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Touch of spring
Dogwoods add an elegant touch of spring to this scene photographed last week in Samford Park by Jeff Etheridge of AU Photographic Services.

Human Sciences plays major role in state’s initiative to strengthen families

Auburn’s College of Human Sciences is playing a major role in the Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative, an inter-agency, statewide effort to strengthen communities by strengthening relationships and supporting family stability.

The Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative unites government officials, educators, social services professionals, civic leaders and others in community programs to help couples and families cope with the economic, social and interpersonal stresses that often lead to divorce or other family crises.

As one of the first states to organize a statewide initiative under a nationwide effort supported by the Bush administration, Alabama is charting a new course in family and marriage programs, said Francesca Adler-Baeder, who coordinated a recent meeting in Auburn of the Alabama Healthy Marriage Initiative Steering Committee.

Adler-Baeder, an assistant professor of human development and family studies, said the academic aspects of the initiative will serve two functions. One is to promote research-based outreach by social-service and other organizations that help strengthen stability in couples and families. The other is to get research-based information directly to individuals and families through web-based sources or agency distribution.

The Alabama initiative draws heavily upon research in the College of Human Sciences and other academic areas at Auburn and other universities across the state, said Adler-Baeder, who is also a human development and family studies specialist with the Alabama Cooperative Extension System.

Adler-Baeder said civic leaders and others outside the academic community look to scholars for information on the best practices in counseling.

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Squeezed by seemingly conflicting demands, colleges and universities around the world are finding innovative ways to produce higher quality graduates and research at less cost, according to a new book of essays co-edited by an AU authority on higher education.

“In Becoming a Productive University: Strategies for Reducing Costs and Increasing Quality in Higher Education,” James Goccia, director of AU’s Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, and Judith E. Miller of Clark University in Massachusetts present 37 essays from others in their field discussing ways in which colleges and universities are adapting to the changing demands of a 21st century global society. The 384-page book is published by Anker Publishing Co. of Rosetown.

“Higher education is in trouble around the world, not just Alabama or the United States,” said Goccia. “The book is an outgrowth of an educational leadership conference in Auburn’s College of Education. “Virtually all institutions face financial constraints and more skepticism from the public than they have in the past.”

He added, “Simply slashing costs is not a good response to changing demands because it degrades quality. Instead of improving productivity, that approach can cause long-term damage to the system.”

For instance, he says that reducing lecture halls can result in lower short-term costs but, unless steps are taken to protect quality, public support declines further and demands increase for still cost-cutting.

To counter those pressures, Goccia and Miller, associate dean for special academic initiatives at Clark University, examine the latest developments at universities that improved their quality of instruction, research or services without increasing costs.

Goccia said the book is a continuation of themes explored by the editors and writers who have explored for the past decade in their examination of major issues facing higher education. The book’s six sections propose strategies related to organization, assessment, faculty development, technology, curriculum and instruction.

The essays, which focus on undergraduate and graduate education, were written by faculty at colleges and universities around the world of different sizes and missions from all regions of the United States. Six faculty members from institutions in England and Lebanon also contributed to the book.

Goccia said public support for higher education declined in recent decades as government revenues became scarce and dire interest in other concerns, such as health care and homeland security. In tandem with shifting public priorities, he noted, lawmakers began looking to higher education to deliver on decades of promises of a high rate of return on their investment in colleges and universities.

Faculty and administrators can neither avoid the pressures of government and society nor overcome them by cost-cutting alone, he said. “Productivity is everyone’s concern,” Goccia added. “But productivity must be viewed in context as well as reducing cost or you are not going to be successful.”

Conference to examine economic challenges facing state

A conference in Montgomery on Monday, April 18, will examine challenges to Alabama’s fiscal future.

The AU Center for Governmental Services will host the conference, “Financing Alabama’s Future: Opportunities and Solutions,” at Montgomery’s Embassy Suites Hotel. The conference is the latest in the annual Conferences on Governmental Excellence and Best Practices that bring together state and local policy-makers, educators and others to discuss major issues facing the state.

This year’s conference will focus on securing Alabama’s economic stability, positioning government to capitalize on assets and building coalitions to strengthen the state’s future, said Don Tonn-Veal, associate director of the Center for Governmental Services.

“Governing magazine recently released its annual grades for state governments and Alabama got a minus overall and a C with regard to money management and overall performance,” Veal said. “In the AU Center for Governmental Services’ view, Alabama has a long way to go to compete with high performing states and revenues and revenue growth is the major engine that will power improved performance at all governmental levels — state, county, local.

Speakers include Stuart Varney, an economic and financial journalist with Fox News; Ronald Lewis, associate dean of the McWhorter Business Development Agency; Susan S. Tompkins, director of the Pew Charitable Trust’s Government Performance Project, U.S. Rep. Artur Davis of Alabama’s 7th Congressional District and Andrew Hornsby, assistant state finance director.

