James T. Morris, executive director of the United Nations World Food Programme, will present a public lecture Thursday at the AU Hotel as part of the College of Agriculture’s E.T. York Distinguished Lecture Series.

Morris will participate in a public reception at 5:45 p.m. and will speak at 7 p.m. on “Auburn, Institutions of Higher Learning and the Fight against Global Hunger.”

As head of the World Food Programme, Morris oversees the world’s largest humanitarian organization, which last year fed 104 million people in 81 countries. The WFP aids victims of war and natural disasters, school children in poor communities, families affected by HIV/AIDS and orphans who have lost their parents to the pandemic.

In July 2002, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan appointed Morris as the U.N.’s special envoy for humanitarian needs in southern Africa, a region gripped by a major food emergency. Then, in 2003, Morris guided the WFP in feeding 27 million Iraqis, an effort that officials described as the largest humanitarian operation in history.

Auburn’s connection to the World Food Programme grew out of discussions between faculty in the College of Human Sciences and officials at the U.N. agency. Those discussions led in 2004 to the agency selecting AU as its lead partner in efforts to establish a model for a student-led War on Hunger campaign on college campuses nationwide.

At AU, the campaign is directed by The Committee of 19, a student group that derives its name from the 19 cents a day it takes the WFP to feed a hungry child. The Committee of 19 has sponsored many events to draw attention to world hunger, including a World Hunger Summit held in Auburn in February. Representatives from 28 universities across the country attended the summit and agreed to form a loose alliance, Universities Fighting World Hunger, which will work to build strong hunger initiatives on all campuses involved.

The College of Agriculture established the lecture series in 1981 through an endowment from Auburn alumni E.T. and Vam Cardwell York. E.T. York was head of the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service from 1959-62. He also served as chancellor of the State University System of Florida from 1975 until his retirement in 1980.
Public input sought on parking

The AU Office of Campus Planning and the AU Department of Parking and Transit Services, will jointly host three 90-minute public forums on meeting parking needs at AU. “We want to hear the good and the bad. We want to understand the current campus culture,” she said. “The input will be used to help us chart a course for the future,” Love added.

She noted that an updated plan for campus parking will have to consider information about the changing needs and patterns for vehicle and pedestrian traffic brought about by the new pedestrian corridors and major construction projects, such as the new student center, that will be completed in the next two years.

Chris Keeter joins AU this week as director of public affairs. Keeter comes to Auburn from the U.S. Department of Transportation where he served as the Federal Highway Administration’s associate administrator for public affairs since 2004. In that position, he developed and implemented communication strategies for the federal agency and served as its spokesperson.

“We’re pleased that Brian has decided to return to Auburn and direct the university’s public affairs efforts,” said AU President Ed Richardson.

“We were looking for someone with a very special set of skills coupled with an extensive knowledge of Auburn and Brian possesses both,” Richardson added. “With the experience and knowledge that he brings to the position, he will be a very valuable member of the Auburn team.”

Keeter earned a bachelor’s degree in communications from Auburn, a master’s in mass communications from the University of South Carolina and an Advanced Public Relations Professional Certificate from George Washington University. Before joining the FHA, Keeter was a vice president with Powell Tate/Weber Shandwick Public Affairs in Washington, D.C.

“We were looking for someone with a very special set of skills coupled with an extensive knowledge of Auburn and Brian possesses both,” Richardson added. “We’re looking for someone with a very special set of skills coupled with an extensive knowledge of Auburn and Brian possesses both,” Richardson added. “He will be a valuable asset to the university’s communications, focusing on key presidential and institutional messages that will complement the campus-wide efforts.”

The Office of Communications and Marketing will continue to oversee the broadband electronic communications, publications, creative, marketing, broadcasting, advertising, news writing and disseminations, promotions, events and editing services for the campus. In another move, David Granger, AU’s media relations manager, is leaving the main campus after nine years to become assistant to the chancellor at Auburn University Montgomery, effective Oct. 1.

“I’m extremely pleased to have someone of David’s competence and experience join Auburn University at Montgomery’s leadership team,” said AUM Chancellor John Veres. “David will be instrumental in informing the communities we serve about the many exciting things AU and joint AU-AUM initiatives are currently undertaking. He’ll be a considerable asset to our efforts in the years ahead,” he added.

“Although this office will sorely miss David’s day-to-day skills,” said AU’s executive director of Communications and Marketing. “We will continue to work from time to time with us to increase collaboration between AU and AUM on communications activities, bringing the campuses closer and expanding the good news we both have to share.”

Keeter moves from Washington to AU as director of public affairs

A report of the huge popular Apple product is gaining quick acceptance in Auburn’s College of Business, where physicians and executives are now using Apple iPods enroute to master of business administration degrees.

