

Rightful Rewards

Top faculty asked to take a bow

Each spring, the UL Lafayette Foundation makes a key point about the university: there are superior faculty members in every discipline. • “Since the first Distinguished Professor Award was presented in 1964, the breadth of teaching excellence has been obvious,” said Julie Falgout, executive director of the UL Lafayette Foundation. “It’s a pleasure to acknowledge individuals’ accomplishments. But these awards also send a powerful message about the quality of instruction here.” • Recipients of the UL Lafayette

Foundation’s 2003 Distinguished Professor Award are Dr. Gui-Liang Feng, associate professor of the Center for Advanced Computer Studies; Dr. Susan Mopper, associate professor of biology; and Dr. Evelyn Wills, professor of nursing. Jack Ferstel, an instructor of English, is the recipient of the Excellence in Teaching Award.

They were honored by the Foundation in early April at a banquet held at the City Club River Ranch.

SCHOLAR CONTRIBUTES TO CACS’ STRENGTH

Dr. Gui-Liang Feng

Dr. Gui-Liang Feng was drawn to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette because of its highly ranked Center for Advanced Computer Studies.

By joining the faculty, the associate professor immediately enhanced its reputation.

His status as one of the top researchers at CACS is one reason Feng earned the UL Lafayette Foundation’s Distinguished Professor Award. He specializes in cryptography, internet

security, multimedia compression, fault-tolerant computing and error-correcting codes.

“He has brought distinction and recognition to UL Lafayette for his outstanding and continuing research contributions to his fields,” said Dr. Magdy Bayoumi, director of CACS.

For example, Feng’s work in the area of algebraic geometric code has been extraordinary.

“The algebraic-geometric code is a very difficult area that involves pure sophisticated mathematics. Many engineers and researchers cannot totally understand the essence of the challenges of using the algebraic-geometric codes in practical applications,” Bayoumi said. So, decoding algebraic-geometric code was a problem for many years.

“Dr. Feng developed a novel decoding procedure

which can be used for practical applications. For this contribution, he received the best paper award from the IEEE Information Theory Society in 1994 – an honor usually rewarded to researchers at high caliber universities such as Caltech, Stanford and MIT.”

Recently, Feng has been working on security and reliability aspects of communication systems. He is seeking a patent for a new method of recovering data “lost” in transmission, for example.

“What distinguishes Dr. Feng’s research activity is its novelty, rigorous mathematical foundation and the applicability of his research results to real life problems,” Bayoumi said.



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Dr. Gui-Liang Feng

UL Lafayette Foundation

Feng has received more than \$1 million for his research projects from sources such as the National Science Foundation, Office of Naval Research, NASA and U.S. Army Research Office.

He has introduced some courses at UL Lafayette, such as one about data compression. "I came here and students wanted to take the course, so I learned the course," he explained.

A native of Shanghai, People's Republic of China – a city with a population of about 16 million – he describes Lafayette as a "very small town." Its size suits him perfectly, especially since he lives near UL Lafayette's campus. "I travel here in 10 minutes. So, sometimes at night, I have some ideas and I drive to my office," he said, with a smile.

HOW DOES NATIVE IRIS SURVIVE?

Susan Mopper

Susan Mopper often shares her classroom with Mother Nature – specifically a salty coastal marsh island filled with Louisiana native irises.

The ecologist – named one of this year's Distinguished Professors by the UL Lafayette Foundation – is investigating the evolutionary and physiological ecology of *Iris hexagona* and its community of vertebrates and invertebrates.

"Overall, we are trying to understand how this native plant community can survive and recover from the environmental stresses placed on it," Mopper said. "These plants are real survivors and the community we are investigating on Marsh Island is doing something unique."

Mopper; Dr. Karl Hasenstein, a UL Lafayette biology professor; and several students are exploring how the irises, a typically freshwater species, can live and reproduce in saltier habitats. They are conducting tests on all levels, such as molecular genetics, chemistry, ecology and physiology.

"One of our objectives is to deter-

mine what genes are turned on in the plants to help them tolerate salinity stress. We want to know which genes help these plants cope with increased environmental stress, including climate change, hurricanes and flooding."

The researchers are comparing



Dr. Susan Mopper

DNA analyses of the iris populations at Marsh Island and freshwater Cyremort Point.

Mopper is continuing her research after switching gears not long ago to spend a year as a program director for the National Science Foundation in Arlington, Va. She joined a team of other directors and staff members during a transitional funding period with her research. The team reviewed hundreds of research proposals and ultimately decided which received funding.

