New class explores social media for business success

Social media has demonstrated its ability to grab an audience and hold it as more people become users of Twitter, Facebook, Flicker and other platforms to share their lives and interests.

For example, Iranian dissidents turned into news reporters in summer 2009 after the re-election of their country's controversial president. They released information, photographs and video of government brutality through Twitter after the government banned foreign media from reporting on protests. And a fan campaign through Facebook was the impetus that led to 88-year-old actress Betty White hosting "Saturday Night Live" this past May.

So if social media devices are sufficient to fuel a small insurrection and resurrect the career of an elderly Hollywood actress, surely they can advance business goals.

That's the premise of the Social Media and Virtual Communities in Business course taught by Allen Johnston, Ph.D., professor of information systems. The cutting-edge, Ph.D., professor taught by Allen Johnston taught the course made its debut this past spring. The Virtual Communities in Business course now offer a social media course in MBA curricula.

California-Berkley and Emory University — that offered a similar course this past year. A half-dozen schools have contacted Johnston asking for a copy of his syllabus as they begin to construct similar courses. In another show of its mainstream appeal, Harvard and Columbia now offer a social media course in MBA curricula.

UAB's mission is to be a research university and academic health center that discovers, teaches and applies knowledge for the intellectual, cultural, social and economic benefit of Birmingham, the state and beyond.

Our interactions with each other and the outside world affect how successful we are at fulfilling that mission.

ASC kicks off new season with 11 Day Opening Festival

Art, interaction and music will collide this September at UAB as part of a free 11-day festival celebrating music.

Inter-ART-ive, a free party, will kick off the Alys Stephens Center's 11-Day Opening Festival. Festival of events and performances celebrating the new season. The third annual inter-ART-ive party will take place Thursday, Sept. 16 from 6 to 9 p.m. in the Alys Stephens Center.

This year’s theme is “inter-ART-ive has the beat,” and the festival will feature live performances by the UAB Drumline and acclaimed UAB Steel Drum Band. It all leads up to headliner Willie Ziaivino Y Su Grupa plus a drumming circle led by John Scalici’s Get Rhythm.

The performance and party will take place at the Alys Stephens Center Sept. 20-24. Many events will be free.

The party will feature live performances by the UAB Drumline and acclaimed UAB Steel Drum Band with a drumming circle led by John Scalici’s Get Rhythm (pictured).

“We always feel strongly about opening our center that discovers, teaches and applies knowledge for the intellectual, cultural, social and economic benefit of Birmingham, the state and beyond. Our interactions with each other and the outside world affect how successful we are at fulfilling that mission.

“But the minute they sit down and become a part of the drumming ensemble, they get so much confidence, and have a lot of fun.”

The UAB Steel Drum Band has received accolades wherever it has performed, and Ziaivino's Atlanta-based band features percussion throughout its Latin-infused music.

“If you've never seen a steel drum band, UAB is pretty amazing,” Simpson says.

“And coming to see them is a great way to support students and see what they are doing. Ziaivino's group is impressive, too.
CCTS to host open house Sept. 8

The UAB Center for Clinical and Translational Science Clinical Research Unit (CRRU) will hold its Open House and Research Subject Appreciation Event from 2 to 4 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 8 on the 15th Floor of Jefferson Tower. The CRRU formerly known as the PCIR (Participant and Clinical Interactions Resources).

Wyss to discuss the pipeline for future biomedical discoverers

Cell Biology Professor J. Michael Wyss, Ph.D., will speak to the Pittman Society about building the pipeline for the next generation of biomedical discoverers at 5 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 8 in the Kaul Genetics Building Finley Conference Center. Wyss directs the UAB Center for Community Outreach Development. The presentation is open to all interested students, fellows, and faculty. Direct questions to Peter Smith, Ph.D., at prsmith@uab.edu.

Learn more about the UAB Pittman Society for Clinical and Translational Research at www.ccts.uab.edu.

Lecture, reception for David Hilliard, the John Morton Visiting Artist

Photographer David Hilliard is the 2010 John Morton Visiting Artist in the UAB Department of Art and Art History. Hilliard will present an overview of his career and studio practice at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 9 in the UAB Mary Cul Halsey Recital Hall.

A reception for Hilliard will follow at 7:30 p.m. in The Gallery. Admission to both the presentation and reception are free and open to the public. Call 934-4941.

