Applauding faculty
BGSU's finest recognized at annual dinner

The University honored several of its best researchers, advisers and mentors at the annual Faculty Recognition Dinner this month. Presented were two President's Awards—for Collaborative Research and Creative Work with graduate students, and for Academic Advising of Undergraduate Students by Faculty and Staff. Also given was the Elliot L. Blinn Award for Faculty-Undergraduate Student Innovative Basic Research/ Creative Work, as well as new Distinguished Adviser Awards.

In addition, Faculty Senate presented the Faculty Distinguished Service Award, and students honored their choice for the Master Teacher Award. (See story below.)

Sheri Wells-Jensen, English, and Lakshmi Pulakat, biological sciences, each received a President’s Award for Collaborative Research and Creative Work and with it, $2,500 in cash. The award recognizes innovative research and creative work by faculty members in collaboration with graduate students.

In the case of Wells-Jensen, a faculty member in the Teaching English as a Second Language program, the work was aimed at saving a dying language: Mingo, a Native American language, was once widely spoken in this area, but by the time Wells-Jensen and her collaborators launched the Language Keeper project last year, only one fluent speaker of the Ohio dialect remained. Using a series of classes and a summer language camp, the project is attempting to revive the language by entrusting small parts of it to individual members of the Mingo tribe to preserve and teach. Bevin Taylor, who graduated last May with a master’s degree in English, was among the graduate students who have worked on the project.

“Dr. Wells-Jensen was clearly the expert and we the learners, but she always included us as equals in this endeavor,” wrote Taylor in a letter nominating Wells-Jensen for the award. “We were each given the responsibility to learn certain subparts of the language, and become experts ourselves on those subparts. We were also expected to prepare language lessons and games for the Mingo people, just as Dr. Wells-Jensen did.”

Students select Gene Poor as Master Teacher

Gene Poor, visual communication and technology education, was chosen by the Student Alumni Association to receive the 2004 Master Teacher Award. Considered the highest award given to faculty, it carries a $1,000 cash prize and a plaque in the recipient’s honor.

Poor, who came to the University in 1970 as a doctoral fellow and later founded the VCTE department, is widely known for his pioneering work in the field of animatronics but equally, on campus, for his dedication to his students.

“He has such a passion in the way he teaches that you’d never get bored,” said Mary Kay Coulter, a senior from New Knoxville, Ohio, of her experience in Poor’s class. “He made me want to learn what he was teaching. And he was always willing to help students with anything they needed, even if he wasn’t their adviser.”

Poor continues to help his students even after they graduate. He is the owner of Lifeformations, an animatronics studio in Bowling Green, where about a third of the employees are BGSU graduates who have completed technology internships with the company.

The current industry experience that he brings to the classroom provides an advantage for all his students, Poor said.

Gene Poor and his student nominators

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"Her research with the Mingo community will be of benefit not only to the Mingo people and to the BGSU students who participate, but to many other indigenous language speakers and researchers around the world," Taylor added. Pulakat's nominators included several current and former graduate students, some of whom have moved on to postdoctoral positions at other universities.

Among them was Man Hoe Suh, now a research associate in molecular biology and genetics at Cornell University. "In many ways beyond the lab bench, much of my understanding came from my mentor. Within the lab, he taught me how to analyze scientific problems and how to think critically. He has always been my role model," Suh added.

"Dr. Kristie Foell's commitment to developing students' research skills as part of their undergraduate education is notable and rare," wrote her nominator, John Hetrick, economics chair. "We are indeed lucky to have her here at Bowling Green State University."

President's Awards for Academic Advising of Undergraduate Students

Kristie Foell, director of international studies and a faculty member in German, Russian and East Asian languages, and Linda Swisgood, on behalf of the College of Technology, were joint recipients of the President's Awards for Academic Advising of Undergraduate Students. As part of the award, Foell and Swisgood received $1,500.

The awards recognize individuals who have served as academic advisors and have demonstrated excellence in advising students, including their ability to communicate effectively with students, provide accurate and timely information, and the support they need to develop academic competence, as well as assistance in becoming involved in on-campus and integrating their academic curriculum with life planning.

The college has worked to establish trust and respect between students and advisors. Beginning in summer 2003, all entering freshmen and transfer students were advised in the Program Services Office by a professional advisor, a process that continued for three semesters. At-risk students were encouraged to enroll in the Peer Advising Program, which proved to be very successful.

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BG SU’s finest

Mary Ellen Benedict

Distinguished Adviser Awards

The Distinguished Adviser Awards were created in response to the Advising Plan created by the Collaborative Advising Task Force. In its report on strengthening advising at the University, the task force recommended that more incentives and recognition be given to quality faculty advising.

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The college has worked to establish trust and respect between students and advisors. Beginning in summer 2003, all entering freshmen and transfer students were advised in the Program Services Office by a professional advisor, advisor for three semesters. At-risk students were encouraged to enroll in UMB’s 100 courses, which proved to be very successful. Tactics such as periodic interventions, having evening walk-in hours and providing faculty advisor training have helped increase both the level of activity and scholarship activity. They will also be invited to a forum on advising next semester.

