

Taking a personal approach

CASNR GETS PERSONAL IN PREPARING ITS STUDENTS

Chances are if you are a graduate of UT's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, or College of Ag as it once was known, you remember its warm and friendly atmosphere. Faculty knew you by name and took a sincere interest in your progress. It was easy to spot friends as you walked across the agricultural campus.

Generations may have passed since you attended UT, but today those same values hold true. CASNR prides itself on the one-on-one student advisement that occurs between faculty and students in its programs. While other colleges may rely on large advising centers to guide students through their academic careers, in CASNR, each student is paired with a faculty member who serves both as advisor and mentor to the student—and often, ultimately, as a friend.

Most faculty members with teaching appointments in CASNR advise, and the low student-to-faculty ratio (20:1 in 2007-08) means each

faculty member really gets to know each individual student, his or her aspirations, and personality. Each becomes virtually a member of the departmental “family” with all the benefits of such a relationship.

“Students are the heart of the university,” says Dean Caula Beyl, “and these strong advisor-student relationships help us to bring out the best in our students, guide them through their matriculation, and often help launch them in professional careers following graduation.”

COMPETITIVE FINANCIAL AID PACKAGES

CASNR students also receive highly individualized attention when it comes to financial aid. Entering freshmen, transfer, and current students are urged to submit scholarship applications. The college has many scholarship awards. Some may be designated for persons whose parents are involved in a particular type of agricultural enterprise or simply designated for someone in a county where the students live. Consideration is given to each student's personal circumstances.

“CASNR has one of the largest scholarship programs within the University

of Tennessee and maintains a wide range of awards for students from freshmen through graduate school,” says Jeff Gerkin, UT assistant dean and director of financial aid. “It's one of the most comprehensive scholarship programs we have on campus.”

The exceptional scholarship program is made possible by gifts from alumni and friends. Dr. Mike Smith, professor of Animal Science and chair of CASNR's scholarship committee, says the awards are deeply needed. “As a parent, I well understand the constraints families are under to afford college. Some of our students may have brothers or sisters who are also in college or hoping to attend. For



In CASNR's new agricultural leadership major, Drs. Carrie Stephens, center, and Bryan Patterson see exciting opportunities for students to learn and develop practical skills that can immediately be applied to today's job market. UT is among only a handful of land grant universities to offer such a program.

parents, it can be very tough to cover the expenses. That's where our financial aid can help."

In the 2008-09 academic year, \$812,875 was awarded to a total of 430 students, with a per student average of \$1,890—aid that Smith says has often made a difference in whether a student has been able to attend, or remain in, school.

THE LATEST IN TEACHING THEORIES AND TECHNOLOGIES

For the past two years, CASNR has brought national scholars of teaching and learning styles to campus for workshops open to the college and university community. The programs emphasize ways of reaching and guiding 21st century students.

Comfortable with technology and multitasking, today's students thrive in dynamic learning environments. To suit their learning style, college faculty are using the latest in instructional technologies in their teaching, from podcasting to student-centered Web site construction.

Andy Pulte, lecturer in the Department of Plant Sciences, finds podcasts and blogs useful in extending his classroom teaching. "In the course 'Basic Landscape Plants,' I only have time to go into the chief plants in the classroom. For example I teach them about the standard native redbud tree, but there are some great redbud cultivars that I want them to be aware of. My teaching assistants do podcasts and blogs about these cultivars and



Rich Maxey

those enable students to experience them very efficiently and effectively."

Dr. Matthew Gray of the Department of Forestry, Wildlife, and Fisheries, uses podcasting in all courses he teaches, as well as in his department's graduate seminar. He led the college into podcasting in 2005 and surveyed students on the value they found in it. "One hundred percent of them said they were in favor of it. They can access these files on their mp3 players, by computer, and on cell phones, so the modules are accessible to them. I found that they

were using the podcasts as a tool for studying and that on average their use of the podcasts was boosting their grades by one to two percent."

