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AU'S BROWNING RECEIVES 2005 AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN OUTREACH

AUBURN — Philip Browning, Wayne T. Smith Professor and head of the Department of Rehabilitation and Special Education in Auburn University's College of Education, is the recipient of the 2005 Award for Excellence in Faculty Outreach.

"Phil Browning is a world-class faculty member at Auburn," said David Wilson, associate provost and vice president for University Outreach. "His research and outreach has touched the lives of thousands of individuals across the nation,"

Browning has touched those lives through the Transition conferences that he initiated in 1991 with a startup seed grant from the Office of the Vice President for Extension, now AU Outreach. The conferences were designed to help those with disabilities make the transition from school to the working world. The ongoing purpose of the conferences is to enhance participants' skills in best practices, increase their awareness of transition issues, programs and resources and expand and strengthen the network for all persons interested in the state's youth and young adults with disabilities.

The conference's yearly enrollment has steadily increased for a cumulative count of more than 7,500 transition stakeholders. That effort has now grown to include the creation of the Auburn Transition Leadership Institute. And since that first seed grant, Browning's department has successfully secured more than \$28 million in grants and contracts.

Bill East, executive director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education Inc., summed up the impact Browning's outreach has made.

"His Transition conferences have been recognized as the best in the nation for many years," stated East. "His outreach into the communities throughout Alabama has benefited many individuals with disabilities and their families, and has brought much recognition to Auburn University," he added.

Through his career in special education, East says that he has "witnessed first hand the impact on the professionals that have learned from Dr. Browning, but more importantly, I have talked with students and families that have a better life because Phil Browning shared his expertise outside of Auburn University to the State Department of Education, local school districts and local communities — ultimately reaching the individuals who need help in transition from school to successful adult living."

Browning's nomination came from Mabrey Whetstone, Ph.D., director of Special Education Services in the Alabama State Department of Education. Supporting letters came from Browning's colleagues in the National Association of State Directors of Special Education Inc., headquartered in Alexandria, Va., from the University of Kansas, Southern Illinois University and from Richard Kunkel, former faculty member and dean of AU's College of Education, now at Florida State University.

"While outreach programs and activities have served as the primary platform from which he (Browning) has advocated, research and instructional activities have served to strengthen his base and guide his actions," states Whetstone. "Collectively, they have been the mediums used by him for advancing Alabama's goal to prepare its young people with disabilities to assume more successful and productive roles as young adults."

As a result of the Transition conferences, Kunkel, now dean of the College of Education at Florida State University, said that because of Browning, Alabama now has a "vast and strong network of people serving its young people with special needs and guiding them to more successful adult lives." Kunkel, who attended many of Browning's conferences while at Auburn, added, "I found him to be an admired leader no matter where I went, or with whom I met. I also encountered out-of-state notables from whom I learned that he was nationally known for his scholarly works in the field and his leadership contributions in Auburn. In this regard, Phil has brought both state and national recognition to Auburn University."

Outreach Vice President Wilson also spoke of Browning's "scholarly works."

"He is the epitome of the type of scholarship at Auburn that improves the lives of people," said Wilson. "We're honored to recognize him."

Some of Browning's other honors include the Governor's Certificate of Commendation and the Outstanding Faculty Outreach Award in 1994; Alabama's Outstanding Special Educator of the Year in 1996; Visionary Transition Leader Award and Outstanding Research Award, both in 2000; and the Distinguished Career Award in Rehabilitation Education in 2003. Browning's department also offers master's degrees in Rehabilitation and Special Education through distance learning.

Browning earned his undergraduate degree from Howard Payne College in Texas, his master's at Texas Tech University and his doctorate in Rehabilitation and Special Education from the University of Wisconsin. His early career was spent at the University of Oregon as training director, research director and associate director of the National Rehabilitation Research and Training Center in Mental Retardation at the Center on Human Development. While at the University of Oregon, Browning rose from assistant to full professor and was the director of the Doctoral Program in Rehabilitation Research and Interdisciplinary Studies in Mental Retardation at the university. He joined the AU faculty in 1989 and has been head of AU's Department of Rehabilitation and Special Education since that time.