This fall, students entering Executive M.B.A. and Physician Executive M.B.A. programs in the College of Business started their classes with Video iPods loaded with files containing information for use in business, including data for accounting, economics, marketing and finance.

“We strive to keep our programs on the leading edge of technology, and use the best delivery system available for our students,” said Dan Gropper, the college’s associate dean for M.B.A. programs.

“The video iPod can be loaded with lots of instructional material and then can be synchronized to their iPod so they can print out what they need.”

Material on the Video iPod is in addition to the interactive DVDs by which the cost of the course materials are delivered. Each DVD contains a full-motion video lecture; supplementary print, photo and slide materials; test and review questions; and Internet links.

An online learning platform is also used, enabling students to work with team members on group assignments, submit homework, download course materials, ask questions and hold discussions with their professors and classmates.

“Our executive programs provide the resources and a venue where we can try leading-edge concepts and explore ideas that, where appropriate, can be used across the entire curriculum,” said College of Business Dean Paul Bobrowksi.

“Our creative technology partners have done a superb job developing this platform, and we can envision some very interesting possibilities.”
New Eminent Scholar says study citing value of HR incentives fits larger view of business planning

A journal article co-authored by David Ketchen, AU’s new Lowder Eminent Scholar in the College of Business, provides one reason why some businesses consistently succeed while others briefly fly high and then crash and burn.

In the autumn issue of Personnel Psychology, Ketchen, who joined the AU faculty this summer, and three co-authors provide evidence that organizations which place a priority on their human resources function are more profitable than those that do not. On the flip side, their findings indicate that the short-term financial advantages of slashing incentive-related employee benefits are fleeting.

The findings are contained in the article “How Much Do High-Performance Work Practices Matter?” in the journal’s current issue.

While corporations sometimes need to adjust their mix of employee benefits and incentives to become more competitive, companies that invest wisely in their workers are likely to gain a long-term competitive advantage over those who slash benefits to boost short-term profits, explained Ketchen, who is a professor in the Department of Management at Auburn.

Before joining the Auburn faculty, Ketchen was a faculty member for six years at Florida State, where he teamed with James Combs, Yongmei Liu and Angela Hall to conduct a meta-analysis of 92 studies of the economic impact of human resources functions that were published in professional journals since 1985. Their statistical analysis of those studies found that employee benefits had little impact on profits when considered individually but such practices as incentive compensation, training, employee participation and other employee-centered functions can have a positive impact on profits when grouped together as part of a company’s overall human resources package.

Ketchen says the study supports the argument that the human resources function is important to a company’s bottom line. But, he adds, a company’s leaders need to choose wisely in creating a human resources package. “You cannot just introduce a new practice and expect it to make a difference,” he said. “Your human resources package needs a systematic approach, and it needs to be built around a theme that is relevant to the organization’s goals and culture.”

Chief executive officers should consider human resources as another way to boost profits rather than a necessary expense, he said. “Our study shows that human resources functions can be a strategic weapon when used wisely. Good leaders can use employee incentives and benefits to increase productivity in order to get a competitive edge in an industry.”

Ketchen said no strategy will work in every situation but carefully considered improvements in human resource packages have paid off for many organizations. The approach is most effective in the manufacturing sector, which is more structured than others, but has been shown to work well in other business sectors, such as service industries, he added.

The study of human resources is one of several key areas of interest for Ketchen, who is also an authority on franchising and entrepreneurial studies.

The management professor said those three areas are part of a larger picture of strategic decision-making and profitability. “I am interested in why some firms consistently do better than their competition,” he said. That question has intrigued Ketchen since his days as an undergraduate at Pennsylvania State University in the 1980s, when he earned money for college by delivering appliances for a major national retailer.

Literally beginning at the ground level while studying management throughout the corporate structure, Ketchen compared what he was learning in class with his experiences with the local store’s customers and supervisors. Later, as he associated with leaders at all corporate levels, Ketchen found that successful leaders share certain decision-making characteristics: They pay attention to what works well for the organization and carefully evaluate possible changes but are willing to change with the times.

When once dominant companies lose their competitive edge, the decline can usually be traced to decision-makers who failed in one or more of those areas, sometimes years earlier, Ketchen said. In such cases, the company’s leaders either failed to anticipate changing markets and stuck too long with outmoded business practices after competitors had moved on, or the leaders acted too hastily, instituting changes that fractured the company’s identity and drove away formerly loyal customers.

In worst-case situations, he noted, a chief executive officer will take a company too far in one direction and will be followed by someone who moves the company too far in the other direction. “It is easy for an organization to lose its way and hard to turn things around once that happens,” Ketchen said.

In his research and teaching, Ketchen said, a key goal is to develop and share knowledge that can help business leaders now and in the future make the right decisions.