

# USDA honors teaching excellence

**B**etter than a thousand days of diligent study is one day with a great teacher.

This Japanese proverb reminds one to think about those special individuals who have influenced lives through the gift of education.

For 15 years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has recognized some of those special people through the National Awards Program for Excellence in College and University Teaching in the Food and Agricultural Sciences.

"This is probably the most prestigious teaching recognition awarded across all disciplines of agriculture," said Linda Martin, assistant dean of academic programs for the Oklahoma State University College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources.

The program, which honors excellence in teaching, has extensive evaluation criteria for nominees. The six areas of evaluation assess teaching quality, teaching philosophy and

methodology, service to the profession, service to students, professional development, and endorsement by administrators, alumni and colleagues.

In 2005, Bailey Norwood became the first Oklahoma State University professor to be recognized by the program. He was one of only two recipients in the new teacher category.

In 2006, CASNR claimed two of these coveted awards. Douglas Needham and David Buchanan were recognized in November as two of six teachers honored among four regions.

"This is only about the third time in the history of this awards program that two recipients have come from one university in a single year," Martin said, "so this is a tremendous honor for the college and the university."

## Doug Needham

Douglas Needham, a graduate of Purdue University, has been part of OSU's horticulture and landscape architecture department since 1989. He

has received numerous awards for teaching excellence over the years. Among these are the L.M. Ware Distinguished Teacher recognition, the North American Collees and Teachers of Agriculture Southern Region Outstanding Teacher and Teacher Fellow awards, and the OSU Regents Distinguished Teaching Award.

Needham formed and coordinated the OSU Teaching Community Support Network where other teachers met to discuss issues of the profession. He also was appointed as a faculty adviser to OSU's Institute for Teaching and Learning Excellence.

"I have high expectations for myself, and I have high expectations for my students," Needham said. "I believe that my teaching techniques must be student-centered. My goal is to empower my students to become lifelong learners and collaborative decision makers."

Needham coordinates students who participate in the Horticulture in the European Community and United States Consortium. This study abroad program, known as HORTECUS, is a cooperation among four European and three U.S. universities.

"I spent the summer of 2003 studying problem-based learning and teaching horticulture at Hogeschool INHOLLAND Delft in the Netherlands," Needham said.

He develops close relationships with students that often are maintained after they graduate.

"I maintain an open-door policy, and students frequently come to my office to discuss current events, seek input on projects or talk about their career goals," Needham said. "It is essential that I am readily available to my students."

Needham advises around 25 students of various majors per semester.

"He genuinely cares about his students," said Nathan Smith, an agricultural education major. "Dr. Needham makes every effort to make sure that his students are actively involved in the learning process."

He is a past national president and current adviser for the Pi Alpha



Doug Needham helps student Shelly Wolf in one of his horticulture labs. (Photo by Shanna Boyett)

Xi honor society in horticulture. Needham also coaches the floricultural crop judging and design team.

"Dr. Needham was what I always imagined a college professor should be," said Kristina Lewis, OSU alumna and The Ohio State University graduate student. "He never ceased to amaze me with the depth of his concern for and genuine interest in students."

### David Buchanan

David Buchanan's father, M. L. (Buck) Buchanan, who graduated from Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1935, had an extensive career as an animal science professor at North Dakota State University. David Buchanan, who studied at NDSU and the University of Nebraska, chose to follow in his father's footsteps as a teacher.

Buchanan began his teaching career at OSU in 1980. The graduate of distinction professor has taught courses at all levels during his 26 years in the animal science department, including undergraduate, graduate and honors courses.

"I grew up observing a master teacher," said Buchanan of his father. "While I was young, and while taking three classes from him during my undergraduate program, I received a sense of the joy of teaching and saw that it is possible to make a real difference."

Making a difference is exactly what he has done at OSU. Although many of Buchanan's classes are required and demanding courses, his evaluation scores are consistently high for the college and university.

"Teaching is important because the students will carry with them a piece of the way I think," Buchanan said. "What they do with that is up to them. It's a way ideas move from one generation to the next."

Buchanan has received numerous awards for his teaching in the past. A few of these honors include the NACTA Teaching Award of Merit, the OSU Regents Distinguished Teaching Award, the Mortar Board Golden Torch Award, Sarkey's Distinguished Professor

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### David Buchanan

advising 50 to 60 students per semester, Buchanan currently advises two student organizations: Cowboys for Christ and the Oklahoma Collegiate Cattlewomen. In recent years, Buchanan has hosted club members for a Christmas party at his home. In



David Buchanan teaches the animal science capstone course. (Photo by Shanna Boyett)

Award and the NACTA Teacher Fellow Award.

"I have to always look for the teachable moments," Buchanan said.

Buchanan emphasizes his belief that teaching is not only for the classroom. He said the act of teaching can take place in the hallway or a club meeting just as easily.

"Dr. Buchanan is so dedicated to the students that he is always available for assistance," said OSU alumnus Russell Fent. "His office door is always open for undergraduates and graduate students alike."

Buchanan creates many of those "teachable moments" by involving himself in student clubs and functions. During the course of his career at OSU, the educator has served as adviser for 11 student organizations.

In addition to

recognition of his efforts as a mentor, Buchanan received the Agricultural Ambassadors' Outstanding Adviser Award in 2002.

Both professors are appreciative of the recognition they have received from the USDA.

"Like all awards, it means somebody thought enough of me to nominate me," Buchanan said. "It's gratifying to have colleagues and administrators that admire what I do."

The award winners, although humble themselves, are proud their accomplishments bring recognition to OSU.

"It makes me proud for the university and CASNR," Needham said.

They both enjoy working in a college that supports their efforts and encourages outstanding faculty.

"Whatever successes I have had are in part because I work in a place that encourages excellence in teaching," Buchanan said.

With a combined 43 years at OSU, these two men have excelled for the university and touched the lives of countless individuals through the gift of education. ☺

For more information and a listing of past winners, visit the USDA Web site: <http://www.usda.gov>.