"My ultimate hope is that we can continue to build our podcasting resources to the extent that they augment our continuing education and distance learning programs. I see them as a way of extending our teaching and educational abilities beyond the borders of UT and Tennessee," Gray says.

"This just has been a fantastic year for us in recruitment," says Dr. Richard Heitmann of Animal Science, at left. As advising coordinator, he met with each of the department's 100 new students, mentoring them on course selection and other issues, and then assigned them to a faculty advisor. Enrollment in the department, CASNR's largest, topped 380 this fall.

NEW DEGREES PREPARE AGENTS OF CHANGE

Acting on student interest and industry demands, CASNR added a new degree program this spring and new concentrations in bioenergy and biotechnology.

Preparing tomorrow's leaders today is the goal of the new agriculture leadership concentration, a component of the **Agriculture and Natural Resource Leadership, Education, and Communications degree** offered by CASNR. The degree prepares students for careers in fields all experiencing heavy demand.

"The leadership education and skills acquired through this new concentration will aid the students in finding opportunities in Fortune 500 companies, as well as civic organizations where employers are seeking team leaders and managers who are ready to take on the challenge," says Dr. Bryan Patterson.

The demand for food, agriculture, and natural resources graduates will exceed available supply by four to 10 percent in the next decade, according to national assessments. Leadership skills will be an essential component of what can make these graduates stand out.

In the Department of Plant Sciences, the new **bioenergy concentration** is intended for students interested in pursuing careers in the rapidly

expanding biofuels and bioenergy fields. Graduates will have the background and internship experience to enter directly into the bioenergy workforce or continue on for advanced degrees for careers as scholars and scientists.

The **biotechnology concentration** is designed for students wishing to pursue advanced degrees in plant molecular biology and biotechnology and/or careers in the plant biotechnology industry.

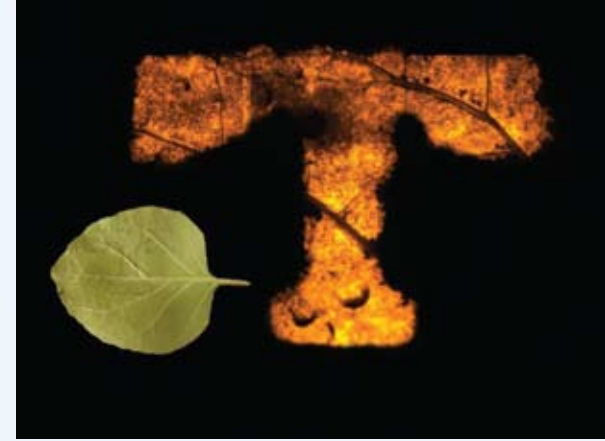
"Both these areas—bioenergy and biotechnology—are moving so swiftly and encompass a growing number of subjects that we felt they merited their own concentrations," says interim department head, Dr. Bob Augé. "We're excited about what they'll enable our students to do."

"It's important for our alumni and friends to understand that the college is looking to the future and attuning its academic programs to the needs we see for the future," says Dr. Mary Albrecht, associate dean for academic affairs. "The students who are coming in are so different than those we've had before, and so are the markets and industries that await them. We have to do things differently to reach this generation of students. They're wired so differently. And we are actively engaged in doing things differently to reach them."

"CASNR is adapting and changing to meet the needs of our students and

the demands of the agriculture and natural resources sectors in the years to come," says Dean Caula Beyl. "Our enrollment is growing, and we're seeing heightened interest by recruiters. It's an exciting time for us and for our students."

You can learn more about the college at its Web site, www.casnr.utk.edu, or by calling (865) 974-7303. —Margot Emery with Doug Edlund



Go Big Orange! As a Plant Sciences doctoral student studying biotechnology, Jason Abercrombie (2007) showed his Big Orange spirit by painting fluorescent proteins in the shape of the Power T in tobacco using a gene screening tool called agroinfiltration. If there is a gene of interest that can be used in a transgenic plant, agroinfiltration is quicker than making stable transgenic plants.



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Random participants will receive UT ag or vet med logo clothing and gear.

www.agriculture.utk.edu/news/survey/

