Top Researcher Named Outstanding Teacher

Though known as a prolific writer and first-rate researcher of the United States Supreme Court, its justices and other law and criminal justice topics, Dr. Christopher J. Smith has been named by the College of Social Science Alumni Association as the recipient of the 2012 Outstanding Teaching Award. The award is presented annually to a faculty member in the College who is committed to quality teaching and demonstrates substantial involvement in undergraduate education.

“I place Professor Smith at the very top as teacher and as scholar,” noted Professor Edmund F. McGarrell of the School of Criminal Justice. “Indeed, it is the integration of his research into his teaching that makes him so exceptional.”

In fact, Dr. Smith’s research is credited with influencing the teaching of criminal justice throughout the United States. A prolific writer, he has to his credit eight scholarly books, over 150 articles, chapters and reviews, and ten textbooks that are among the most widely used in the field.

Currently, Smith is nearing completion of a scholarly book manuscript on retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens. His reputation in the field has helped gain access to valuable sources of information. “During the course of the research for the book, I took advantage of invitations to interview Justice Stevens twice at the Supreme Court,” he said. For his most recent published book, he served as lead editor and wrote three chapters for The Rehnquist Court and Criminal Justice (Lexington Books, 2011).

“I also recently published two articles on prisoners’ constitutional rights in Indiana Law Review and University of Detroit/Mercy Law Review,” he shared, “both of which will contribute to my next book project on the Supreme Court’s role in defining rights for pretrial detainees and convicted offenders.”

The interdisciplinary courses Smith created are among the most popular, even among non-criminal justice majors. They succeed in combining high expectations and with student popularity. Such is the trademark of Smith’s style.

His teaching is rooted in theory and research, added McGarrell. “Professor Smith is incredibly committed to his students. He is an interdisciplinary scholar who integrates law, political science, and criminal justice in the classroom.”

Smith earned his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Connecticut, J.D. from the University of Tennessee, M.S. from the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom, and a B.A. in Government from Harvard University. Prior to joining the faculty at MSU in 1993, he taught at the University of Akron, the University of Connecticut-Hartford and in Asnuntuck Community College’s Prison Education Program – experiences which taught him the need to be sensitive to diverse populations of students.

His style in the classroom, most often described as open, supportive and enthusiastic, helped make his selection as this year’s outstanding teacher an easy choice. “In reading the many letters of support for his nomination, it was clear that his students and colleagues greatly value his contributions and style,” said Dr. Allyn Shaw, president of the College of Social Science Alumni Association. “He is described over and over as demanding but fair, accomplished but modest. We are very proud to honor him with this award.”
A Message

Spring is an exciting time of year on the campus of Michigan State University, and the College of Social Science is eager once again to welcome its newest class of graduates. With over 1,400 new alumni joining our ranks this semester alone, your college is among the largest on campus. This certainly brings its share of challenges, but mostly it means that we have a plethora of success stories to share both from a faculty and student perspective.

A few recent highlights among our faculty include David Wheat, a third-year assistant professor in History, who has been awarded a prestigious fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities for his project, "Atlantic Africa and the Spanish Caribbean." This funding is rarely given to faculty so early in their careers. Then there is the Lilly Teaching Fellowship awarded to Political Science Assistant Professor Ryan Black whose work “Visualizing Politics: Do Graphs Enhance Student Interest and Learning” has made his mentor Professor Charles Ostrom, Jr., proud. And Suzanne Cross, associate professor in the School of Social Work, received the prestigious Mit Joyner Gerontology Leadership Award from the Association of Baccalaureate Social Work Program Directors and the Association for Gerontology Education in Social Work.

Students have been in the academic spotlight quite often as well. Geography Ph.D. candidate Jordan Howell received the MSU Excellence in Teaching Citation Award in February. Social Science can also boast that 12 of its students earned University Distinguished Fellowships, four from Psychology, two each from History, Anthropology and Economics, and one each from Social Work and Political Science.

While I can say with confidence that we have excellent faculty and students in every one of our programs, I think it is worth noting the recent distinctions earned by individuals in our Geography department. The Association of American Geographers (AAG), the premier nonprofit scientific and educational society in the field, has elected Professor Julie Winkler as vice president of the entire AAG. She will serve as President in 2013. Graduate student Nick Perdue won the best student paper competition in cartography, with Dr. Kirk Goldsberry as his advisor. Lastly, three professors, Drs. Kyle Evered, Guo Chen and Catherine Yansa, were elected as officers of Specialty Groups within AAG.

