

He upholds the tradition

By Nikki Coe
Hydro, Okla.

A friendly face is a welcome sight among the challenges of college life. For 25 years, Joe Williams has been a friendly face and helped Oklahoma State University students through challenges.

Last fall, the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources awarded Williams the first Academic Mentor Award in honor of his commitment to helping students.

"The College of Ag has a strong tradition of mentoring its students," Williams said. "I am extremely honored to be among a group of faculty and staff who care about students, and it's very special to be the first recipient."

Williams said he believes mentoring students is a lifestyle, which includes being a positive force in the environment in which students learn, work and live. He has been the academic adviser to many OSU agricultural economics students since 1975.

He was the financial adviser for Alpha Gamma Rho Fraternity for 13 years and advised CASNR Student Council for two years. He advised Alpha Zeta honorary agricultural fraternity for eight years. Williams also advised Aggie-X club, the 10th and 12th floors of Kerr Residence Hall and the Latin American Student Association.

"Dr. Williams does an excellent job of getting to know potential students on a personal level and then presents the opportunities that will appeal to that particular student," said Shannon Ferrell, OSU agricultural economics graduate and Truman Scholar.

Kent Gardner, agricultural economics senior and Truman Scholar, said he appreciates Williams.

"Dr. Williams always has been very supportive of me," Gardner said. "He's more like a parent, because he's quick to let me know if I ever need anything, he'll be there."

Williams, a native of Roswell, N. M., received his bachelor's and master's degrees in agricultural economics from New Mexico State University and then spent two years in the U.S. Army.

He returned to New Mexico to work as an agricultural lender for his hometown bank for a short time and then accepted a research position at NMSU while his wife, Sue, completed her college education.

After earning his doctorate in agricultural economics from Iowa State University, Williams began teaching at OSU in 1975. Sue Williams is an extension specialist for the College of Human Environmental Sciences.

They have two daughters, Anna Langley of Oxford, Miss., and Heather Williams of Tulsa. Both daughters graduated from OSU in agricultural economics. Williams was academic adviser to his daughters and said, while he was hesitant at first, it was a wonderful experience.

"I would not have chosen a different adviser," Heather Williams said. "We were always able to separate home and school, and I studied hardest for his classes."

Williams' desire to be a mentor began because of the mentors who helped him during his college experience. His NMSU academic mentor, James Gray, allowed him to work each summer as a research intern. Williams went on to complete his master's degree under Gray's supervision.

Because of Gray's influence, Williams participates in OSU's Freshman Research Scholar Program. Agricultural economics undergraduate students work with a faculty member in actual research, allowing them to develop economic research skills.

Williams said he learned it is important to help students outside the realm of academia while working for NMSU University Housing and Food Services. Ed Rapp, food services director, inspired Williams with the way he cared for students' welfare. This experience led Williams to believe the university experience should be a total package that includes academic instruction, student organizations and living centers.

"Dr. Williams' vision for students does not end with completion of their academic program," Ferrell said. "He keeps in close contact with graduates of our department, helping them with career development challenges far beyond graduation."

Williams keeps up with former students having maintained a list of advisees' names from 1971 to present. The chalkboard in his office displays pictures of agricultural economics graduates with their children, whom he calls his "grand-advisees."



Joe Williams, agricultural economics professor, instructs his farm and ranch management class. (Photo by Todd Johnson)

Williams also has contributed to the teaching and research sectors of the agricultural economics department. He is head of the agricultural economics scholarship committee, which under his direction has raised more than \$525,000 during the past 10 years.

Williams advised two of the three Truman Scholars from OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources. He developed and maintains a business card listing of all OSU agricultural economics graduates, which allows students to research various job opportunities.

He teaches a course in farm and ranch management, as well as a seminar for agricultural economics seniors, which helps prepare them for the work force. He also has researched various aspects of the Oklahoma swine industry.

The door to Williams' office is always open to students, and he said every phone call is important to him. This open-door policy, along with his teaching and research duties, keeps him busy. However, he said seeing students find success and hearing thanks is rewarding.

Williams also has seen many students struggle with college life. His personal goals for advising are to encourage and provide students an opportunity to develop to their greatest individual potential.

"I advise CASNR students to set high goals, work to achieve those goals, develop academically, identify what you want to do in a career, and develop leadership and social skills," Williams said.

Next time you are in Agricultural Hall and see Joe Williams' smile, you can't help but know he is there to help and that he cares about CASNR students. CJ

CASNR Honors Mentoring Tradition



Joe Williams, center, accepts the Academic Mentor Award from Dean Sam Curl (left) and Associate Dean Ed Miller. (Photo by Todd Johnson)

OSU's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources administration takes great pride that its faculty and staff are committed to helping students, said Wes Holley, CASNR assistant dean.

The administration turned to the CASNR scholarship and awards committee to help them develop a way to recognize annually a faculty or staff member who has gone beyond the call of duty to help students.

"We were looking for someone who exhibits the whole package of club involvement, academic advising and individual mentoring," Holley said.

Joe Williams, agricultural economics professor, received the first CASNR academic mentor award Sept. 13 at the fall Division of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources faculty meeting. When presenting the award, Ed Miller, CASNR associate dean, said Williams "fit the prototype of who this award was supposed to honor."

In the nomination process used, applicants wrote an essay and received support letters from students, faculty and their respective department head. The scholarship committee then reviewed all the applications and selected the outstanding mentor. An award of \$1,000 and a statuette will be given to the recipient each year.

Holley said the recipient does not have to be an academic adviser, but should be highly involved with students in some capacity. Holley said he would like to see this become the top award for CASNR faculty and staff.