Spotlight

academic awards triannual

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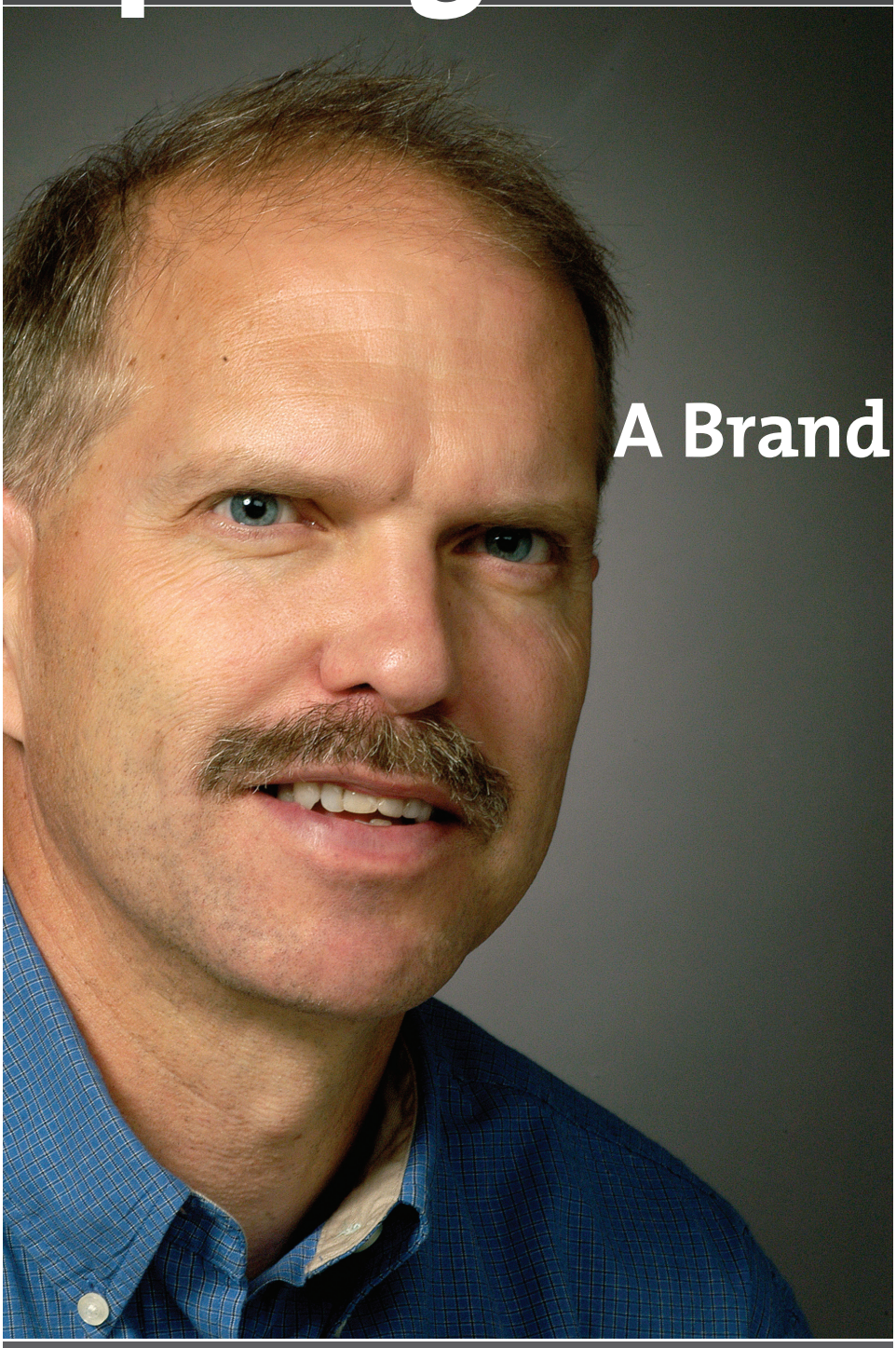

Dr Frank Robinson
Professor, Poultry Management/Physiology
2007 3M Teaching Fellow

How many gummy bears can you get from the gelatin of one cow? Will a double-yolked egg hatch twin chicks? If your car burned methane, how far could you travel on the methane from one cow?

A Brand New Day

These and other wacky questions are Frank Robinson's way of integrating research and teaching; engaging students in a fun and creative learning environment; and connecting students with the community.

Robinson is one of the U of A's two professors awarded the 3M National Teaching Fellowship in 2007. The 3M award recognizes excellence in undergraduate teaching and is the only national award of its kind in Canada.

Students in Robinson's first year animal science classes in the Faculty of Agriculture, Forestry, and Home Economics are divided into groups and given a quirky question like the ones above. They research the science behind the question and then present their findings to their peers. But it doesn't stop there. They also present their research, accompanied with music, skits, comedy and an American Idol-like panel, to members of the academic and agricultural communities. Members of the general public even show up to see the spectacle known as "There's a Heifer in Your Tank" which has attracted audiences of up to 700 people.