Register for Conversation on Capstones seminar Sept. 9

Director Suzanne Scott-Trammell will discuss ways in which Career Services can provide resources and information that could be integrated into courses during the Conversation on Capstones at noon Thursday, Sept. 9 in Sterne Library Room 182. Registration is required; contact Juanita Sizemore at jsizemor@uab.edu by noon Tuesday, Sept. 7.

Call for submissions: ’10 Frederick Conner Prize in the History of Ideas

The Conner Prize is awarded for an essay in the history of ideas written by a member of the UAB faculty. The term “history of ideas” is to be interpreted liberally, as including a broad range of interdisciplinary concerns. The prize carries an award of $250. For more information, visit http://main.uab.edu/Sites/faculty-development/50537.

Contact Claire Peel, Ph.D., at 934-0513 or peelc@uab.edu or lapteo@uab.edu for more information.

Discussion Book dialogues set to begin Sept. 16

Birmingham Museum of Art curator Samantha Kelly will discuss "The Power of the Creative Act: How Museums Transform and Unite Community" during the UAB Discussion Book Dialogue at 11:30 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 16 in Heritage Hall Building Room 549.

This event is free and open to the public. Direct questions to Juanita Sizemore at jsizemor@uab.edu. A complete listing of UAB Discussion Book activities can be found at www.uab.edu/discussionbook.

Faculty Senate to conduct online survey though Friday, Sept. 17

According to the UAB Strategic Plan (2003), one of UAB’s core values is “shared governance.” In order to assess faculty perceptions of shared governance at UAB, the Faculty Senate is conducting an online survey through Friday, Sept. 17. All faculty are encouraged to fill out the survey at www.surveymonkey.com/D3k3b29K. All responses will be confidential and reported only in aggregate form.

For more information, contact Faculty Senate Chair Mark Hickson, Ph.D., at hickson@uab.edu or Sue Kim, Ph.D., at suekim@uab.edu.

Order your 2010-11 bTicket today

Be there in person for all the 2010-11 sports seasons for UAB Athletics. Catch the excitement of UAB Football, Basketball, Volleyball, Soccer, Baseball and Softball with the bTicket, an inexpensive way to watch all home athletic events for UAB employees.

For more information on UAB Athletics, call 975-8221, e-mail tickets@uab.edu or visit uabsports.com/tickets.

Improve your conversational English — classes to be held

Free conversational English classes for beginning and intermediate levels will be taught from 7 to 8:30 p.m. Tuesdays, Sept. 7-Nov. 23 and from 10 a.m. to noon Wednesdays, Sept. 8-Nov. 24 in the Smolian International House. Or you can practice interviewing skills from 6:30 to 8 p.m. Wednesdays.

Learn more at www.uab.edu/iss.

Check online calendar for events

The UAB Campus Calendar at www.uab.edu/calendar is updated daily with campus events, activities and deadlines, and the “Calendars” link on the UAB home page takes you straight there. Postings can include detailed information, photos and links to sites or related events. Check out the FAQs for more information.
Conference enables engineering to showcase MPAD

This past spring, the U.S. Army Research Laboratory (ARL) released $1 million for federal government-supported research to be conducted in the UAB School of Engineering Metals Processing Laboratory. The week of Aug. 23, more than 300 people from 36 companies visited UAB to dedicate the new Materials Processing & Applications Development (MPAD) Facility. The event, which was part of the Alabama Composites Conference, was held in part to showcase the university’s research on applications development for metals复合材料in transportation, defense, power and energy, corrosion prevention and infrastructure.

“It was a great conference — fantastic,” says Uday Vaidya, Ph.D., composite’s lab director and a materials science and engineering (MSE) instructor. “The cutting-edge research taking place at UAB is why we had such a good industry turnout. Many of the people attending the conference were surprised at the amount of work going on at UAB and the impact it has had. We had several comments on how great the interaction was, especially with a conference of this size. Coming from industry, that’s not trivial feedback.”

The 9,000-square-foot MPAD lab, located in the 501 Warehouse Building, was a showcase for the conference. Visitors received first-hand demonstrations of the lab’s capabilities and an up-close look at how it will enable UAB faculty to foster unique research partnerships with leading industry minds.

The federal funds given by the ARL will support development and production of innovative materials on scales so large that they essentially are nonexistent in any other university-based, metal-casting lab in the country or any other industry testing facilities.

“Most universities have simple testing and the data is published and the research stops there,” Vaidya says. “We can take it further and produce large-scale components and testing in real-world conditions. We can go from prototype to design and into commercialization here.”

