

Findeis and Puri Named Distinguished Professors

Two faculty members in the College of Agricultural Sciences—Jill Findeis, professor of agricultural, environmental and regional economics and demography, and Virendra Puri, professor of agricultural and biological engineering—have been named distinguished professors by the University.

The title of distinguished professor was established by the Office of the President to recognize a select group of professors with exceptional accomplishments in teaching, research, and service.

Findeis is internationally known for her research on off-farm labor, farm household economics, rural employment, rural poverty, and rural policy, according to Steve Smith, head of the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. “Her expertise in statistical analysis and economic/mathematical modeling also has been called upon by national and international organizations,” he says. “Her research program and philosophy exemplify the land-grant spirit.”

Calling her the “consummate scholar in both research and teaching,” Smith points out that Findeis chooses to research problems of importance to society and people, publishing in a range of outlets that make her research accessible not only to professionals but to practitioners.

“Evidence of her standing is the many invited presentations she has given,” Smith says. “Notable international invited venues include the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization in Rome, the Indian Statistical Institute (OXFAM), International Crop Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics, the French Society for Rural Economy at the Sorbonne, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris.”



Jill Findeis

Domestically, she has briefed congressional staff on issues ranging from agricultural policy to policies affecting vulnerable populations and has been invited to speak to the Urban Institute, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and the National Agricultural Statistics Service. Findeis has served on the graduate committees or as an external reviewer for 92 students from five different colleges and has supervised the research of 30 graduate or honors students.

As a teacher, Smith notes, Findeis has few peers, bringing “a special intangible magic to the classroom” that enriches the learning experience and endears her to students. She has received numerous teaching honors, including the 1989 American Agricultural Economics Association Teaching Award, two University awards—the George W. Atherton Award for Teaching Excellence and the Milton S. Eisenhower Award for Distinguished Teaching—the College of Agricultural Sciences Gamma Sigma Delta Teaching Award, and the USDA Excellence in College and University Teaching Award. The College of Agricultural Sciences also named her a Harbaugh Faculty Scholar as part of a program to promote innovative teaching methods.

Puri’s international reputation in the areas of powder mechanics



Virendra Puri

and computational fluid dynamics makes him most deserving of being named a distinguished professor, according to Roy Young, head of the Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering. He notes that Puri’s overarching goal is to achieve excellence in his program areas by integrating cutting-edge research and scholarship, resident instruction, and outreach functions.

Over the past few decades, Puri has worked to develop a comprehensive group of test devices and modeling protocols for characterizing powdered materials in agricultural and food applications.

His work helps maintain ingredient accuracy by measuring the flow properties and bulk characteristics of powders. As a result of his analysis, the behavior of powders in any process or storage container can be compared, predicted, and controlled. Companies are now able to compare ingredients provided by their suppliers, which results in uniform components and finished products. In addition to improving product formulation for quality and consistency, companies can reduce costs and increase speed of processing, blending, or tableting.

“Under the leadership of Professor Puri, an internationally recognized research program has been firmly established here in the ar-

reas of powder mechanics and computational modeling,” says Young. “This pioneering, world-class program was forged through significant interdisciplinary collaboration with faculty members from the Colleges of Agricultural Sciences, Engineering, and Earth and Mineral Sciences.”

During his tenure at Penn State, Puri has compiled 570 scholarly publications, including 121 refereed journal articles, 96 proceedings, 28 books, book chapters, and workshop notes, 134 nonrefereed articles, 5 patents, 1 copyright for software, 5 course notes, and 180 research reports to project sponsors. He has directly supervised 41 graduate students and served on 105 graduate students’ committees from 18 different programs in four colleges.

Puri was one of the 10 founding members of the Particulate Materials Center, the National Science Foundation’s Industry/University Cooperative Research Center. He served as the director of the center from 1998 to 2000. Puri is also the editor of three archival journals.

Puri was elected a Fellow of the American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers in 2002 and has been invited to make numerous presentations, organize conferences, and serve on international advisory boards.

—Jeff Mulhollem

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