As you can tell, I could go on and on with lists of accolades. It is a reflection on the high quality of teaching and research that happens in your college every day. You, the alumni of Social Science, also make us proud every day with what you accomplish in your professional lives. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Marietta L. Baba, Dean and Professor

Social Science Alumni Association Update: A Fond Farewell

To all Social Science alumni and my fellow members of the College of Social Science Alumni Association (CSSAA) Board of Directors, thank you for the opportunity and honor to serve as president of this fine group for the last two years. As my term comes to an end and a new slate of officers prepare to carry on, I am reflecting on this tremendously rewarding experience and how it has continued to demonstrate to me what an incredible world class institution MSU is by meeting its land grant mission and helping those around the globe.

I am humbled by the alumni we serve for all they do to help make MSU and the world a better place. Your hard working volunteer board has accomplished much over the last year. From finals week care packages for students who have aged out of the foster care system, to a study abroad scholarship, to travel funds for a unique opportunity for criminal justice students, and more, you can be proud of what your representatives on the board are doing.

As is customary, the board holds an annual meeting in May during which the new executive board and members are elected. I am sure you will see in a future issue the information about the outcome of this year’s meeting.

Lastly, I would like to congratulate our 2012 graduates! We celebrated our newest alumni at the college’s commencement on May 5, joined by the CSSAA’s two award winners who you can read about elsewhere in this issue.

Much is happening in your alumni association. Please let us know how you would like to become involved. Thanks and Go Green!

Allyn Shaw
President, College of Social Science Alumni Association

The College of Social Science at Michigan State University is a community of scholars committed to creating, disseminating, and applying knowledge in the social, behavioral, and economic sciences. The MSU Social Science community includes more than 6,700 undergraduate and graduate students, 400 faculty, 170 staff members, and 85,000 alumni in four schools, eight departments, and six centers and institutes.
Margaret (Peg) Bubolz and Linda Nelson worked together as friends, colleagues and leaders in human ecology for more than 30 years. For a time, Bubolz served as chairperson of the Department of Family and Child Sciences while Nelson chaired the Department of Family Ecology. These departments later were combined and aligned within the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, now housed in the College of Social Science.

Their dedication to their field and to MSU is legendary in Human Ecology circles, yet these two extraordinary women decided to expand MSU’s rich history in the development and advancement of the field of human ecology by each making a $30,000 gift to create the Human Ecology Legacy Fund. The fund will allow the department to make an annual award supporting research by an undergraduate student, and the selection process of the first recipient is underway. The fund will also create the Bubolz-Nelson Leadership Award as well as provide valuable discretionary funding to support opportunities identified by the chairperson of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies.

“Drs. Bubolz and Nelson are wonderful examples of emeriti professors who remain engaged in their discipline, and this endowment further augments their legacy in the department and university,” commented Marietta Baba, dean of the College of Social Science.

Unfortunately, Bubolz passed away in early 2012 before she had a chance to participate in the selection of the first recipients of the Legacy Fund. “Peg loved MSU,” Nelson said. “With her passing, we lost a dear friend and someone very important to our profession for her scholarship as well as for her thoughtful and caring mentoring of students.”

Bubolz never stopped working toward making the study of human ecology all that it could be at Michigan State. She concentrated on research, writing and scholarly work, developed an ecological model that was widely applied, received MSU’s Distinguished Faculty Award in 1983, and continued in retirement by writing a book about Bea Paolucci, a renowned leader in Human Ecology, among other things.

Nelson, a force within the Human Ecology profession as well, focused on teaching and qualitative methodology during her years as professor. She was the first woman invited to give the keynote lecture at the World Food Institute at Iowa State University, and she has consulted and taught in many nations, including Japan, Malaysia and Spain. A graduate of MSU, having completed her doctorate in 1963, she received MSU’s Distinguished Alumni Award in 2005.

“The unique focus of this endowment allows us to recognize the many contributions our students make to the community as well as provide material support for undergraduate research projects,” said Karen Wampler, chair of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies.

Inspired by an idea to honor her parents, Richard and Lillian Jacobson, who were farmers and leaders in a Finnish American community in rural Minnesota, Bubolz originated the endowment and Nelson volunteered to match her contribution. They both felt it was important to support endeavors related to home economics, later called human ecology, and its impact on families and communities through targeted programs.

“Education doesn’t begin at school,” Bubolz said at the time. “It begins at home and families are the first and primary educators.”

For more information on contributing to this fund or making a gift to the College of Social Science, contact Associate Director of Development Angela Lett toll free at (855) 600-8854.
Beginning January of this year, Dr. DeBrenna Agbényiga assumed new responsibilities as Associate Dean for Graduate Studies and Inclusion in the College of Social Science, a promotion earned after serving since 2005 as an assistant dean. In her new role, Agbényiga assumed all responsibilities for graduate studies.

Agbényiga continues to lead the Office for Equity, Diversity and Inclusive Academic Affairs. She also serves as the College’s Faculty Excellence Advocate.