Several research projects already are under way, including projects for the ARL Department of Energy, Redstone Arsenal and the Navy.

The Graduate Automotive Technology Education (GATE) program funded by the Department of Energy aims to discover new materials capable of reducing the mass of buses and automobiles. “A 10 percent reduction in mass can result in 6 percent in fuel savings over the life of a vehicle,” Vaidya says. “We’re looking at new technologies and new materials that would enable applications for a wide range of transportation systems that would make this goal possible.”

Another research focus, funded by the ARL, is investigating ways to lightweight personal protection and vehicles.

It’s not uncommon for a United States soldier to carry close to 100 pounds of weight total with his armor, backpack, helmet and shoes. The extra weight carried makes it difficult to be mobile, not to mention the issues in transporting the equipment.

“There’s a big need for reducing weight and improving the efficiency of the body armor system,” Vaidya says. “We’re working with helmets and determining how to reduce the weight but increase their performance efficiency. We’re doing the same thing in vehicles, trying to determine ways to reduce the weight but keep the performance of the equipment the same or better.” Other projects include reduced weight and improved efficiency of automotive body panels and interior components and high-value-added materials and processing technologies for next generation structures. Researchers also have state-of-the-art equipment at their fingertips to discover and test new metals and alloys for these and other projects. The equipment is capable of pouring 500-pound test castings — significantly larger than traditional test samples at similar U.S. facilities.

The MPAD is expected to fuel economic development in the area and drive materials-science innovation, and if the composites conference was indication, the facility is on its way, Vaidya says. Four of the 36 conference exhibitors were from Alabama. The rest were from outside of the state.

“That shows the work here is of national and international interest,” Vaidya says. “Each of the companies that were represented here are very diverse. They ranged from material suppliers to producers to designers to others. The technologies that were here will become next generation materials and structures.

Great for students

The opportunity to host so many exhibitors also brought graduate and undergraduate engineering students a chance to see the future of their field. Students played a large role in making the conference a success. Vaidya says. They managed the production of the conference and helped exhibitors set up. They also displayed more than 40 posters on emerging technologies in structural, nano and biocomposites.

“Our students really were the face of the conference,” Vaidya says. “They worked out a lot of the conference details and received a lot of face time with industry leaders. A couple of our students were offered jobs because of their opportunity to interact with these industry leaders. There’s no question in made a big impact on our students. They learned more about their technology and the work taking place in the industry during these four days than they would have in the classroom.”

The “inter-ART-ive” party will feature headliner Willie Ziebar Y Su Grupa. Sept. 20 and free daily performances at 12, 2 and 6 p.m. each day Sept. 22-23 on the outdoor Earth Harp. Thursday, Sept. 23 will feature two free events of particular interest to faculty and staff. The first is a noon lecture and performance called The Dish, when the group will talk a little in depth about their art form. Boxed lunches will be available for purchase during the lecture. The evening free performance will feature the MASS Happy Hour from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

The week will culminate with a one-night-only stage performance by MASS Ensemble. They will combine live music, sculpture, dance, video, light and rigging to create a multi-sensory rock opera at 6 p.m. on Friday, Sept. 24. Call 975-2787 for tickets or go to www.AlysStephens.org. The group will build another giant Earth Harp from the stage of the Jemison Concert Hall to the balcony as part of the performance, transforming the concert hall into a working musical instrument.

“MASS Ensemble will provide you with a lot to experience the entire week of Sept. 20,” Simpson says. “Faculty and staff can walk over on their lunch break or right after work, get to see a performance, and they’ll talk about the piece and the art form and how it was created.”

MASS Ensemble builds all of its Earth Harps specific to the sites they visit. They have performed at the Space Needle in Seattle, Discovery Center in Houston, The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and World Financial Center, among others.

“It’s the coolest, most unique and innovative thing we may see on campus this year,” Simpson says. “It’s really impressive to see what they can do.”

To learn more, visit www.AlysStephens.org.

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UAB’s Alumni Affairs and its yearly Annual Giving campaign have created a new and innovative way to communicate and foster positive relationships with alumni this year with a mailing that features a survey aimed at graduates from each school.

“We’ve sent approximately 70,000 of these mailers out, and we’re very excited about the response we’ve received from alumni,” says Becky Watson, associate vice president of Alumni Affairs & Annual Giving. “We’ve had only positive feedback concerning the marketing effort.”

