Northern Arizona University Selected As 1999 Boeing Outstanding Educator

A team of engineering professors from Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Ariz., has been selected to receive the prestigious 1999 Boeing Outstanding Educator Award. As the winner, the team members and university will share a $50,000 award.

The Boeing Outstanding Educator Award recognizes educators who have made exceptional contributions to improving undergraduate engineering education. "These educators are ensuring universities are constantly adapting to the fast-paced changes taking place in the engineering field, while helping students be prepared for those challenges," said Dave Swain, Boeing vice president of Engineering. "Engineering programs like that at Northern Arizona University are developing the ideal employees that Boeing and technical companies throughout the country are seeking."

Competing individuals or teams are graded on improvements they have made to the educational process that enhance attributes of graduating engineering students. Each individual or team also has to provide evidence that their work has long-term, pervasive impact on engineering education. They also must demonstrate the extent to which educational improvements have become institutionalized.

The Northern Arizona team was recognized for implementing a four-year sequence of classes called Design4Practice that provides students with hands-on learning and professional skills for engineering careers. The program not only gives students the fundamentals of engineering, but also helps develop their managerial and professional skills. Launched in 1994, Design4Practice is a required sequence of classes for all engineering students, thereby ensuring collaboration among civil, electrical, environmental, computer science and mechanical engineering disciplines. It's designed so that the courses become technically more difficult and complex as the student progresses. A key component of the courses is the active participation from industry executives and engineers in teaching engineering concepts and practices, sponsoring students' engineering projects and evaluating the coursework. "The Design4Practice instructor teams are leaders in engineering education and have created an innovative and successful solution to a challenge -- educating engineers in the 21st century," said Mason Somerville, dean of Northern Arizona University's College of Engineering and Technology. "The sequence of classes focuses on design as the heart of engineering problem-solving in an interdisciplinary world. The award is well-deserved recognition of this team of educators' significant achievement."

Nationally, individuals and teams from 22 schools were nominated for the 1999 Boeing Outstanding Educator Award. The field was narrowed to three finalists, with each visited by the judging team from Boeing for an in-depth examination of the work of each nominated person or team. Besides Northern Arizona University, the other finalists were teams from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and Iowa State University.

Of the $50,000 total award, $5,000 will be awarded to the winning team and $20,000 will be given as an unrestricted grant to further that team's programs. An additional $25,000 grant will be made to the engineering school for ongoing support of educational improvement. A formal presentation of the award will take place at Northern Arizona University.

Northern Arizona University President Clara M. Lovett said, "We are pleased to win the prestigious Boeing Outstanding Educator Award. The partnership between NAU engineering faculty and industry produces graduates who can hit the ground running in their profession." This is the fifth year Boeing has granted the Outstanding Educator Award. The 1998 recipient was a team of educators from Penn State University; the 1997 recipient was Dr. Robert Quinn of Drexel University in Philadelphia, Pa.; the 1996 recipient was a team of educators from the University of Maryland in College Park, Md.; and the 1995 award went to a team from the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y.

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