



Rucker awarded ASG's Most Outstanding Faculty

By Kylee Sigmon

The U of A Associated Student Government (ASG) recognized Jill Rucker, assistant professor in the Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology, as its “Most Outstanding” faculty award recipient at its faculty awards dinner this spring.

After being nominated by a handful of AECT students, Rucker was selected by the 2016 Faculty Appreciation Selection Committee as a finalist. With more than 1,288 faculty members at the University of Arkansas and more than 50 applications being submitted, this honor carries a significant amount of prestige.

Rucker, a native of Stillwater, Oklahoma, has been on faculty at Oklahoma State University and the University of Georgia prior to starting at the U of A in the Fall 2012. She is now on her third year, specializing in agricultural communications and leadership.

ASG hosted a dinner on April 15 to honor all of the finalists and their student nominators. Rucker, accompanied by AECT students Will Clark, Kylee Sigmon, Maggie Jo Hansen, and Patterson Hilaire, was in attendance to graciously accept her award.

Maggie Jo Hansen, graduate assistant with Bumpers College International Programs Office, said she appreciates how Rucker genuinely cares for each of her students.

“Dr. Rucker’s heart for students is undeniable. She treats everyone with respect, kindness, and brotherly love, and without prejudice, judgement, or impatience,” said Hansen. “Dr. Rucker enables students to maximize their



Rucker sports her trophy for being awarded “Outstanding Faculty” through ASG.

strengths while improving upon their weaknesses, and in the meantime, break down barriers that hinder the pursuit of education and personal purpose.”

Rucker is known for investing in her students and making sure that everyone can find a friend in her. She takes pride in empowering students to set goals to achieve their dreams. Whether that means advising students academically or mentoring students to seek value added opportunities such as internships, leadership positions, or scholarships, she doesn’t hesitate.

“I was very humbled and honored,” said Rucker. “To me, this is like receiving a People’s Choice Award because it was created by students and voted upon by students. I cannot think of any higher honor!”

AECT brings home multiple awards from SAAS

By Morgan Marley

The AECT department recently earned numerous awards in the Agricultural Education and Agricultural Communications sections at the Southern Association for Agricultural Scientists (SAAS) conference in San Antonio.

In the agricultural communications section, multiple faculty and graduate students received awards.

Graduate students Maggie Jo Hansen and Fawn Kurtzo, Assistant Dean of Student Programs and Associate Professor Leslie Edgar and Assistant Professor Jill Rucker presented the Outstanding Research Poster. Jefferson Miller, professor of agricultural communications, graduate student Kyle Hunter and honors undergraduate alum Andrea Love presented the Second Runner-up Research Poster.

“It seems like every year our students and faculty earn more than their fair share of awards at SAAS,” Miller said. “That says a lot about the quality of our people and programs and about how we stack up nationally.”

In the agricultural education section, additional faculty and graduate students claimed awards.

Kate Shoulders, assistant professor in agricultural education, co-authored the Distinguished Innovative Poster and the Outstanding Innovative Poster. Graduate student Jackson Alexander, Rucker, Graduate Coordinator Donna L. Graham, Jefferson Miller and Professor of Meat Science Jason Apple received the Distinguished Research Poster award. Graduate student Kristina Bautista, Professor Don Johnson, Shoulders and Edgar received the Distinguished Research Poster award.

“It’s really neat and exciting to have the opportunity to attend these conferences and hear about research that other universities are doing,” Bautista said. “It was nice to hear my name called as an award winner in front of the conference. It really makes the work and research pay off for myself and faculty.”

Faculty team members Johnson, Shoulders, Edgar, Graham and Rucker were presented with the Outstanding Manuscript Award in addition to the Distinguished Manuscript award.

“I believe our research was recognized because of its relevance to academic programs as well as the implications it held for potential employers,” said Rucker. “I am proud to be a

part of a dynamic team and have the opportunity to collaborate with some of the best researchers within our discipline.”



New Graduate SPOTLIGHT

Olivia Norton

Hometown: Texarkana, Texas
Undergraduate: Texas A&M University
Animal Science and Ag Comm
December 2015

Why did you decide to pursue a master’s degree with AECT?

I am actually fairly new to the agricultural world. I already had a passion for communications, but I really fell in love with animal science during my undergraduate work. I was encouraged to pursue a communications-related degree by my faculty so I could combine my specific talents, in animal science and communications. Having both degrees allows me to better tell the story of agriculture.

What are your research interests?

Communicating agriculture to the public. I will be looking into generation gaps and how the different age groups working in agriculture provide the public with information about our industry.

What are your career goals after you graduate?

I would love to work for an agricultural advocacy group. It is important that we provide the public with a transparent, accurate picture of agriculture, and I would love to have a hand in doing so.

