

University Distinguished Professor Dennis Ray Makes Significant Impact

By Susan McGinley

As a University Distinguished Professor, Dennis Ray is honored for his longstanding and continued record of excellent contributions to undergraduate teaching over more than two decades, not only in the classroom, but also through his involvement in the university-wide general education program. He is a professor of both plant sciences and arid lands studies in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

According to his colleagues, Ray has had a powerful and positive impact on the quality of the general education program and on academic advising. He has worked with faculty at all three Arizona universities and at Arizona's community colleges in the statewide articulation effort, and in the assessment of the quality of the University of Arizona's general education curriculum.

"I've always been very committed to teaching," says Ray, whose research focuses on the development of new crops such as guayule, guar and lesquerella for arid and semi-arid regions. "I think the next generation of students needs to know

how important plants are to us so they can make informed decisions. They need to know where their food comes from, who grows it, and how plants in general are important in our lives."

In the classroom, this translates to steady attendance that does not decline through the semester, students say, because Ray's dedication as a teacher, tutor, mentor and scholar keeps them coming back.

"He has a gift for making incredibly complex scientific concepts appear simple and straightforward," says a former student who is now a doctor at the Yale University of Medicine.

"Dennis' success as a teacher is not just his ability to present interesting and clear lectures, but he also has the unique ability to motivate students to want to study and learn," adds Robert Leonard, head of the plant sciences department. "His knack for engaging students in learning is really special."

Beyond the classroom, Ray serves as a faculty fellow for students at Cochise Hall, speaks at various colloquia, offers



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student advising workshops, and is active in student honorary societies. He has mentored a large number of graduate assistants and undergraduate preceptors.

Ray's numerous other awards include the Honors College Five Star Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching; his election as a Fellow in the American Society for Horticultural Sciences; the UA Provost General Education Teaching Award; the College of Agriculture Faculty Teaching Award, and many other national and international honors.

Yet he says his own accomplishments are not what is most important to him.

"Most significant would be some student I have reached who will do something great someday." ■

Ralph Price's All-Around Dedication Earns Recognition

By Susan McGinley

Since 1976, thousands of students have taken Ralph Price's nutritional sciences course, NATS 104: Food, Nutrition and You. Filled with multimedia presentations, hands-on projects, and practical information, it has become one of the most popular of the general education biological science Tier 1 classes at the University of Arizona, garnering consistently high ratings from students.

Price, a professor in the nutritional sciences department of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, is the honored recipient of the 2003 Provost's General Education Teaching Award. In his nomination packet, colleagues and students alike note his enthusiasm, organizational skills, knowledge and love of his subject, deep appreciation for undergraduate students, and dedication to mentoring others as a "teacher's teacher." He has won five other teaching awards.

Price leads the team of faculty, graduate assistants and student preceptors that delivers NATS 104 to more than 2200 students annually. With 500 stu-

dents in each class, it is a tremendous undertaking to keep the course fresh. To hold interest, Price incorporates current songs—he once sang a duet with a football player, and brings cartoons and images into the class sessions to convey serious nutritional information in an entertaining way.

"I ask questions to at least awaken them," Price says. "I like to get the students to relate their bodies and nutrition with what they're eating." Students assess the nutrient content of their actual diets over a three-day period, do nutritional case studies, and learn about the effects of various diets, pregnancy and lactation, physical fitness, anorexia and bulimia, and alcohol on the body.

"As a consequence of exposure to NATS 104, we have also seen a steady increase in the numbers of students transferring into our major programs of study," says Linda Houtkooper, nutritional sciences department head. "This is a direct result of Dr. Price's influence in the classroom."



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During his 35 years at the UA, Price has also directed the Better Process Control School, delivering his food safety certificate program to more than 5,000 enrollees. He is an elected Fellow of the Institute of Food Technologists, one of only twelve individuals honored annually nationwide. Fluent in Spanish and Portuguese, he has made presentations worldwide on various aspects of food safety and the uses of multimedia and the Internet in science.

As one student wrote, "His style of teaching does not make the students feel overwhelmed but rather encouraged to learn about nutrition for their own benefit and longevity of life." ■