

Two Professors to be Honored at Commencement

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Russell Tronstad wasn't much older than his 12-year-old son when he was operating heavy equipment on his family's Montana ranch. Years later, he's taken his farming and ranching background to a whole new and modern level, developing online tools to aid with livestock management and crops marketing.

Diane Austin, who has taught students ranging from second grade to college, has always had a passion for research and education. With the help of her students, she's worked with a number of communities â€” including American Indian tribes, border towns and areas affected by Hurricane Katrina â€” to tackle important environmental issues.

Both Tronstad and Austin will receive The University of Arizona's Distinguished Faculty Outreach Professor Awards at Saturday's winter [commencement](#) ^[1].

The award recognizes faculty members who have significantly contributed to the University's outreach mission through scholarship-based outreach to the state, nation and world. It includes the honorary title and a \$5,000 base salary increase.

Russell Tronstad

Since joining the UA in 1989, Tronstad, a professor and specialist in the department of agricultural and resource economics, has led numerous research and outreach projects and co-authored several publications to aid farming and ranching communities, particularly in rural Arizona.

His recent research undertakings include a study, conducted with a graduate student, on the costs of illegal immigration on Arizona's border ranches â€” including fence repairs, litter cleanup and livestock losses â€” and a study on trade flow between Arizona and Sonora, Mexico.

Tronstad also has worked to take the enduring trades of farming and ranching to the Web, with the development of Web sites to support ranchers and farmers.

One of those sites, www.livestockrecords.arizona.edu ^[2], aids ranchers in livestock identification, monitoring, record keeping and other issues, a key focus of much of Tronstad's work. Another, www.farmdirectory.org ^[3], helps small local farmers market their crops directly to consumers through an interactive site that includes listings of products, farmers' markets or other events and information.

"As a land-grant university, it (outreach) is part of our job," said the head of the agriculture and resource economics department, Gary Thompson, who nominated Tronstad for the award. "But Russell has gone far beyond the expectations as far as reaching out to the community."

In the future, Tronstad said he hopes to work more with tribal farming communities to help them develop programs to help sell crops to tourists.

"One of the interesting things in Arizona agriculture is tribal agriculture issues, in the sense that they're really in it for the long term," he said.

He said he is also interested in technological advances in crop production techniques, since new methods of producing crops are important in modern agriculture.

He said he is currently working with a plant sciences researcher on a study about grafting melons â€” a process that involves joining parts of different plants to create stronger root systems.

Diane Austin

It might not be easy to catch Austin, an associate professor and associate research anthropologist in the UA's Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology, in her office since she spends so much time in the field.

Austin, who taught elementary and middle school before joining the UA in 1994, said she believes learning is experiential, so she likes to get her students out of the classroom and into communities that can benefit from their help as much as possible.

"I've always had an interest in the research/science side of things and the educational side of things," Austin said.

With a focus on environmental anthropology, Austin has worked with many communities to help them address pressing environmental issues in their areas, from air quality to water quality to natural resource management.

She has done extensive work with the city of Nogales " on both the Arizona and Sonora, Mexico, side of the border " to bring people together on projects related to hillside revegetation, anti-erosion activities, installation of composting toilets and the use of recycled cooking oil for the production of biofuel.

She also has aided southwestern American Indian communities, including the Southern Paiute tribe, with natural resource management issues and worked with communities in the Gulf of Mexico coastal states to mitigate the impacts of offshore oil drilling.

In addition, she has collaborated with communities affected by Hurricane Katrina to help identify hurricane relief and recovery strategies.

Austin said it's her goal to build positive relationships in the community and to support individuals, in her own backyard and beyond, that may not otherwise have access to the University and its resources.

The most rewarding part of her work, she said, is going into communities viewed in a negative light and teaching them how to use the resources they have in a positive way.

"She's an incredibly giving person. She's incredibly student oriented. She does a tremendous amount for the University," said Carol Bender, director of the Undergraduate Biology Research Program, who " along with Tim Finan, director of the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology " nominated Austin for the award. "You can't make environmental change unless you take into account the needs of a population, and she listens to all the stakeholders."

Both Tronstad and Austin will be honored at Saturday's commencement ceremony at 9:30 a.m. at McKale Center.

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Links

[1] <http://dos.web.arizona.edu/commencement/index.html> [2] <http://www.livestockrecords.arizona.edu> [3] <http://www.farmdirectory.org>