An Associate Professor in the School of Social Work, Agbényiga has taught advanced graduate courses in community practice, essential theories for organization and community development, human behavior and the social environment, and social development and education. She has led study abroad courses on perspectives from Ghana and Jamaica and is a core faculty member of the African Studies Center (ASC), the Center for Advanced Study of International Development (CASID), the Center for Gender in Global Context (GenCen), and the African American and African Studies Program (AAAS). Her research interests are focused in organizational culture, international social and economic development, women’s rights, children’s rights, cross-cultural learning, and diversity.

“Dr. Agbényiga has not only excelled in her research and teaching, but she has proven to be a highly competent administrator as well,” Dean Marietta Baba said. “We are fortunate to count her among the senior staff in the College of Social Science.”

Contributing Editors:
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Before his involvement as a student on the Dean’s Student Advisory Council (DSAC) in the College of Social Science, Andrew Jessmore admits he was more departmentally focused. Then he became one of two students from his department selected to serve on the DSAC. His perspective changed, which proved a benefit for him personally and the entire college.

“During my first year in the DSAC, it quickly became apparent all of the things the college does and all the change that will be taking place in the future,” said Jessmore, chairperson of the DSAC. “Students can really benefit from the college and the information and support it provides. One of our charges this year has been making sure that students are aware and utilize these resources.”

Each of the 13 degree-granting programs in the College select two undergraduates, one senior and one non-senior, to serve on the DSAC. The resulting 26 members, all students in good academic standing, become a valuable resource to the Dean and faculty of the college. Their impact is varied.

“I have enjoyed meeting and speaking to incoming freshman and their parents at events. It really is the embodiment of what this council is supposed to do, taking our experiences as successful undergraduates and sharing them with current students, administrators and future Spartans,” said Jessmore, a 2012 graduate in Psychology who was chosen as the student speaker at the College’s spring commencement.

“For years in the future, Spartans will benefit directly from the opinions and the solutions we came up with on the DSAC,” he added. “My hope for the DSAC is that it continues to build a reputation of being a place for Social Science administrators and staff to go when in need of a student opinion.”

While at first glance it seems the college may be the main beneficiary of the efforts of these talented students, Jessmore acknowledges the benefits to the students as well. “Students in the DSAC gain connections to the top students in the other departments, building friendships and professional connections,” he said. “The DSAC has also allowed me to make connections with top administrators in the college and university. These professionals have provided me with advice and help when applying to graduate school and making important decisions.”

The DSAC is truly a win-win endeavor.
Eicher Wins Outstanding Alumni Award

The College of Social Science Alumni Association (CSSAA) is proud to announce that the winner of the 2012 Social Science Outstanding Alumni Award is Dr. Joanne B. Eicher, a highly accomplished teacher, distinguished writer and world-renowned researcher in the field of culture and dress.

“Dr. Eicher truly exemplifies the Spartan Spirit,” said Jennifer Shimp, a member of the CSSAA board of directors and graduate of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies. “Her accomplishments in her field over a long and productive career are nothing short of amazing. She is truly an international leader in her field, and she got her start at MSU!”

After receiving her BA, MS and PhD from Michigan State University, Eicher served on the faculty of MSU from 1961-1977 in the department that later became Human Development and Family Studies. During that time, she co-authored the first academic text on cross-cultural dress.

Eicher moved on to the University of Minnesota as department head of Textiles and Clothing from 1977 to 1987. She received the university’s highest honor for faculty when she was named a Regents Professor in 1995.

She retired in 2005, but since her “retirement,” she authored The Visible Self for Fairchild Books in 2008 and remains an active consultant to publishers, museums and institutes of art. Her work is closely followed by the fashion industry, and she continues to mentor young professionals in positions in academia, museums and industry.

For several years, Eicher has identified primarily as an anthropologist and conducted extensive fieldwork on dress and textiles in the Niger Delta of Nigeria with the Kalabari people. This directly relates to her latest undertaking since retirement: serving as Editor in Chief of the ten-volume Berg Encyclopedia of World Dress and Fashion. This work was published by Oxford University Press in 2010, is updated three times each year, and won the 2011 Dartmouth Medal for outstanding reference presented by the Reference and User Services Association. It is the new benchmark in the field, exploring all aspects of dress and fashion globally, from pre-history to the present day.

Eicher’s is a story that began in East Lansing yet influenced the world. “She went on from MSU to emerge as a national and international scholarly leader in this field of textiles and society,” said Sociology Professor David Wiley in his nomination letter. “She richly deserves this CSSAA alumni award.”

For information about nominating someone for a Social Science Alumni Award, please contact Associate Director of Alumni Relations and Communications Vicki Essenmacher toll free at (866) 496-6656.