The NAS had mailers created that are tailored to graduates from each of UAB’s nine schools. Graduates of The School of Nursing, for example, received a card that had a note geared toward the school, pushing the message that it remains “committed to developing leaders like you.”

“It was a way for each school to communicate with their individual alumni,” Watson says. “For the College of Arts and Sciences, this was the first time they were able to address to their alumni what it’s all about. It’s a great tool for the alumni and for us.”

After the personalized message, recipients are invited to tell UAB more about themselves and their UAB experience by visiting their own personalized website.”

“The piece invites you to go to, for example, beckywatson.youanduab.org, and you have a 15-question survey that enables you to tell us about your UAB experience,” Watson says. “Once we get the data back, we will share it with each school so they can learn more about their alumni and develop more meaningful relationships with them.

“We believed we needed to find a way for each school to be able to tell their story to alumni, and learn more about their alumni. What was their experience like here? What are they doing now? What can UAB do to make them a bigger part of their school? It’s really an effort to create an ongoing dialogue so UAB can better serve its graduates.”

“We don’t know how to effectively communicate with alumni if we don’t understand their experience,” she adds.

The UAB NAS now has more than 9,000 members with 60 chapters around the world. It has provided more than $750,000 in scholarships, grants and gifts back to the university.

There are more than 105,000 UAB graduates living around the world. Watson acknowledges that the current campaign, which reaches out to more than half of those graduates, is ambitious.

But, she says, it’s a project important to strengthening the legacy of UAB.

“This has really been Alumni Affairs’ first branding campaign in a while,” Watson says. “We believed we needed to find a way for each school to be able to tell their story to alumni, and learn more about their alumni. What was their experience like here? What are they doing now? What can UAB do to make them a bigger part of their school? It’s really an effort to create an ongoing dialogue so UAB can better serve its graduates.”

Faculty and staff who are alumni members and received a mailer are encouraged to answer their survey if they have not already.

For more information on the Annual Giving Campaign, e-mail Becky Watson at bwatson@uab.edu or visit www.uab.edu/alumni.

YOU AND UAB
SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

UAB NAS reaching out to alumni with new survey campaign

BRANDWORKS

CONTINUED from page 1

“We’re passionate about seeing the UAB brand flourish — because that helps our employees and students flourish. We want to provide the tools needed to do that, and the Brandworks website is the starting point.”

often receive inquiries about official university colors, logos and style guides, in addition to questions about website themes, PowerPoint templates and images. The Brandworks website offers all of these products and more.

Letterhead, business cards, photography requests, brochures and other brand tools are available through the website.

And if your department is considering updating or creating a website, all of the tools needed are available; they are branded properly, offer theme choices and are hosted and administered by UAB Information Technology at no charge.

The themes, easy for designers to manipulate and tailor as desired, offer a high level of functionality while maintaining consistency across the brand.

“Joomla is our primary content management system offering, and we have tutorials available on Brandworks for how to use the application,” Martin says.

“We have several theming options available, and you can preview the 150+ color combinations right there on the site,” he says. “In addition, we have HTML and CSS documents available for those who have Web-based applications or tools or just have one or two Web pages and don’t want a content management system.”

“The resources available at Brandworks cover broad areas,” Tapp adds. “You can’t execute a print ad, but you can get that started and find the resources that will set you on the right path.”

While Brandworks tries to offer all of the tools and advice necessary to advance the UAB brand and yours, Martin encourages users to e-mail or call if you don’t find what you need.

“There are feedback links located on the bottom of each page and request forms located throughout the website,” Martin says.

“If there is a problem, or if something is not clear or missing, we don’t know that unless we hear from our users. Please use the feedback link to let us know your needs, likes and dislikes.”

Products are updated frequently, as are request notifications and the style guide. Tapp says users should check back often for improvements and additions.

“Every single employee and student is an ambassador of the UAB brand, and making the workflow seamless through Brandworks is our priority,” Tapp says. “Arming everyone with ideas, messages and logos that are on target and correct will help us continue to build that brand.”

But, she says, it’s a project important to strengthening the legacy of UAB.

“We believe we needed to find a way for each school to be able to tell their story to alumni, and learn more about their alumni. What was their experience like here? What are they doing now? What can UAB do to make them a bigger part of their school? It’s really an effort to create an ongoing dialogue so UAB can better serve its graduates.”

Faculty and staff who are alumni members and received a mailer are encouraged to answer their survey if they have not already.

