

Peer Review

UL Lafayette Foundation rewards faculty's finest

The University of Louisiana at Lafayette Foundation has made rewarding excellence an annual event. • Through its Distinguished Professor Award and Excellence in Teaching Award, it acknowledges faculty members who have been singled out by their peers. “This is a way to acknowledge faculty who are doing extraordinary work and making significant contributions in the classroom, in research and in the community,” said Joel Gooch, president of the UL Lafayette Foundation. • The Foundation has sponsored the Distinguished Professor Award, which is presented during a banquet each spring, since 1964. The Excellence in Teaching Award was first given in 1992. This year, the Foundation banquet will be held Tuesday, May 16 at the Holidome.

Dr. Henry Chu, Herman Mhire and Dr. Robert Twilley will receive the Distinguished Professor Award, while Dr. Sally Dobyns will be presented the Excellence in Teaching Award.

“His teaching is well received, attracting superior students to attend his classes,” said Duane Blumberg, dean of the College of Sciences, in a letter nominating Chu for the UL Lafayette Foundation’s Distinguished

Professor Award. “He cares about his students and is willing to devote his time to students and colleagues.”

Born in Hong Kong, Chu came to the United States to attend the University of Michigan in the late 1970s, he explained in an interview in his office in the Conference Center. That’s where he got hooked on the Detroit Tigers.

Chu stayed at the University of Michigan to get his master’s degree before following Edward J. Delp III, his academic adviser and mentor, to Purdue University. After earning a doctorate in electrical engineering from Purdue in 1988, he began teaching at UL Lafayette.

“He is one of the top researchers in the Center for Advanced Computer Studies,” said Blumberg. Chu’s projects include improving images that physicians use to study the human heart and brain waves. His newest medical-related research has him collaborating with researchers at the world-famous Mayo Clinic.

Chu has also developed a way to print images that is superior to most conventional printing methods.

“In the area of image and video compression, Dr. Chu developed a more efficient technique in the area of accurate image motion estimation,” Blumberg said. “He is working on wavelet compression, which is expected to be the standard for future HDTV and digital video.”

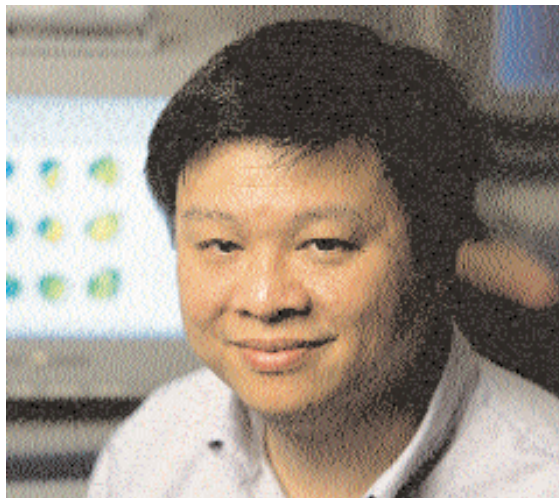
Away from the office, Chu enjoys reading about Theodore Roosevelt. He is a member of the Theodore Roosevelt Society, which is composed of other Roosevelt admirers.

“He (Roosevelt) practiced what he preached,” Chu said, when asked what

‘MY STUDENTS ARE MY CHILDREN’

Dr. Henry Chu

Dr. Henry Chu is a man with many interests. His curiosity has prompted him to conduct research in the fields of medicine, printing and communication. He’s a fan of the nation’s 26th president, Theodore Roosevelt, and the Detroit Tigers baseball team. He’s especially interested in teaching graduate students.



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Dr. Henry Chu

drew him to Roosevelt. "For instance, Roosevelt didn't simply give orders to the Rough Riders during the battle of San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War; he led them."

In his spare time, Chu enjoys photographing roses that he and his wife grow in their garden.

Does he have any children?

"My students are my children," he replied.

IT'S PRIME TIME FOR WETLANDS SPECIALIST

Dr. Robert Twilley

Biology Professor Robert Twilley was surprised when he learned he had been chosen to receive the Distinguished Professor Award.

Hasn't he reviewed his résumé lately?

Darryl L. Felder, head of UL Lafayette's Biology Department, and a committee of Twilley's peers have looked at it carefully. What they saw is what Felder describes as a faculty member who is "working at peak performance."

Twilley, he said, "has built one of the most productive, well-funded and internationally visible research programs in the department. . . Robert's work is of international, national and regional significance."

Twilley's expertise is rehabilitating damaged wetlands.

At the university's Center for Ecology and Environmental Technology, which has a one-acre greenhouse, Twilley and several graduate students have built a mini-swamp to study ways to restore ailing wetlands. Recently, he agreed to serve as the center's director.

Last summer, Twilley landed a \$999,815 grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to develop an interdisciplinary project related to his specialty.

"We plan to look at how energy technologies have modified wetlands. We'll also be putting that information into the context of how those technolo-

gies can restore wetlands," he said. "That's what's been missing from ecology. Restoration ecology is a prescription for ecology. We'll propose what it will take to fix a damaged wetland."

The almost \$1 million DOE grant



Dr. Robert Twilley

is in addition to the \$2.44 million in external funding for research that Twilley has obtained since 1988.

At the same time, he directs research programs of doctoral and master's students, recruits and supervises postdoctoral associates, and teaches undergraduate classes.

Twilley said his productivity is due, in part, to an interview he heard on the radio. In it, a best-selling author explained how he rises early each morning to write six pages before doing anything else. That way, no matter what his day may hold, he knows he has produced at least six pages.

Twilley adopted a similar schedule. "So, if my day goes crazy, I know I've at least got something on paper. That also allows me to go home at the end of the day and coach my son's basketball team or help with the Boy Scouts," he said.