REPS

Representing, Excellence, Pride & Service

AECT REPS organize events throughout the semester for high school students to become familiar with our program. If you are interested in setting up a tour or have an event you want one of our REPS to attend, contact us today!

Phone: (479) 575-2035 | Email: ccrumle@uark.edu

AECT students go to Scotland for summer internship

By Alex Mcleod

The Dale Bumpers College of Agricultural, Food and Life Sciences is going on its fourth year of participating in an internship exchange program with Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) to provide students professional development opportunities.

Jefferson Miller, professor of agricultural communications, takes the lead in coordinating the exchange program for Arkansas students.

The program began with the goal of providing international opportunities for students within Bumpers College, specifically students in the AECT department.

"Where once this program was relatively open, over the last few years we had to establish an application process in order to better place students in an environment best suited for them," said Miller. "The program is continuing to expand."

Since all AECT students must complete an internship credit to graduate, Miller said being able to provide opportunities like this to his students is important because most students do not consider traveling abroad for an internship.

"Ideally we would like to see everyone who graduates from the AECT department to have an international experience," said Miller.

There is a high level of prestige that accompanies this internship exchange opportunity. Being able to record international travel and completing an internship of this magnitude adds value to students' resumes, said Miller.

However, the expensive prices of international programs often prohibit students from taking interest, much less following through with the experience. But for students like Alex Mcleod, the price is worth the experience and personal growth gained. As an added bonus, Mcleod's internship is paid, further alleviating the expense.

"The experience I will gain on this trip is worth so much more than the cost," said Mcleod. "You can't put a price on the experience you will receive during an internship like this. You gain valuable problem solving skills. During an internship, like the one in Scotland, students are able to prove to their employers, and themselves, that they are professionals in this field."

The expectations students leave the states with is far lower than the experience students actually gain. Students come back to America with professional growth, but also as stronger individuals.

"I expect this program will give me valuable, hands-on experience in the communications field," said Mcleod. "I hope to gain a better outlook on the world to prove to myself that I am a professional and can overcome obstacles in a new environment. This experience will allow me to build my resume and portfolio so I am more prepared for the career field."

Mcleod will travel with fellow intern Tess Constant, a hospitality major. Completing the exchange, Miller will host two SRUC research interns this summer.

Additional AECT Accomplishments

Students

Graduate

Kristina Bautista - North American Colleges and Teachers of Agriculture (NACTA) Outstanding Graduate Student

Maggie Jo Hansen - John W. White Outstanding Graduate Student

Emily Hawkins & Jessica Guinn - Graduate Student Congress

Undergraduate

Victoria Maloch - Truman Scholar

Morgan Marley - John W. White Outstanding Undergraduate Student

Austin Hamm - John W. White Outstanding Transfer Student

Departmental Awards

Kylee Sigmon - Outstanding Freshman

Hannah Johnson - Outstanding Sophomore

Lauren Cheevers - Outstanding Junior

Austin Hamm - Outstanding Transfer

Morgan Marley - Outstanding Senior

Maggie Jo Hansen - Outstanding Graduate

Faculty

Dr. Donna L. Graham - NACTA Outstanding Educator

Dr. Jill Rucker - U of A ASG Most Outstanding Faculty Member



Taylor Johnson interned in Scotland at Scotland's Rural College last summer. She is majoring in Agribusiness in Bumpers College.

She believed...

By Hannah Rea

I believe in the future of agriculture...

These words have circled around the heads of most, if not all, FFA members. Most FFA members have to memorize the FFA creed written by E.M. Tiffany. For some these words are forgotten with the passing of time, but for others they live on and carry cherished memories.

One individual who truly learned what it means to “believe” is Victoria Maloch, a student in Bumpers College and 2015 National FFA Secretary. She grew up in Magnolia, Arkansas, a place where kids are introduced to agriculture early in life and raised with manners and values. Because her family has a long standing Brangus ranch in southern Arkansas, Maloch’s involvement in agriculture and FFA was inevitable.

“When I was little I didn’t get the concept of high school. I thought it was elementary, middle school, then FFA,” said Maloch.

FFA seemed to be her destiny. She became a member as soon as she could, beginning in eighth grade. In those years, she was the junior high chapter president, senior high secretary, and president. She was also a national delegate for three years.

Maloch was blessed with an outstanding FFA advisor, Terressa Curtis. Curtis managed everything Magnolia had to offer. Not only was she the 4-H leader and the ag teacher, she was Magnolia’s Mayor. Curtis also served as the Arkansas FFA Alumni President.

“Terressa Curtis was my biggest influence,” said Victoria. “She kept in contact with me outside of the classroom. We became best friends. She would push back on some of my ideas and made sure I really wanted it. This presented me with the most growth, later when we were friends and not just in the student and teacher relationship.”