For more information on the Annual Giving Campaign, e-mail Becky Watson at bwatson@uab.edu or visit www.uab.edu/alumni.
Crystal Tumlin's hands are contorted and uncooperative at times due to her disability, but she fights, for example, to have feeding paper into a shredder at the document destruction facility.

The work is tough, but she loves it—and it is quick to show visitors how proficient she's become at the task. Crystal is able to work thanks, in part, to the generosity and ingenuity of students from the UAB Department of Biomedical Engineering at the who designed and built the wheelchair lift that Crystal uses to reach her shredding machine each day.

Crystal is a client of LINCPoint, a rehabilitation and wellness center for adults with severe physical and mental disabilities operated by United Cerebral Palsy (UCP) of Greater Birmingham. She and others work in the UCP document destruction center and receive regular paychecks.

“Our clients love the work, and it becomes contagious—when one client sees another's paycheck that client wants to earn some money, too,” says Roshaan Green, a UCP occupational therapist. “They are working and getting paid and building self-esteem through a sense of accomplishment.”

Each semester biomedical engineering students enrolled in the department's senior design class build rehabilitation devices to aid UCP clients. The students receive grades for the design and functionality of their devices at the end of each term, and their devices are then donated to help UCP.

“The therapists and rehab specialists at UCP come to me each year with a list of devices that could help them and their clients,” says Alan Eberhardt, Ph.D., a professor in biomedical engineering and faculty instructor for the senior design class. “We assign our students projects that meet the needs, and many times their final designs hit the mark and are put to work at UCP.”

Another example of the students’ craftsmanship in recent semesters is embodied in a half-dozen standing boxes, support devices that give UCP clients the chance to work on various projects in a standing position and stretch ailing muscles that normally require the support of walkers or wheelchairs.

Away from the recycling center floor, a sensory station built by the UAB student engineers plays music and projects videos onto walls. Equipped with lights, a bubbling water column and plenty more to stimulate the senses, the device helps UCP clients to mentally and physically engage their surroundings.

“If we were to buy a similar piece of technology from a specialized equipment program or company, it was going to cost $2,600. We are nonprofit and don’t have those resources available,” says Jessica Morrow, the life enrichment program supervisor at UCP.

"UCB’s Department of Biomedical Engineering is a great resource for us to get access to these devices that enhance our clients’ quality of life,” Morrow says. “We couldn't do these things on our own, and we deeply value our partnership with UAB.”

The partnership between biomedical engineering at UAB and rehabilitation services at UCP will continue this fall when a new round of design projects will be assigned to a new class of seniors, ending with a new round of donations to UCP in December.

Each semester biomedical engineering students enrolled in the department’s senior design class build rehabilitation devices to aid UCP clients. Examples of the students’ craftsmanship in recent semesters are embodied in a half-dozen standing boxes, support devices that give UCP clients the chance to work on various projects in a standing position and stretch ailing muscles that normally require the support of walkers or wheelchairs.

Social media

Continued from page 1

"Using social media as part of a business plan is so new, there’s no consensus on the right way,” Johnston says. “Some companies do a good job with it, but many companies struggle.”

Johnston has spoken about those struggles to business owners, both locally and around the Southeast. He led a discussion on social media for businesses at a Teaching Technology Workshop in Huntsville this past spring: a recurring theme is that confusion reigns supreme.

“Everybody has this pressure or feels like their business needs to have a Facebook site, a Twitter account and be on Foursquare,” Johnston says. “They think they need to do all of these things, but the question is why? Why do we need it, and how do we use it to meet our goals?”

Many business owners and leaders say they are using social media because their competition is using it and because it’s a cheap way of advertising—or both.

Johnston's students learn that if businesses aren’t using social media platforms strategically to meet a goal, it can backfire just as quickly as they can help you.

Johnston repeats a story he heard a cable company executive tell during a presentation in South Carolina. The company created a Facebook page and set it up as a supplemental help desk. They did not anticipate customers using the site to complain about service. The company's reaction to the posts only complicated matters. At first, they ignored the negative posts. After a week they deleted the comments.

"Big backfire," Johnston says. "They didn't establish a Facebook site to field those kinds of comments. They did it because it was a cheap solution for a help desk, and it enabled them to put together a serve-yourself function for their customers to come and look up their own answers. They didn't anticipate or know how to manage the negative feedback they'd get. Once they started deleting the messages it became worse. People started saying, 'Where did my postings go?' That's just like this company. They can’t handle critical advice. We were just trying to get good service, and all they want to do is mute the people who are dissatisfied to make it look like everything is OK.”