Robinson calls his teaching philosophy "It's a brand new day," attributable to Sister Mary Clarence from the movie Sister Act 2. Robinson believes good teachers bring students to greater achievement by making every day a new beginning in a learning journey. For Robinson, the content is not always as important as the learning process in a university class.

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...“Robinson” continued

“I see a huge role for experiential learning for learners of all ages. I think that the day that students carry out research and then communicate the relevance of that knowledge, they move up to a higher level of learning,” says Robinson. This approach has attracted students from all disciplines to his courses, a fact that Robinson is very proud of.

Another important aspect of Robinson’s success is involving the community. In addition to integrating the agricultural community in the course, Robinson has invited other groups to participate, including a junior high school jazz band, a community choir, the minister of Alberta Agriculture and Food, and alumni. “We blurred the boundaries between the students, the university and industry,” says Robinson. “It has also been a powerful vehicle for communication between the academic community and the rural community.”

Robinson inspires other educators by encouraging them to step out of convention and embrace a “new day” as teachers. Robinson’s enthusiasm for teaching is infectious and has spread to his colleagues in the Faculty and beyond, with universities across Canada and the US seeking his advice. ■

Upcoming Deadlines for Academic Awards

Alan Blizzard Award

The Alan Blizzard Award was developed by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) to encourage, identify, and publicly recognize collaboration in university teaching which makes a demonstrated difference in student learning.

The Alan Blizzard Award is given to collaborative projects that increase the effectiveness of student learning. The deadline to submit applications to STLHE for the Alan Blizzard Award is **January 11, 2008**. The application form is available at www.mcmaster.ca/stlhe/awards/alan.blizzard.award.html.

Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF)

The Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF) was created to improve teaching and learning effectiveness.

Applications are invited from all University of Alberta instructors who seek innovative ways of integrating teaching and research. It is anticipated that this fund will support a diverse range of initiatives specifically focused on creating exceptional and life changing university experiences for students.

There are two levels of funding for the TLEF: personal development in the area of teaching and learning and projects or research. Applications for funding for personal development are accepted on a continual basis. The deadline for funding for projects or research is **February 1, 2008.**

Alberta Order of Excellence

The Alberta Order of Excellence is the highest honour the Province of Alberta can bestow on a citizen.

The Alberta Order of Excellence recognizes extraordinary Albertans who have made a unique and lasting contribution to their community, province and the country as a whole. Nominations are accepted at any time; however, in order to be considered for induction in 2008, nominations must be received by **February 15, 2008.**

Rutherford Award

The Rutherford Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching is designed to recognize teaching excellence by full-time continuing academic staff at the University of Alberta.

Any individual who has completed a minimum of five years of teaching at the University of Alberta as a full-time continuing member of the academic teaching staff is eligible to be nominated for the Rutherford Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. The deadline to submit nominations is the last Friday of February (i.e., **February 29, 2008**).

Teaching Unit Award

Excellence in teaching and learning may occur at the group or individual level. The intent of the Teaching Unit Award is to celebrate excellence in teaching when a group of individuals consistently work together to promote outstanding teaching and learning.

The teaching unit may work at the graduate or undergraduate level and may include some or all members of a faculty, school, department or division, or it may be an interdisciplinary team. The deadline to submit nominations is the last Friday of February (i.e., **February 29, 2008**).

William Hardy Alexander Award

The William Hardy Alexander Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching was created to recognize teaching excellence by academic staff.

Temporary academic as well as continuing academic staff (Administrative Professional Officers, Faculty Service Officers, Librarians, part-time Continuing Academic Staff and Trust staff) with at least three years teaching experience (and who have taught at least 18 credits) at the University of Alberta are eligible to be nominated for the William Hardy Alexander Award. The deadline to submit nominations is the last Friday of February (i.e., **February 29, 2008**). ■

For more information . . .

For more information, visit our website, **www.ualberta.ca/academicawards,** use the search tool or navigate to the award you are interested in.

For discipline specific awards, please visit our website, select the appropriate field of study and determine which award(s) are applicable to you.

The Academic Awards and Ceremonies Office

The Academic Awards and Ceremonies Office website is a resource to assist University of Alberta faculty in their pursuit of awards in teaching excellence and/or citizenship. The website also celebrates those who have received awards in teaching, citizenship and research.

If you have received an academic award and your outstanding accomplishment is not celebrated on our website, please contact us so that we may recognize your achievement.

We look forward to assisting you so that you or a colleague may be successful when being nominated for any academic awards. For more information or assistance with an academic award nomination, please contact Bobbi Schiestel, Faculty Awards Facilitator, at 780.492.2644 or via e-mail at bobbi.schiestel@ualberta.ca

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