That extra push from her advisor was just what Maloch needed to be voted in as Arkansas FFA President.

“I am a unique situation. For me, becoming a state officer was a natural progression. It held a different meaning for me seeing my brother hold the role while I was young,” said Maloch.

After her year in state FFA office, she ran for National office, but was not elected. Her defeat was hard to accept, and she then found herself at a crossroads in her life.

“The year after I wasn’t elected, I had to find out who I was outside of the jacket,” Victoria explained.



Victoria Maloch tells a story about her homestay family in Japan during her retiring address from national office.

She then began a new path for at the U of A in Bumpers College.

“I took every opportunity that I could. Not getting the office helped me out so much. I pushed myself and took courses and joined clubs completely outside of what I was used to,” said Maloch.

The year of education and growth was exactly what she needed, because the following year she was elected as 2014 National FFA Secretary. She and her father were the first father and daughter duo to serve in the same office position in both the State and National FFA offices.

Maloch’s year as a National FFA officer was a whirlwind of opportunity and prestige. She was able to speak at countless events and venues, catering to the youth who are willing to make a difference.

She is now officially an alumna of the FFA organization. She is a full-time student pursuing her education. Instead of standing on stage lecturing to the masses, she is now sitting in the crowd taking it all in.

“Transitioning back into school wasn’t as hard as people said it would be. I was ready to get back into the role of student,” said Maloch. “I received lots of support from my department. While I was here before I was very active in several clubs, so now that I go back to those meetings it’s nice just getting to sit back and watch others succeed.”

Will Clark is an individual who watched

Maloch succeed and gleaned from her accomplishments to pursue his own. Her time as Arkansas FFA Secretary was his first time to State Convention.

“Victoria has truly been a role model of mine for the past five years. I remember meeting her at my first State Convention and it’s been amazing to not only watch her grow in FFA, but also acknowledging how her influence has helped me grow in this organization as well,” said Clark.

Clark is currently serving the Arkansas FFA office as Secretary.

Looking back at her accomplishments in the FFA organization, Maloch feels qualified to offer advice to the next generation of believers.

“Do things in FFA and agriculture that you wouldn’t normally find yourself doing. There may be other areas that you will love that you wouldn’t have ever known. The only way you can discover new things is by experiencing it!” said Maloch. “Don’t feel that you have to win every contest you go to. I never won a judging contest. Just because you win or lose a contest doesn’t determine what you can accomplish.”

E.M. Tiffany said it best himself: I believe that American agriculture can and will hold true to the best traditions of our national life and that I can exert an influence in my home and community which will stand solid for my part in that inspiring task.

AECT offers new leadership concentration

By **Brittany Coffee**

The AECT department will offer a leadership minor to its students starting Fall 2016, and a new leadership concentration is in the curriculum approval process.

There is an ever-growing demand for young professionals to have leadership skills. Employers are on the lookout for applicants who have an understanding of leadership and the gumption to get things done. Work settings increasingly focus on teamwork, and this type of training for employees starts in the classroom.

AECT Assistant Professor Jill Rucker saw a need for more courses in leadership at the U of A. When she first joined the faculty department three years ago, she developed two leadership courses for undergraduate and graduate students.

“The first course is a survey of leadership theory that focuses on looking at the cornerstones of leadership. The other course is leadership theory and analysis through film. The students take a more in depth look at theory through a pop culture lens. This course is used to actively engage students in testing the theories,” said Rucker.

Service learning components have also been added to the original Leadership in Ag Organizations class with an objective to create opportunities for students to implement what they learn in the classroom to a real-world situation.

“Over the course of [the service learning] class, the students have conducted over 800 hours of community service to have tangible impacts to organizations in Northwest Arkansas,” said Rucker.

Rucker’s success teaching leadership led the AECT Department to propose the new minor and concentration. Starting this fall, students can begin declaring the minor

“We predict that we will have vast growth based on industry need, student interest, and research,” said Rucker. “Research says our students are graduating with the basic competencies in their specific field, but we’re finding that the students lack the soft people skills.”

The leadership minor consists of 15 credit hours, and the concentration will be one of the four offered through the department. Additionally, the hands-on curriculum offers students opportunities to gain real life experience to give them an advantage in the job market.

“During my time here, we have more than doubled the enrollment in the original undergraduate [leadership] course, and I believe the enrollment will continue to grow,” said Rucker.

Will Clark, a freshman in the department, said he believes the leadership concentration will attract a wider variety of students, and sets the U of A apart from other Arkansas universities.

“I feel like we’re going to attract a different type of person than the type of student we have been recruiting,” said Clark. “I think this will allow us to become more diverse. It will be a great way for our department to broaden its horizons and turn to a field that we haven’t really been in before.”

Razorback AgCademy offering college courses for high school students

By **Meghan Anderson**

A new program through AECT called Razorback AgCademy exposes high school students to on-line introductory courses in Bumpers College at a reduced rate.