Digital branding

Johnston's class, which brings together students from marketing, medicine and information systems, defines four pillars of social media and the ways in which they can represent a business: communication, collaboration, entertainment and education.

Social media also has key uses for students, Johnston says. They may use the platforms to help with their own career management and to establish a digital identity.

Johnston says local advertising agency Big Community—which is on the cutting-edge of it—is trying to figure it out.

"There’s not an academic textbook on the best way to do it,” Johnston says. "We used white papers and articles from businesses to inform our students. Academics hasn’t caught up to it yet, and even the business community—which is on the cutting-edge of it—is trying to figure it out.”

Johnston says local advertising agency Big Communication helps local businesses raise their social media presence, but he says even they admit they are learning as they go.

"It’s a bit of a trial-and-error thing,” Johnston says. "It’s not the technology—that’s the easy part. It’s setting it up and managing in a way that you can pay attention to comments, respond appropriately and use the criticisms and positive feedback to make a difference. That’s what we’re trying to teach,” Johnston says. "How do you want to use your social media site and for what purpose? Who is your audience? What are your goals? Those are the questions we’re challenging our students to answer.”
Charles Watkins, Ph.D., vividly remembers the first chemistry class he taught at UAB in 1970. It was a Tuesday-Friday course that met from 5:45 p.m. to 7:50 p.m. to better accommodate UAB students who were employed in full-time jobs and attending college for the first time.

Watkins was a wet-behind-the-ears 27-year-old who had just completed his postdoctoral fellowship in chemistry at University of North Carolina when he began his teaching career. He walked into his classroom and first noticed a man wearing an Alagasco uniform; most interesting to Watkins was his hair, or lack thereof.

“He was bald,” Watkins says. “It’s still one of the most memorable moments I’ve ever had at UAB, walking into to teach a basic chemistry class to see a student perhaps twice my age. But I also remember thinking to myself, if this guy can come to class on Friday night after working all week because he’s trying to make his life better or start a new career, then I should do the best I can for him and these students.”

Watkins, who has done that for his chemistry students for 40 years, is the 2010 recipient of the Ellen Gregg Ingalls/UAB National Alumni Society Award for Lifetime Achievement in Teaching. The award is presented annually to a full-time, regular UAB faculty member who has demonstrated an outstanding commitment to teaching throughout his or her career at UAB. It is considered the highest annual prize for teaching presented by the university. To be eligible, faculty members must be past recipients of the President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching and have taught at UAB for 20 or more years. Watkins was selected for the President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2009.

“It’s just an incredible honor, and I’m really humbled by the selection,” Watkins says. “To receive the Ingalls/Alumni Award you have to already have received the President’s Award for Excellence in Teaching, so you’re in pretty select company. Then to be selected among the people who have already been denoted for achievement, it’s just a tremendous honor.”

Watkins will be honored formally during at the UAB Alumni Leadership Recognition and Awards Luncheon Thursday, Sept. 23. In his UAB career, Watkins served for 10 years as the associate dean for the School of Natural Sciences & Mathematics, which became a part of the new UAB College of Arts & Sciences in 2009. He also spent 10 years serving the University Honors Council, the advisory body that interviews and selects students for the University Honors Program.

During his years of service as an educator and mentor, colleagues say Watkins has demonstrated an unprecedented passion and dedication in the classroom. He has taught undergraduate courses that require innovative teaching skills, updated subject matter and motivated students to remain focused on the course contents.

“In looking back over his career at UAB, Charles Watkins represents the quintessence embodiment of the Ingalls/Alumni award,” said David Graves, Ph.D., chair of the UAB Department of Chemistry. “He is an exemplary faculty member and colleague who is truly dedicated to his profession and has made a difference in the lives of students at UAB.”

Early foundation
Watkins’ dedication to teaching in a broad range of chemistry courses, including one of the most challenging, undergraduate physical chemistry, has been an important asset to the school.

It’s a foundation that Watkins says began as a high-school student in Shelby County High School in Columbiana. He had teachers who were dedicated to their craft and to their students. Their desire made an indelible impression on Watkins.

“I went to a rural school, but my interest in teaching started with the teachers I had,” Watkins says. “I had wonderful teachers, they were people who were toward the end of their career and did everything possible to help the students achieve. I really appreciated that.”

Watkins graduated from the University of Alabama with a bachelor degree in chemistry and physics and a minor in mathematics in 1964. His thirst for learning led him to University of Florida where he was a NASA Trainee and earned his masters and then doctorate in physical chemistry in four years.

