year’s.

DOD grant boosts fuel-filter research in College of Engineering

The Office of Naval Research in the U.S. Department of Defense has awarded a $3.2 million grant to the Center for Microfibrous Materials Manufacturing in Auburn’s Samuel Ginn College of Engineering to study and develop advanced air filters for fuel cell systems.

“Fuel cells are more sensitive to trace levels of common airborne contaminants than human lungs are to nerve gas,” said Bruce Tatarchuk, the center’s director and a professor in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering’s Department of Chemical Engineering. “They require filters with high efficiency to bring contaminants down to undetectable levels.”

To effectively remove airborne contaminants, fuel cell filters must operate efficiently while also allowing air to pass through them with a minimal drop in pressure. Tatarchuk believes this research in fuel cell filtration can also be used to develop improved filters for homes and offices, creating jobs in Alabama, as well as the potential for new technologies and services.

Drawbacks often found with traditional high efficiency filters are their high initial cost and maintenance requirements.

“There are significant electricity costs associated with the power required by HVAC systems to pull air through the filters, whether inside an Alabama home, school or business,” Tatarchuk said. He noted that enhanced filters can also improve air quality, reducing airborne contaminants that cause allergies and respiratory diseases.

“Better air filtration eliminates the root causes rather than our current focus, which is on treating the symptoms of these respiratory ailments,” Tatarchuk said. “Our goal is to provide a healthier environment and save money at the same time.”

Tatarchuk’s center has also developed remote sensors to monitor these filters and notify users when they should be replaced.

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GED program

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high school education as a matter of self-improvement,” Witte said. “This is an opportunity to progress.”

Evening courses will be taught each Thursday by Southern Union staff member Georgia Love, who graduated from Auburn with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in collaborative teacher education. Coursework will be tailored to each student based on the results of aptitude tests. Witte said the GED program will likely offer courses two nights per week during the spring 2012 semester.

Sheri Downer, head of the College of Education’s Department of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Technology, described Auburn’s role in the venture as “teaching the teachers how to effectively teach GED content to students.”

A U.S. Census community survey conducted from 2005-09 found that 92.8 percent of Auburn residents ages 25 and over have a high school degree or above. However, the lifetime earning potential of those individuals who fall into the 7.2-percent of have-nots is far lower. The National Center for Education Statistics has reported that the average median income for individuals ages 18-67 who had not completed high school was approximately $23,000 in 2008, compared to $42,000 for individuals in the same age range who possessed at least a high school diploma or GED.

“The job you get or the profession you pursue depends on your skill, your ability, your self-motivation and your willingness to bring a viable service to the workplace,” Witte said.

Individuals who are interested in enrolling in the GED program may contact Witte at 844-3054 or witteje@auburn.edu or Derika Griffin, director of adult education at Southern Union State Community College, at 745-6437, ext. 5339 or dgriffin@suscc.edu.

— Troy Johnson

Materials research

Continued from Page 1

“Condition-based maintenance is a far more efficient strategy than routine maintenance, which invariably changes air filters too early or too late in their life cycle,” Tatarchuk said.

The Center for Microfibrous Materials Manufacturing was founded at Auburn in 1996. Researchers are developing fibers that can entrap microscopic particles and evaluating their potential for new technologies that have commercial as well as defense uses.

The center, which supports research conducted by the Auburn’s Department of Chemical Engineering, is working with two Alabama business partners, IntraMicron Inc. of Auburn and Quality Filters Inc. of Robertsdale, to conduct the project.

Defense-related research has widespread interest in Congress. Tatarchuk said U.S. Rep. Jo Bonner of Mobile has been especially supportive of Auburn’s research in air filtration technologies for the Navy.

— Sally Credille
Agriculture, Athletics collaboration

Researchers look for the ideal grass for athletic fields

At Auburn University’s Turfgrass Research Unit south of campus, plant scientist Scott McElroy is putting five bermudagrass sports turf samples through the wringer to generate data which can help high school, college and pro athletic field managers determine which of the many hybrid varieties available will perform best on their fields.

Bermudagrasses have a number of desirable attributes — their fine texture, density, drought tolerance, vigorous growth and color retention — that make them the turfgrasses of choice on sports fields in the South. But at the top of the best-trait list are excellent wear tolerance and quick recovery from injury.

“We’re evaluating several of the different characteristics in this project, but our main focus is on how well each one stands up against heavy traffic and how quickly it bounces back from the damage,” McElroy said.

McElroy, who is an associate professor in the Department of Agronomy and Soils, and graduate research assistant Philipe Aldahir launched the study last spring, laying side-by-side plots of five varieties that include Tifway 419, a classic cultivar that has been covering athletic fields for more than four decades, along with four newer sports turf varieties: TifSport, TifGrand, Celebration and Patriot.

At Jordan-Hare Stadium this fall, the Auburn Tigers played their home games on Tifway, but Eric Kleypas, manager of all varsity sports fields on campus, said that while Tifway is the standard-setter in sports turf, the research McElroy is conducting will help him determine whether there is something better out there.

“Traffic tolerance and recuperative ability are my major concerns, and one of these other varieties may prove to outperform Tifway in those and other characteristics,” Kleypas said. “But installing sports turf is very expensive, more than $2 a square foot, so obviously I can’t put some newer variety down just to see if it works.”

“This study to simulate play on a football field on a small scale will give us solid information to make that kind of decision,” he said. The project is a research collaboration between the College of Agriculture and the Athletics Department.

