

Byrne receives Auburn's first award for mentoring undergraduate research and creative scholarship

Mark Byrne, an associate professor in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering, has received the 2010 inaugural Provost's Award for Faculty Excellence in Fostering Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship at Auburn.



Mark Byrne

Provost Mary Ellen Mazey presented the award to Byrne at the seventh annual Auburn University Undergraduate Research and Creative Forum on April 7, following his selection by a five-member committee of faculty and students.

The new award will be presented annually to recognize a faculty member who has taken extraordinary measures to mentor undergraduate students in research and scholarship endeavors.

"Auburn University is committed to encouraging and creating significant opportunities for undergraduate scholarship and creative endeavors outside the classroom," said Mazey. "It is important that we recognize faculty members, such as Dr. Byrne, who are leading the way in establishing undergraduate research at Auburn and nationally."

Mazey added, "One of the things that stands out about Dr. Byrne is his dedication to helping undergraduate students understand the importance of research and scholarship in their total academic experience and then helping them move beyond the fundamentals into scholastic endeavors of the highest quality. He is having a huge impact on the future success of his students."

Byrne, the Mary and John H. Sanders associate professor of chemical engineering in the Samuel Ginn College of Engineering, was nominated by Chemical

Engineering Department Chair Chris Roberts, with letters of support from several former students, who have progressed to graduate school, medical school or professional careers.

"Dr. Byrne is world class in his ability to engage and challenge undergraduate research students to reach their utmost potential," wrote Roberts. "While the sheer number of students that he has mentored is impressive, it is their meteoric level of achievement that makes his contributions through undergraduate research and scholarship most remarkable."

Roberts noted that two students mentored by Byrne placed first nationally in undergraduate research competition at the 2006 and 2008 annual meetings of the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. "As a result of Dr. Byrne's mentorship, these students have reached the epitome of what we hope to have our students achieve in Chemical Engineering at Auburn University," he wrote.

In remarks to the award committee, Byrne said he emphasizes to his students the value of failure as well as success in research. "They learned to fail often, but in that failure they learned to succeed. Success was not awarded; it was earned by many of them and is not only reflected in awards, publications or presentations."

Byrne, who holds a Ph.D. from Purdue, has been a faculty member at Auburn for six years. In that time, he has mentored 20 undergraduate researchers in his lab and directed with Steve Duke an interdisciplinary project, the National Science Foundation Research Experience for Undergraduate Programs, that involved 32 students. He also serves as an organizer for the Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship Symposium Forum.

— Roy Summerford



Spring, finally

March finally arrived in April this year, and Auburn students have been making up for the slow start to spring. A.K. Bruton, a public relations/pre-law major from Birmingham was one of several students who took advantage of a windy day for kite flying last week during a WEGL-sponsored event on Cater Lawn.

Melissa Humble, Photographic Services

Program offers faculty, staff option of saving on health insurance

In exchange for having their blood pressure, glucose and cholesterol levels checked, Auburn faculty and staff can save \$25 a month on their health insurance premiums next year under the new Healthy Tigers Initiative.

Employee participation is optional for the program, which is a joint venture of the university's Office of Payroll and Employee Benefits and the Harrison School of Pharmacy. The medical screenings begin May 3, and insurance savings for participants will start Jan. 1, 2011, at the beginning of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama accounting year for Auburn's employee health insurance plan.

The savings, up to \$300 a year, will actually be the lesser of two benefits for some participants, especially those who are at risk for heart disease or diabetes and do not know it, says the initiative's coordinator, Kimberly Braxton Lloyd, assistant dean for pharmacy health services in Auburn's Harrison School of Pharmacy.

Based on a similar and well-received program for State of Alabama employees, the Healthy Tigers Initiative is designed to slow the annual increase in health insurance premiums by offering an incentive for university employees to learn more about their own health. "Based on the experience of plans elsewhere," Braxton Lloyd said, "a significant number of persons will use that knowledge to protect their health."

In addition to the benefits that individuals receive from early detection and management of potential medical problems, she said a widespread emphasis on health and wellness can provide additional insurance savings for all employees and the university.

If the experience is the same at Auburn as elsewhere, she said, everyone in the health insurance plan will benefit through a slower rise in premiums. "Studies have shown that implementing a health and wellness plan can decrease the rate of increase in health-care costs," she explained. "Disease states that are caught and managed early have better outcomes for the employee and are less expensive to treat."

Braxton Lloyd said the effort to slow the increase in health care costs is doubly important for Auburn's faculty and staff because the university is self-insured. Although Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Alabama administers the plan, all claims are paid from a funding pool financed chiefly by premiums from employees and the university.

To qualify for the savings, faculty and staff members can either participate in a free health screening on campus between the first part of May and the end of November or have their physician submit a form, available soon, with the results of a health screening by the individual's physician before the end of November.

Braxton Lloyd said the screening will measure a limited number of indicators — blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose levels — that are important to everyone who cares about his or her health and quality of life. She noted that many individuals already receive regular health screenings from their physicians, and many of those are following the advice of their doctors to protect their health.

Others assume that they are in good health and don't bother to get routine medi-

See Insurance discount page 2