“I wanted to learn as much as I could as fast as possible,” he says.

Watkins completed internships with Shell Oil during his undergraduate days, but when it came time to decide where he wanted his life to go — academics or industry — academics won out.

“Again, at Florida in the chemistry department, the teachers were just great,” Watkins says. “I had been so favorably impressed by the teachers I had, I decided that’s what I really wanted to do.”

Change in students
Watkins has seen several changes in students through the years as UAB has evolved from a school catering to working adults into a more traditional campus.

The shift in the age of students — as well as the progress of time — brought numerous paradigm shifts toward learning.

Early in Watkins’ tenure, students interacted less with the professor, he says.

“They used to accept whatever the professor said,” Watkins says. “I like the environment today because students really want to know why they’re in the class. What are you going to do for them? How are they going to learn? How is this going to be something important? I’ve always tried to challenge the students and make it interesting.”

Watkins says he’s also been fortunate to work with many dedicated and fascinating colleagues. Watkins says he’s never forgotten the opportunity former Natural Science & Mathematics dean Jim McClintock, Ph.D., gave him with his promotion to associate dean in 1999. And Watkins says the long hours he and Dean Lowell Wengr, Ph.D., put in as part of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation strengthened their partnership immensely.

“I was and am very appreciative of their mentorship,” Watkins says. “I had a great experience, and both of those guys were just terrific.”

Watkins retired July 1, but he is teaching two courses this fall and mentoring a new faculty member. He’ll teach one more course in the spring before he pursues the adventures he has planned for the next phase of his life — traveling to art museums, taking in the outdoors and enjoying concerts by the Alabama Symphony and events at the Alys Stephens Center.

As Watkins looks back on his career, he says he doesn’t consider it a 40-year burden, but rather an achievement and an exciting experience.

“If you’re a professional, you always want to do a good job at whatever it is you do,” Watkins says.

“You want to do a good job and have people respect what you do. In turn, you can be proud of your achievements. I would never look at a job as sort of being in a place meandering. I’d really rather try to go forward, make a positive statement and be a positive influence.”
UAB funding pilot research into effects of Gulf oil spill

UAB is soliciting Phase II applications for pilot projects that will explore the economic, health and social effects the Deepwater Horizon Gulf Oil Spill will have on virtually every aspect of life in the Gulf coastal states.

The UAB Gulf Oil Response Initiative will enable investigators to obtain data and prove feasibility for projects in anticipation that substantial new extramural funding opportunities will become available. Guidelines for submitting applications are online at workspaces.ad.uab.edu/al/committees/gid/gulf/uab.asp.

The deadline is 5 p.m. Sept. 15. Direct inquiries to Charles Prince, Ph.D., princecw@uab.edu, or Mike Perez, mpgperez@uab.edu.

More fat, less bone?

UAB researchers are looking at the relationship between bone and fat. While there has been a dramatic increase in childhood obesity during the past three decades, there also has been an increase in fracture risk. The study will attempt to identify factors related to bone and fat accrual before puberty in white girls to develop interventions that might help curtail obesity and promote bone health. The study is funded by the UAB Center for Metabolic Bone Disease. Researchers are enrolling white girls age 5 to 10.

For more information on the study, contact Krista Casaza at 975-6226 or kristac@uab.edu.

Genetics at root of Hispanic obesity?

Hispanic children typically have more fat mass than white or black children, even if they have a similar BMI. There may be a genetic component, and UAB researchers are looking for genetic factors associated with excess fat deposition in Hispanic children. The study, funded by the UAB Minority Health Research Center, will look for potential interventions to minimize the effect of other lifestyle factors that may influence obesity. Researchers are enrolling Hispanic children ages 3 to 7.

For more information on the study, contact Krista Casaza at 975-6226 or kristac@uab.edu.

Psychologist receives grant to study autism

Professor Rajesh Kana, Ph.D., in the UAB Department of Psychology, has received a $210,000 grant from Lindamood-Bell Learning Processes to study the effectiveness of a new intervention to help children with autism improve their language-comprehension skills.

This workshop will provide study coordinators with the basics of good clinical practice, research compliance and other key topics. This is a six-session course to be held Sept. 7, 14, 21 and 28 and Oct. 5 and 12. Sessions are from 8 a.m. to noon in the Children’s Harbor Bradley Conference Center; cost is $75 and payable with registration. Enrollment is limited, so please register early.