"This was a whole different ball game for me. Usually I'm a principal investigator with a proposal up for funding. In this position, I was an administrator for research funding," she said.

Mopper had previously served as a panelist who reviewed ecology research proposals for the agency.

"Now, I'm hoping my experience can help the University's research office further increase funding for projects on campus. UL Lafayette has been really successful in the past and wants to increase its funding success."

Dr. Darryl Felder, head of UL Lafayette's Biology Department, wrote a letter recommending that Mopper receive the 2003 Distinguished Professor Award. "In the almost 10 years since Susan joined our faculty, she has built one of the most productive, well-funded and internationally visible research programs in our department," he stated.

NURSING CAREER 'ALMOST LOGICAL'

Evelyn Wills

As a child growing up on a farm in Minnesota, Evelyn Wills was introduced to what would ultimately become her career.

"My father was a researcher and inventor, so anything we did around the farm, we had to delve into," she said, during a recent interview. If a farm animal died, for example, she and her dad would conduct an autopsy.

"If we were going to plant something, we would first test the soil. We had to do it just right. We had to use proper sampling techniques," Wills said.

Her mother and an aunt were nurses, so she saw their compassion for others and their desire to ease patients' suffering.

"It seemed almost logical that I would become a nurse. There's enough science in nursing to satisfy my soul."

Dr. Gail Poirrier, dean of UL Lafayette's College of Nursing and Allied Health Professions, said her colleague is a well-rounded professor who "has demonstrated excellence in teaching and instructional research."

Wills, who is coordinator of research and evaluation in the college, is also chairman of UL Lafayette's Institutional Review Board, which reviews all research that involves humans as subjects. She's chairman of a local hospital's Internal Review Board, as well.

Nursing research is a bit different



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Dr. Evelyn Wills

than research in other sciences because of its breadth, according to Wills. “Our interest is the human response to all kinds of things,” she explained. “We can generalize, at least at some level, and yet nursing is never going to be an exact science because no two people are going to respond in the same way.”

Wills was named an assistant professor of nursing at UL Lafayette in 1990, after she had earned a doctorate in nursing from the University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing. She was named an associate professor of nursing in 1997 and a professor of nursing in 2002.

She is completely sure that she belongs in a classroom – as a professor.

“As long as I can be useful in the education of nurses, that’s what I want to do.”

CHANGE KEEPS
TEACHING FRESH

John Ferstel

Restless. Intense. Innovative. Those are words John “Jack” Ferstel, an instructor of English, chooses to describe himself.

The characteristics are reflected in his teaching. “I get bored teaching the same thing. It’s a part of my personality; I have to feel like I’m alive,” he said during a recent interview in his Griffin

Hall office, which is a forest of books and manilla folders.

During his 25-year career at UL Lafayette, Ferstel has earned a reputation for introducing subjects for study and incorporating technology into his classroom.

For instance, he’s one of the founders of Canadian Studies at UL Lafayette. His interest in Canadian literature was piqued when he borrowed a book by Margaret Atwood from a colleague. “I questioned how Americans viewed Canadians and vice versa,” he said.

Ferstel began to look for other books by Canadian writers and was surprised to find a “large foundation” of Canadian literature. So, he included it in English 371, Special Topics in Ethnic Literature. This semester, he’s “team teaching” a course on the U.S./Mexican border culture with Julia Frederick, a UL Lafayette assistant professor of history.

“Somewhere down the line, I would like to teach a North American literature class. I’d like Americans to better understand their neighbors. As Americans, we are often less aware of the world than we should be,” he said.

In a letter nominating

Ferstel for the Foundation’s teaching award, Dr. David Barry, dean of the College of Liberal Arts, noted that Ferstel was one of the first faculty members to “regularly teach in a computer classroom and developed his entire syllabus for technical writing (English 365) around the use of the computer and the World Wide Web.”

Ferstel has authored Student Technology Enhancement Program grants totaling \$187,000 to purchase computers and software for the English Department.

He also introduced the first online technical writing course and the first online British literature course.

Dr. Darrel Bourque, head of UL Lafayette’s English Department, said students benefit from Ferstel’s dedication to teaching and his high standards. “Jack challenges his students all the time on many fronts, but he knows how to manage challenge so that students perform at a higher level when they leave his classes.” ■



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Jack Ferstel