Buskist, Lamke win first Leischuck Awards as Auburn’s best teachers

Veteran professors William Buskist of the College of Liberal Arts and Leanne Lamke of the College of Human Sciences are the first winners of a new annual award recognizing AU’s best teachers.

Interim President Ed Richardson presented the first Gerald and Emily Leischuck Endowed Presidential Awards for Excellence to Lamke and Buskist in a recent ceremony at the President’s House after they were identified as Auburn’s top teachers for 2005 by a faculty committee and Provost John Helmman.

Helmman said the awards and their first recipients bring increased recognition to teaching at Auburn. “The annual awards that Emily and Gerald Leischuck have established to honor excellence in teaching represent a visionary commitment to the instructional cornerstone of Auburn University’s academic mission,” he said.

“Auburn deeply appreciates both the Leischucks and the first recipients of their award, Leanne Lamke and Bill Buskist, who through their innovative methods have set a standard to which all of us who are devoted to teaching at Auburn can rightfully aspire,” he added.

Buskist is Alumni Professor and Distinguished Professor in the Psychology Department, where he has been a faculty member since 1982. Early in his Auburn career, Buskist expanded his studies of competition and cooperation into educational psychology with studies in the qualities and behaviors of “master teachers,” adopting some of the best practices for his own teaching. He has also conducted studies in the assessment of teaching effectiveness.

Buskist won the American Psychological Association’s Robert S. Daniel Teaching Excellence Award in 1999 and was among the first faculty members inducted when the College of Liberal Arts established its Academy of Teaching and Outstanding Teachers in 2003.

Liberal Arts Dean Anne-Katrin Gramberg said Buskist is a role model for other faculty in the college. “Bill Buskist, the teachers’ teacher, has...
AU converts financial records to new Banner System

AU has placed all its financial records in a new integrated and comprehensive online collection of records, completing the first phase of an overhaul of all AU administrative records.

The conversion to the SunGard SCT Banner System, after more than a year of development, becomes official this week with the start of the 2005-06 fiscal year.

For many of the faculty and staff who deal with financial records across campus, the change is both monumental and, after extensive training, routine, says Fred Bobo, AU’s Banner project manager.

Compared to the previous financial software programs, Bobo said, the new financial module is easier to access and navigate, establishes a common look for financial records and provides more flexibility for users in departments across campus as well as accountants and other Business Office staff.

The finance module includes purchasing, accounts payable, inventory management, cost accounting, budgeting, investment management and other financial services.

Bobo and Karen Chastain, SunGard SCT’s Auburn project manager, worked with finance team leader Melissa Morris and numerous volunteers to set up the finance module and train approximately 1,700 users across campus.

“It has been a long and complicated process but there has been a great deal of support at every level of the university and a lot of people are excited about finally having a fully integrated system for financial records,” Bobo said.

The next phase will be in Human Resources, with training sessions scheduled to start in November. For online information on the Banner System, see www.auburn.edu/banner.

AU Report Editor: Roy Summerford. Contributing editors and writers: Katie Wieder, AU Communications; Photography: Jeff Elledge and Trice Meggison, Photography Services; Assistant Vice President for Communications and Marketing: John Hachfel; Director of Communications: Deidra Downie.

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Historian sees link to Scopes trial in debate over intelligent design

Eighty years after one of the most famous court cases in American history, the teaching of evolution in public schools is again being challenged on religious grounds in school districts across the nation, with the latest case coming from Pennsylvania.

While carrying a new name, the movement labeled “intelligent design” by its supporters is essentially the same as the anti-evolution side in the 1925 case of Scopes v. Tennessee, says Charles A. Israel, author of “Before Scopes.” The book is a recently published history of the clash of cultures that led to the Scopes trial — conflicts that continue in many parts of the nation today.

“The intelligent design movement represents the evolution of creationism, and its purpose is to discredit evolution,” said Charles A. Israel, an associate professor of history at Auburn University. But, he adds, many of its backers believe that evolution, as taught in public schools, is an attempt by skeptics to discredit their religion.

If the Scopes trial were today, the great orator and Scopes prosecutor William Jennings Bryan would probably argue in support of intelligent design, said Israel, who examined the Scopes legacy in the concluding chapter of the book published by the University of Georgia Press in 2004. The current debate, as in previous encounters since the late 19th century, pits conservative religious leaders who believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible, such as Bryan in 1925 and school board members in the current Pennsylvania case, against scientists and science teachers who regard attempts to mix religion and science as bad science and bad religion.

“The classic play and movie “Inherit the Wind” leaves the impression that science teacher John Scopes won the case, destroying the anti-evolution movement. Despite a brilliant courtroom performance on his behalf by Clarence Darrow, Scopes lost his challenge to a Tennessee law barring schools from teaching about evolution. Even when the state appeals court overturned Scopes’ conviction, it allowed the law to stand. Israel said the law, which was on the books until 1967, had a chilling effect on science teaching and research in Tennessee and much of the South.

The issue was largely dormant for decades following the Scopes trial but reemerged during the Cold War as schools increased their emphasis on science education. In their opposition to the teaching of evolution, many fundamentalist Christians sought to have their local school boards require “equal time” for the biblical account of creation. When those efforts consistently failed in the courts, intelligent design arose as an alternative. In their attempt to bypass the First Amendment obstacles that blocked the teaching of creationism in the schools, advocates of intelligent design infer but usually avoid direct mention of God as the intelligent force behind the design of the universe.

Israel said the arguments on behalf of intelligent design have an advantage over earlier attempts to undercut the teaching of evolution. “The strongest appeal of intelligent design is to Americans’ sense of fairness,” said Israel. “Its supporters argue that intelligent design is another theory equal or superior to evolution, so, if you are going to teach one in a science course, why not teach the other?”

Scientists have always had a difficult time explaining the complexities of evolution to the vast majority of people who do not have a scientific background, Israel said. The problem is compounded, he said, by the difference between the popular idea of theory as unproven conjecture and scientists’ definition of theory as a testable hypothesis with substantial supporting evidence. Israel notes that each side sees the other as its enemy in the culture wars. Some Christians see teaching of evolution as an attack on their religion through their children. Skeptics in the scientific community, meanwhile, see intelligent design as a wedge to undercut science and return state-sponsored religion to public education.

“If often the question is asked whether a person believes in evolution or in God, presenting a particularly stark choice that is actually rejected by many scientists and theologians,” the Auburn faculty member said.

“Unfortunately, rich theological discussions of the role of God in nature — as well as philosophical inquiries about the nature of scientific enterprise — get lost in the simplistic binary of ‘whose side are you on: God or Darwin?’” he said, adding that most people see no need to choose between science and religion.

The historian says scientists are correct in opposing teaching of intelligent design alongside evolution in high school science courses because, unlike evolution, the theory cannot be tested scientifically. But he adds that the theory of intelligent design is a natural fit for philosophy courses, which already include the concept, if not the name, in the study of great philosophers since ancient times.