Direct questions to Susan Branscum at branscum@peds.uab.edu, Sheree Carter at sheree.carter@ccc.uab.edu, Penny Jester at jester@peds.uab.edu or Kathleen Powell at kpowell@uabmc.edu.

UAB researchers develop new test for shellfish bacteria

Asim K. Bej, Ph.D., a professor in the UAB Department of Biology, and his research team have developed a new method to test for Vibrio vulnificus, a bacterium common in oysters and other shellfish that is responsible for more than 95 percent of all seafood-related deaths. Currently, the recommended methods for testing non-harvested shellfish for the bacterial pathogens rely upon DNA detection and are complex and time-consuming.

Bej’s method, which does rely on the basic principles of current testing practices, is streamlined; it amplifies a targeted gene in an isothermal condition and confirms the presence of the Vibrio vulnificus using a disposable colorimetric device.

Reports in the most recent edition of the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium Sea Briefs newsletter quote U.S. Food and Drug Administration officials who say Bej’s new bacterium testing method is extremely cost-effective and could be adopted as an industry standard.

Training program for research coordinators to start Sept. 7

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Faculty needed for Nascent Projects Mentoring Panel

If you know a faculty member who is pursuing clinical or translational research, and is planning to submit a career-development proposal or his/her first investigator-initiated grant to an external funding agency, please consider referring them to the CCTS Nascent Projects Mentoring Panel.

Interested faculty members should e-mail Jean Lambert at jeanl@uab.edu with a copy of their NIH biosketch and a one-paragraph description of their research project.

For more information regarding the Nascent Panel visit www.ccts.uab.edu/pages/nascent_projects.aspx.

Register for radiation safety training course

Occupational Health and Safety is offering a Radiation Safety Training Course for lab personnel who have never attended a formal course in radiation safety practices and/or those using radiotopes for the first time.

The in-class portion of the course will be held from 1 to 5 p.m. Monday, Sept.13, and an examination will be given Friday, Sept. 24. Both will be held in the CHP Room B-1.


Call the Radiation Safety Office at 934-4751 or 934-2487 to register by Friday, Sept. 10.

Protect your intellectual property

Many discoveries that result from funded research can be commercialized for the financial benefit of UAB and its faculty. The UAB Research Foundation can help you protect your interests before you publish your results to the public domain.

For more information, visit www.uab.edu/uabrf.

Elections make defense spending cuts more difficult

U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ recently announced plan to cut nearly $100 billion from the defense budget during the next five years isn’t likely to be embraced by Congress as it looks ahead to the 2012 elections, according to a UAB study that examined U.S. data during a 44-year period.

“Military spending is affected by the electoral cycles,” says Assistant Professor of Sociology Casey Borch, Ph.D., an expert on defense spending who teaches in UAB’s Department of Sociology and Social Work. “Historically, about a year or two before national elections you can see a fairly substantial increase in military spending. During an election year and immediately after an election year when military spending is reduced.”

And, he says, the reluctance to cut military spending prior to an election year holds true among both Republicans and Democrats alike. “It’s largely because you have people coming up for re-election and politicians want to make sure the economy is as strong as possible – and one of the good ways to ensure economic stability is to increase military spending,” says Borch. “Increased spending on defense is something that is largely supported by the public and is commonly used to show up a bad economy.”
PLEASE JOIN
The UAB Minority Health & Health Disparities Research Center
and Honorary Chair Charles Barkley
FOR

A CELEBRATION FOR SUPPORTERS OF THE UAB MHRC

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 24, 2010
7 P.M.
UAB CAMPUS RECREATION CENTER
1501 University Boulevard

Cocktail Buffet and Dancing

Tickets: $200 per person
Tables also available

Attire: Black Tie and Tennis Shoes

Rewriting Her Story
Put Yourself in Her Shoes with Special Guest Maya Angelou
The Inaugural UAB MHRC Luncheon benefiting minority women’s health across the generations

Friday, October 15, 2010, 11:30 a.m. – 1 p.m.
Birmingham Sheraton Hotel
Tickets: $100 per person

Information: (205) 975-5659
www.uab.edu/centercourt

Please respond by September 10.
After that date, reservations will be accepted on a space-available basis.

Co-Chairs:

Dr. Marquita Furness Davis
Alabama Department of Children’s Affairs

Bobbie Knight
Alabama Power Company

Barbara Royal
Momentum

Tickets available through October 8
www.uab.edu/mhrcluncheon (205) 975-5659