Funding picture improving for AU

Continuing improvement in AU’s finances will enable the university to provide faculty and staff pay raises and increases for operating budgets across campus starting Oct. 1, Auburn officials said Friday. Under the 2005-06 AU System budget approved by the Board of Trustees on Friday, AU System funding will increase $46.3 million to $664.1 million. Of that amount, the main campus is budgeted to receive a $36.5 million increase to $497.4 million.

Other units will receive proportionately similar increases to $52.4 million for the Cooperative Extension System, $53.7 million for the Agricultural Experiment Station and $60.6 million for Auburn University Montgomery.

Interim President Ed Richardson said state revenues for education have increased much faster than most analysts predicted a year ago, when some analysts warned of possible proration. The state’s economy is continuing to expand, offering cautious hope for more economic improvement in Auburn’s finances next year, Richardson added.

The other factor in AU’s financial improvement is the board’s commitment to set tuition near the regional average. A combination of the latest tuition increase and a record enrollment this year is projected to add $7.5 million to AU’s budget.

Executive Vice President Don Large said the changes in AU’s tuition policy enabled Auburn to become more competitive with its peers in the Southeast and provide need-based scholarships to more students, including a $1 million additional allocation in the new budget.

Adhering to guidelines established last spring, the budget includes a 4 percent increase in funding for salary and wage increases. The increases, which will vary for each individual, will be based on merit decisions for faculty and a combination of merit and across-the-board increases for staff.

In other action, the board hired an executive search firm to assist in the search for a new president. The board selected John H. Kuhnle, managing director of Korn/Ferry International Education Practice, to work with campus groups to set a timetable and conduct the search.
Dan LaRocque, head of performance for AU Theatre, has been named interim chair of the Department of Theatre in the College of Liberal Arts.

The appointment comes amid changes in the schedule for 2005-06, including a later start to the season, the addition of a new play, moving a play from fall to winter and the offer of free season tickets to students on a first-come, first-serve basis.

LaRocque, a faculty member since 1990, succeeds Worth Gardner, who resigned as department chair after three years and is returning to professional theatrical production.

“While we are disappointed at the departure of a talent such as Mr. Gardner from the Theatre Department, we are thankful that another highly respected theatrical professional, Dan LaRocque, has stepped forward to lead the department this year,” said Liberal Arts Dean Anne-Katrin Gramberg. “We have a strong faculty in the Theatre Department, and, under Dan’s leadership, they will continue to build on the department’s reputation for quality of graduates and stage productions.”

LaRocque, who holds a master’s degree in fine arts from the University of Washington, has extensive credentials in both theatre and academia. Before joining the AU faculty, he taught at the University of the South and Iona College.

LaRocque has served as a regional chair for the Kennedy Center American College Festival and on the National Committee on Washington, D.C. He also has appeared in professional theatres throughout the country and acted in television productions, and his one-act play “Man, Woman, Flower” has been produced in New York and Los Angeles.

In other changes, to introduce Theatre to students in all disciplines, AU Theatre is providing free season tickets for this year’s productions to all students on a first-come, first-serve basis. Gramberg said the department and college are able to provide free student tickets this year with support from the President’s Office.

The Theatre Department is also adding the play “Defying Gravity,” by Jane Anderson as the first production in the 2005-06 season. The play which examines the interaction of seven fictional characters following the 1986 space shuttle Challenger disaster, will run at Peet Theatre on Oct. 18-23.

The second play of the season will be Neil LaBute’s “The Shape of Things” on Nov. 8-13. The two plays will then run in repertory on Nov. 15-18. Curtain times are at 7:30 p.m., with all Sunday performances at 2:30 p.m.

With the new fiscal year starting Oct. 1, the play originally scheduled to start the season on Sept. 27, “The Best Little Whimshouse in Texas,” has been moved to April. Other productions in the upcoming season include the modern dance review “Dance” in January and the folk play “Blue Bird” in March.

For information on tickets and schedules, contact the box office at 844-4154. Online, see http://media.ca.auburn.edu/theatre/home.cfm.
AU receives two national awards for fund-raising

AU recently received two national awards recognizing successful fund-raising efforts by Auburn’s Office of Development. Auburn was the only university to receive awards for 2005 in both categories of the Council for Advancement and Support of Education’s Circle of Excellence Program.

At its annual meeting in Miami, CASE presented AU with awards for Overall Fund-Raising Performance and Overall Fund-Raising Improvement Award among public research and doctoral institutions by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

In selecting Overall Fund-Raising Performance winners, judges recognize institutions that show solid program growth, breadth in the base of support and other indications of a mature, well-maintained program.

In selecting Overall Fund-Raising Improvement winners, judges find significant program growth across three years of data. Institutions are evaluated among 22 peer groups on the basis of size and type of institution.

Each year since 1995, CASE has recognized exceptional development programs. The awards program recognizes Overall Performance and Overall Improvement in educational fund-raising programs based on data from the Council for Aid to Education’s “Voluntary Support of Education” survey and on the basis of evaluations by a panel of experts in the field.

Agricultural festival set for campus on Saturday

Auburn’s College of Agriculture and its Agricultural Alumni Association will host their Taste of Alabama Agriculture and Fall Ag Roundup on Saturday at Ag Heritage Park.

The annual event, held across Samford Avenue from the AU Athletic Center, offers visitors a wide range of traditional and exotic food items that are grown or processed in Alabama.

Those items include sweet potato fries, collard greens and cornbread, fried catfish, chicken, pork, all-beef burgers, roast lamb, goat sausage, satsuma oranges, kiwi fruit, pecans, boiled peanuts and other usual and unusual foods.

Activities include musical entertainment, and displays will include a miniature syrup mill and cotton gin and Old Nancy, an antique steam tractor. A special children’s section will feature a petting zoo, pumpkin painting and face painting.

Festivities are from 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. and will conclude one hour before the start of AU’s homecoming football game. Admission is $5, with children 6 and under admitted free.

Faculty meet to discuss books about teaching

A faculty group is beginning its second year of meetings to discuss books on ways to improve teaching effectiveness.

The Biggio Book Group will meet in November in Draughon Library’s second floor conference room to discuss “What College Teachers Do” by Ken Bain. The book was published in 2004 by Harvard University Press.

“All the books present philosophical perspectives and provide practical, pragmatic information based on research,” said James Groccia, director of AU’s Biggio Center for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning.

“Virtually all faculty like to read, and most are constantly looking for the most effective ways to enhance teaching skills,” Groccia added. “The book group provides an opportunity for faculty to come together and share their ideas and thoughts with one another after reading some outstanding books about pedagogy.”

Last year, the discussions regularly drew faculty from Veterinary Medicine, Engineering, Pharmacy, Liberal Arts and periodically from other colleges and schools.

The meetings, which are informal and open to all faculty, will be from 5 p.m.-6:30 p.m. on Nov. 9 and noon-1:30 p.m. on Nov. 10 for discussion of Bain’s book. Faculty may attend either or both sessions, and participants bring their lunch to the noon meetings.

The book group will also meet in February and April to discuss other works on teaching enhancement. The Biggio Center offers coupons for 50 percent off on purchase of the books through AU Bookstore. For information, call 844-8530 or send e-mail to biggio1@auburn.edu.