Upcoming Events

Tuesday, April 12

• Grand Opening: Digital Resources Lab, all day, Draughon Library. This and other events are in connection with National Library Week.
• Littleton-Franklin Lecture: Physician Oliver Sacks, author of “Awakenings,” 4 p.m., auditorium, Sciences Laboratory Center, Roosevelt Drive.

Wednesday, April 13

• Library Events: Free book repairs, Special Collections, Draughon Library. Also, poetry reading by Lee Peterson, 2 p.m.; seminar, “Assessing Journal Quality,” 3 p.m., second-floor conference room.
• Public Lecture: “Tibetan Buddhism and World Peace,” Geshe Jinpa Wangpo, 4 p.m., JCS Museum.

Thursday, April 14

• Library Events: Literacy Night, foreign languages, 10 a.m., Mell Street entrance, Draughon Library. Also, Poetry Slam, 3 p.m., JCS Museum.
• Public Lecture: “Opening the Heart: Rousing the Mind of Universal Kindness,” Geshe Jinpa Wangpo, 5 p.m., JCS Museum.

Friday, April 15

• All-State Band Festival Orientation, associate professor, Columus.
• Public Lecture: “The Symbolism of the Mandala,” Geshe Lobsang Tersens, 1 p.m., JCS Museum.
• Concert: AU Gospel Choir, 5 p.m., Victory World Prayer Center, Shelton Mill Road.

Sunday, April 17

• Concert: AU Concert Choir, Men’s and Women’s Choirs, 2:30 p.m., Lakeview Baptist Church, East University Drive.
• Next AU Report, April 18.
**Human Sciences**

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“Information and education can play a major role in helping families overcome or prevent problems.”

Doug Hankes, associate director of Student Counseling Services, was recently elected to the executive board of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology. Hankes will be responsible for the organization’s newsletter and its web site and research journal, Journal of Applied Sport Psychology.

The AAASP is a 1,200-member international organization of educational, clinical and counseling sport psychologists. Applied sport psychology involves extending theory and research into the field to educate coaches, athletes and parents.

**Authors to discuss women’s finances**

Authors Candace Bahr and Ginita Wall, co-founders of the Women’s Institute for Financial Education, will be the keynote speakers April 25 at the spring 2005 symposium of the Women’s Philanthropy Board in the College of Human Sciences.

The symposium is from 9 a.m.-2 p.m. at AU’s Dixon Conference Center.

The Women's Institute for Financial Education is the oldest nonprofit organization of its type in the United States. Among their other activities, Bahr and Wall are authors of “It’s More Than Money—It’s Your Life!”

June Henton, dean of the College of Human Sciences, said the two women have national reputations as financial experts. “Each brings a wealth of experience and information, especially regarding the financial and philanthropic endeavors of women.”

Other speakers include Diane Mooney, founder of Southern Living at Home, who will speak at the luncheon.

Symposium tickets are $50 per person. Contact Sidney James Nakljavan at 844-9199.

**In ‘Comedy of Errors,’ theatre presents the Bard for Trekkies**

AU Theatre will close out its 2004-05 season this month with a play that will be familiar to fans of both Shakespeare and “Star Trek.”

The text remains true to the 16th century original in “The Comedy of Errors,” at Telfair Peet Theatre on April 20-23 and 26-30. But, in a melding of classic literature and pop culture, the theatre company has changed the setting for William Shakespeare’s first comedy from ancient Ephesus in Asia Minor to a futuristic space station modeled on those in the “Star Trek” television series and motion pictures.

Although Shakespeare wrote his plays in the late 1500s and early 1600s and usually set them centuries earlier, several motion pictures have changed the setting to more modern times. The AU play carries the process a step further.

Dan LaRocque, director of the AU production, said, “The Comedy of Errors” is the ideal candidate for a science fiction setting. Shakespeare describes the town of Ephesus as having a reputation for strange and magical citizens and behaviors. LaRocque notes, adding that the story, like many in science fiction, involves a quest.

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“A major theme in the play has to do with a quest a character makes in alien territory to find a lost brother and mother and restore harmony and wholeness to individuals, families and even the larger society,” said LaRocque.

“I have been a big ‘Star Trek’ fan since I was a kid, so it was not much of a leap for me to find resonance between this particular play and the sci-fi world we all now recognize, whether we are Trekkies or not,” he added.

“This seemed like a great opportunity to frame the play in a familiar context without completely reworking Shakespeare’s text,” LaRocque said. “It has been really fun in fact to discover just how well the play works pretty much just as he wrote it, in a world inhabited by Vulcans, Forngii and Bolians instead of the ancient citizens of Ephesus.”

Curtain time is 7:30 p.m. for all performances. For ticket information, call the AU Theatre Box Office at 844-4154.

**Hankes elected to association post**

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