In the project, McElroy and Aldahir are replicating the abuse that a football field endures during a three-hour battle between two teams of 250- and 300-pound athletes with an “athlete traffic simulator,” a souped-up version of a walk-behind machine used on golf courses as a greens aerator. The researchers say that, with their modifications, the traffic mimicker simulates both the pounding and the shearing of a cleated athletic shoe and puts down the same number of cleat marks that would occur between the hash marks in a single NFL game.

“With the traffic simulator, one pass across and back over the research plot is the equivalent of one NFL game,” Aldahir said. “We have a control section that the machine hasn’t touched and a section each at one, three and five games a week.”

The multiple-game trials are important because, though Auburn and other college and university and pro teams play at home once a week at most, the research applies to all levels of athletics, from the NFL down to high schools and municipalities.

“One high-school field, you’re going to have the varsity, junior varsity and younger football teams playing on it, the marching band both during the game and in practice and whatever else comes along,” McElroy said. “Those field managers can use the data we collect here this year and over the next two to three years to decide which cultivars are most wear-tolerant and best suited to their locations.”

In addition to wear and tear, McElroy and Aldahir are evaluating the five cultivars on traits such as color intensity, heat tolerance, how quickly they green up, how long they stay green and how well they handle both overseeding with ryegrass as the weather turns cooler and, come spring, the methods used to kill the ryegrass. They also are looking at shade tolerance, McElroy said, because bermudagrasses typically require six to eight hours of direct sunlight a day, but the designs of many college and professional stadiums leave large portions of the fields in shade.

— Jamie Creamer

Museum exhibition to feature works of leading African-American artists


The exhibition features a range of works from the private collection of African-American art amassed by Arthur Primas, a Texas resident and prominent entertainment manager.

The display includes 75 paintings, sculpture, drawings and prints by more than 30 artists and spans a period of 150 years. Highlighting artwork by Benny Andrews, Richmond Barthé, Romare Bearden, Elizabeth Catlett, Sam Gilliam, Jacob Lawrence, Howardena Pindell and Hale Woodruff, among others, who explored themes of the universal quest for freedom and its impediments.

“Until recently, art history curricula and literature did not give adequate recognition to African-American artists,” said Dennis Harper, the museum’s curator of collections and exhibitions. “Now these artists are widely acknowledged for their creativity, achievements and considerable contributions to the history of American art.”

Primas said he considers himself the guardian rather than the owner of the collection. He says that he has benefitted deeply from the lessons of the art and its makers, considers it a valuable experience worth sharing and has made the collection available for travel.

“Promises of Freedom” is organized by Landau Traveling Exhibitions and The Heritage Gallery in Los Angeles.

Programs and events to complement the exhibition are scheduled to begin Jan. 19 at 6 p.m. with a lecture by Primas and continuing through early March with lectures, poetry readings, gallery talks and theatrical and musical performances.

— Colleen Bourdeau

Silent reminder

As homeowners in the city repair houses damaged by the Nov. 16 tornado that passed through Auburn at mostly treetop level, a lone pine, now topless, near the College of Veterinary Medicine bears silent witness to the destructiveness of even an F2 tornado. Fortunately for those in the path of the storm, the losses were confined to property damage.

Jeff Etheridge, Photographic Services
More than 1,500 to receive degrees during fall graduation on Monday

Auburn University will award 1,575 academic degrees during two fall graduation ceremonies Monday, Dec. 12, in Auburn Arena.

The 10 a.m. ceremony will include the colleges and schools of Architecture, Design and Construction; Engineering; Forestry and Wildlife Sciences; Liberal Arts; Nursing; and Sciences and Mathematics. The 2 p.m. ceremony will be held for the colleges and schools of Agriculture; Business; Education; and Human Sciences. The ceremonies can be viewed live through the university’s website at www.auburn.edu/graduationlive.

Of the degrees Auburn will award, 1,216 are bachelor’s degrees, 275 are master’s degrees, 77 are doctorates and seven are educational specialist degrees.

The College of Liberal Arts will award the most bachelor’s degrees with 288, followed by the College of Business with 268 and Samuel Ginn College of Engineering with 177. The College of Education will award 136 degrees; College of Sciences and Mathematics, 110; College of Human Sciences, 80; College of Architecture, Design and Construction, 66; College of Agriculture, 57; School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences, 19; and Office of the Provost, 15 degrees in interdisciplinary university studies.

Engineering Professor Emeritus Black produces 11th edition of textbook

J T. Black, professor emeritus in the Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering, has edited the 11th edition of “DeGarmo’s Materials and Processes in Manufacturing,” the leading textbook on manufacturing processes.

The book was originally published in 1957 by E. Paul DeGarmo. The new edition includes a chapter on lean engineering. Black’s co-editor, Ron Kohser, is a professor of metallurgy at the Missouri University of Science and Technology.

Summerfield appointed to associate dean post in College of Liberal Arts

Giovanna Summerfield has been named the associate dean for educational affairs in the College of Liberal Arts. Summerfield had served as director of arts and faculty initiatives for the college since September 2010.

She was instrumental in the implementation of the Language Across the Curriculum program and in securing an Italian government grant for the Italian Studies program in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, where she served as undergraduate advisor of Italian Studies and faculty advisor of the Italian Club.

Hankins appointed as head of Office of Contracts and Grants Accounting

Larry Hankins has been promoted to director of Contracts and Grants Accounting in the University Business Office. Hankins previously served for 11 years as the assistant director of the department.

Hankins holds an undergraduate degree in accounting from Purdue University and an MBA from the University of Alabama in Birmingham. He was employed by Energen before coming to Auburn University as the assistant director.

Succeeding Hankins as assistant director is Regina Bailey, who previously served as accounting manager. Bailey, who holds an accounting degree from Auburn, joined the Business Office as an accountant from Knology in 2002.