Twilley also finds time for an activity that doesn't show up on his résumé. It's what he calls "my traveling road show." As often as he can, he speaks to elementary school students about ecology and the environment.

He devised a skit in which each youngster in a class plays a role in the ecosystem. Using string, he shows how they are interconnected—how one affects the other.

"I have as much fun teaching about the ecosystem to school children as teaching graduate students," he said.

ARTIST MAKES A LASTING IMPRESSION

Herman Mhire

While some people shy away from challenges, Herman Mhire does the exact opposite.

The associate professor of visual arts thrives on developing projects from arduous beginnings. That's one reason he has been chosen to receive the Distinguished Professor Award from the UL Lafayette Foundation.

"It's extremely gratifying to be recognized by your peers," Mhire said. "It's an honor to be acknowledged for making contributions that touch people's lives."

Some contributions have done more than touch people's lives; they have changed the community. For instance, he is founder of the now world-famous *Festival International de Louisiane* held in Lafayette each year. He conceived the idea in 1985. The festival has grown into the largest Francophone visual and performing arts festival in the United States.

The idea for the festival came while Mhire was working as executive director of University Art Museum at UL Lafayette. There, he was introduced to a performing arts group from Senegal in West Africa.

"The music was beautiful and moving," Mhire said, during an interview at his newly constructed art studio. "They performed at the museum in addition to

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several local schools and churches. This experience was profound for me.”

So profound, it gave Mhire the idea of establishing a festival where groups from across the world would come to Lafayette to showcase their talents and cultures. “We could see that the French language could serve as a vehicle of communication between people here and on the opposite side of the planet,” he said.

Mhire noted that without his work at University Art Museum, the festival would have never become a reality.

“Through teaching and directing UAM, these activities like the festival allowed me to interact with organizations from CODOFIL to the Wetlands Research Center,” he said. “I was always looking ahead for our next five projects. Many times I was working on various projects simultaneously.”

Throughout his work as museum director, festival founder and visual artist, Mhire never stopped teaching students how to express their creativity through art.

“As a faculty member in visual arts, my role is to assist students in

tainingly requires an understanding of who the students are, what their needs are and finding creative ways of introducing ideas that will able the students to engage those ideas.”

This may be Mhire’s most difficult challenge yet. But he’s not reluctant to tackle it year after year.

“I feel very fortunate to have had so many opportunities to pursue my varied interests,” he said. “And I look forward to what lies ahead.”

GIFTED PROFESSOR HELPS GIFTED KIDS

Dr. Sally Dobyns

It’s not one of those things you wake up knowing you’re going to do,” said Sally Dobyns of her interest in gifted education.

She discovered it when she first taught 7th graders.

“It was obvious that some kids in the classroom already knew and understood what was being taught.

It seemed unethical to me not to be able to move them forward,” said the Kentucky native, who began teaching at UL Lafayette in 1992.

Her interest in gifted students grew stronger when her daughter began to read books independently at age 3. To prepare herself as a mother and teacher, Dobyns began researching journals for ways to teach advanced students. Two names from the University of Connecticut continued to surface in articles she found about gifted students: Joseph Renzulli and Sally Reis, a husband-and-wife research team. Their insight drew Dobyns to UConn,

where she earned master’s and doctoral degrees in gifted education in 1991 and 1992.

“Those two continue to be my mentors,” she said, as she pointed to a



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Dr. Sally Dobyns

newspaper article about Renzulli and a photo of his family, which are taped to the wall above her desk.

Through her relationships with Renzulli and Reis, Dobyns learned the value of a mentor. Now, she fosters similar relationships with her students.

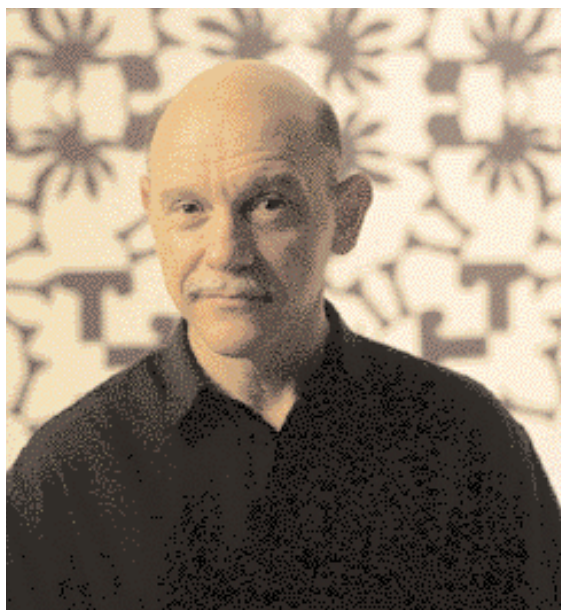
“Without the relationships that become established with those teachers-to-be, as well as with my graduate students, there would be no point to my being here. I would not be fulfilled,” Dobyns said. “I have the pleasure of collaborating with some of them in the classroom. We’re peers then. It’s no longer a student-professor relationship.”

Dobyns is an out-and-about teacher whose efforts are not limited to her own classroom.

For instance, she is director of Louisiana Lagniappe, a week-long professional development workshop offered by UL Lafayette’s Center for Gifted Education.

She also conducts inservice seminars and offers support to schools in Acadiana that ask for her assistance. Some of those requests are made by former students.

“When teaching teachers, my focus is the kids. If I lose sight of who they teach, then I’m not very credible. I try to get in the classrooms as often as I can, so I don’t forget what those students need.”



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Herman Mhire

developing their technical knowledge and abilities, while encouraging them to learn more about themselves,” said Mhire, who has been teaching for 24 years. “Being a successful teacher cer-