Writers of the inaugural Distinguished Adviser Awards were Steven Chang, geography; Diane Frey, family and consumer sciences; Jeff Holcomb, human services; Martha Torre Mazzarella, sociology; Brent Nicholson, legal studies and director of the Dallas/Hamilton Center for Entrepreneurship; Dale Schmattet, humanities; BGSU Forelands, and Charles Sottoliver, visual communication and technology education.

Mary Ellen Benedict

Kristie Feoli and Linda Swisgood

Distinguished Service Award

Arjun Gupta, Distinguished University Professor of mathematics and statistics, won the Distinguished Service Award, and with it, $1,000 and a reserved parking spot on campus for one year.

Presented by Faculty Senate, the award recognizes continuing quality contributions to the University, whether in the faculty governance process or to the learning environment. University relations and other areas that advance BGSU’s mission.

Gupta, who has taught at BGSU since 1986, was nominated for the award by his department chair. Nath Carothers. the 1996 winner of the Omicron Research Award, Guptas service to the University includes leadership as chair of the department, the Advisory Committee of the Statistics Program, and as graduate coordinator.

A prolific scholar, Gupta has been active in a number of professional organizations and editorial boards. Carothers, was, and has organized several national conferences and symposia. He has been editor or assistant editor for a number of leading journals.
Common Reading Experience author seeks emotional truth

"Truth is a complicated thing," novelist Tim O'Brien told students during his October visit to campus. "Be careful about the word 'truth.' It's not all black and white in this world of ours—there are many shades of gray."

O'Brien spent two days on campus with about 250 students in BGeXperience, UNV 100 and BG Perspective classes, in addition to giving a public lecture Oct. 20. His book, The Things They Carried, which was a finalist for both a 1990 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Critics Circle Award, was the campus Common Reading Experience this fall, so students were familiar with his work and prepared to ask questions.

Sometimes the questions were challenging, as the one that elicited the above response. "We heard that you visited another college and told the students a story that was a total lie. Why would you do that?" a young woman asked.

O'Brien explained that in his stories and his writing, he strives for emotional truth as opposed to literal truth, which can never be expressed in its totality anyway. "If it's made up, it doesn't make it any more meaningful. It's about the heart, and the emotional truth there." Or, to quote Picasso, he said, "Art is the lie that makes us realize the truth."

The Things They Carried draws on his and his comrades' experiences as young soldiers in Vietnam, and the things he refers to were not always tangible, he explained. Sometimes they were memories, as of his first encounter with death when the little girl he had had a crush on died in the fifth grade. "She was among the things I carried."

The book does not delve into the reasons, right or wrong, behind America's involvement in the war. "I'm not really into politics—I wasn't even interested in it when I was in Vietnam. But I was interested in what was in my heart, and the way I felt."

Students asked if he sees parallels between Vietnam and today's war in Iraq. O'Brien replied that he sees similarities in the situations the soldiers are faced with. "There's that sense of frustration and anger when you can't find an enemy to shoot back at. They're not dressed in uniform; you can't recognize them. After a while, it feels like the whole country becomes your enemy—dogs, buildings, farmers, even the earth itself. The civilian casualties are mounting up. It feels like 'Nam to me now—a lot."

The novelist also described the life of a writer. While outwardly very boring—sitting for hours on end in front of a computer, even on holidays and weekends—"it's not boring inside. Just the opposite." The alternatives aren't nearly as exciting as the fun of living another life, he said.

Students laughed to hear how he began writing at the age of 9, when he blatantly plagiarized a book called Larry the Little League, coming up with "Timmy the Little League," in which the main character single-handedly won the baseball game, scoring every run, playing every position and becoming a hero.

"But that's how you start," O'Brien said. "You don't start with Shakespeare. You start with Larry the Little League."

Current holder of the Roy F. and Joann Cole Mitte Chair in Creative Writing at Texas State University, O'Brien graduated summa cum laude from Macalester College, St. Paul, Minn., in 1968. After returning from Vietnam in 1970, he pursued graduate studies in government at Harvard University and, from 1973-74, was a national affairs reporter for the Washington Post.

His visit to campus was underwritten by a gift to BGeXperience from University alumni Ron and Sue Whitehouse of Harbor Springs, Mich.

Master Teacher
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incomparable perspective for students. They praise his ability to demonstrate the application of theory to real-world situations.

Receiving the Master Teacher Award caps a series of other recognitions throughout his career for his work with students. In 1999, Poor was presented the Outstanding Adviser Certificate of Merit by the National Academic Advising Association. At BGSU, he received the 1997-98 College of Technology Adviser of the Year Award and was named co-recipient of the 1998 University Outstanding Adviser Award. The Undergraduate Student Government presented him the Excellence in Teaching Award in 1985.


Poor received bachelor's and master's degrees in industrial education in 1966 and 1968, respectively, from Kent State University. He earned a Ph.D. in educational administration and supervision from BGSU in 1972.