Kate Shoulders, associate professor of agricultural education, has taken the lead on developing this opportunity for high school students interested in agriculture.

“This will be the first opportunity for Arkansas students to take [agriculture] college courses in high school for college credit,” said Shoulders.

One of the main goals of the program is to make college available to high school students who believe tuition is a barrier keeping them from going to college. The program also gives students an inside look at the educational quality Bumpers College has to offer.

“It gives the students a sampling of how fantastic our teaching quality is and be able to experience it first hand,” Shoulders said. “The students who want the hours going into college will be exposed to all the opportunities that agriculture has. The course will show that agriculture is more than farming.”

Shoulders is also excited about the curriculum offered through the program. Sable Sellick, an AECT graduate student, developed the first and only virtual plant science lab in the country.

“I really enjoyed working together with my advisor, Dr. Shoulders, as well as Dr. Longer from CSES and Ken Muessig from U of A Global Campus, to put together the first on-line plant science lab,” Sellick said. “The project allowed me to utilize both pedagogical and content knowledge I had acquired in my years as an undergrad.”

The curriculum is in the structure of modules that align with introductory AFLS courses. The modules start in the fall and cost \$39 per module. Students can earn up to 8 U of A credit hours.

Shoulders said some high school agriculture teachers will use the curriculum in their programs.





Note from the department head: 10 year review

Every 10 years the University of Arkansas requires each academic department to undergo an “external review.” The review is done by an external review committee

comprised of nationally respected university and industry leaders in our profession.

The AECT department recently completed this process. Our review committee was comprised of administrators from Virginia Tech University, the University of Florida, the University of Missouri, a vice president of the Arkansas Farm Bureau as a stakeholder representative, and a faculty member from the U of A School of Nursing as a university-assigned reviewer. The department prepared an extensive document including the history of the department, current productivity metrics, and plans for the future. The external committee reviewed this document and then spent four days meeting with U of A campus administrators and other college faculty. Additionally, the committee met with AECT faculty, staff, and students. The review committee members had their own personal perspectives of our program within national and state contexts. While they will soon submit a detailed written review of the AECT department and its programs, before leaving campus they provided an informal summary of their report.

Here are some highlights:

- > Our faculty are “gems.” We already suspected that we had one of the best faculty teams in the US; they confirmed that we are among the top faculty groups in the nation.
- > Our students are respected and treated well. Our students feel welcome in AECT and feel challenged by our faculty. In fact, other departments in our college respect the value of our expertise and the quality of our students.
- > The reviewers endorsed two new programs AECT is creating: our Agricultural Leadership undergraduate program and our AgCademy program for high school students to earn college credit in agriculture.
- > Our goal of having 50 percent of instruction in each of the departmental courses be “hands-on” and “real world” experiences is commendable and sets us apart from other programs.
- > Our M.S. program, particularly the opportunity for students to complete an M.S. degree on-line, is a strength. At least half of our M.S. students are interested in pursuing a Ph.D., which speaks to the high quality of our M.S. program.

The department has always considered its peers to be similar programs at other Land Grant universities. Internally, we set a goal to become the best AECT program nationally

among those that do not train Ph.D. students. The external committee reviewed our program and addressed this question for us. They said, “Your goal is to be the best non-Ph.D. program in the country. You are already there.”

I couldn’t agree more.

Mark your calendars! Important Dates:

Association for Communication Excellence (ACE) - June 13-16

North American Colleges and Teachers of America (NACTA) - June 21-24

Association for Leadership Educators (ALE) - July 8-14

Ag Media Summit (AMS)- July 23-27

Fall 2016 semester starts - Aug. 22

Contact Information

Department of Agricultural Education, Communications and Technology
205 Agriculture Building
University of Arkansas
Fayetteville, AR 72701
Fax: (479) 575-2610
aect.uark.edu

Dr. George Wardlow
Department Head
(479) 575-2038

Dr. Jeff Miller
Ag Communications
(479) 575-5650

Dr. Don Johnson
Ag Systems Tech
(479) 575-2039

Dr. Don Edgar
Ag Education
(479) 575-2037

Dr. Donna Graham
Graduate Coordinator
(479) 575-6346

Dr. Jill Rucker
Ag Leadership
(479) 575-3506

Lanny Rice
Ag Systems Tech
(479) 575-6797

Dana Harris
Admin. Manager
(479) 575-7123

Dr. Kate Shoulders
Ag Education
(479) 575-3799

Cassandra Cox
Ag Leadership
(479) 575-2040

Rhonda Harton
Admin. Specialist
(479) 575-2035

**Do you have an idea for
Ag Wire?
Let us know!**

Phone: (479) 575-2035
Email: harton@uark.edu