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Award Created for Environmental Toxicology Students

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Award Created for Environmental Toxicology Students

Recognition named in honor of influential former faculty member

JANUARY 24, 2015 BY ERIN GARRETT

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Kristine Willett (left), William Benson and David D. Allen

OXFORD, Miss. – To honor a former faculty member and environmental toxicology research leader, the **School of Pharmacy** has created the William H. Benson Distinguished Graduate Student Award.

"I was honestly in disbelief when I first learned of the plans for the award," said Benson, who served as a professor of pharmacology and toxicology at the school for a decade. "I am just incredibly flattered and honored that it would even be considered."

The award will recognize the most outstanding graduate student in environmental toxicology each year. Recipients will receive a plaque and monetary gift. Kristine Willett, professor of pharmacology, developed the idea for the award after realizing that other graduate programs had similar recognitions.

"Dr. Benson really spearheaded the environmental toxicology research program here at the University of Mississippi," Willett said. "Many of his former students and mentees are still actively involved with our School of Pharmacy and provide networking opportunities for our current students."

Benson joined the School of Pharmacy as a faculty member in 1988. He served as director of environmental and community health research at the school's **Research Institute of Pharmaceutical Sciences** before leaving in 1999.

The associate director for ecology at the **Environmental Protection Agency** fondly remembers his time at Ole Miss.

"The beauty of the pharmacy school was our ability to work across departments," he said. "We worked together in the best interest of our students. It was so easy to work in a multidisciplinary culture because everyone pitched in. It was almost like a family, not a lab."

Willett said that Benson continues to influence the University of Mississippi, despite being away from campus for nearly 15 years.

"As environmental toxicology-associated faculty members have prepared training grant proposals, Dr. Benson has volunteered his laboratories as internship locations for our students," she said. "When I teach environmental toxicology, I use slide sets from short courses he has taught. Most importantly, he is always on the lookout for job opportunities for our students. At meetings, he enthusiastically encourages them and introduces them to other experts in the field."

Benson said he hopes the award will give opportunities to deserving students who are dedicated to improving the state of Mississippi.

"I hope it goes to students who really believe in doing the right thing for the right reason," he said. "I hope they work toward public, environmental good and that their work is beneficial to the people of Mississippi, while having impact on the nation and the world."

To contribute to the William H. Benson Distinguished Graduate Student Award, send a check with the fund noted in the memo line to the **University of Mississippi Foundation**, 406 University Ave., Oxford, MS 38655. For more information, contact development director Raina McClure at rmcclure@olemiss.edu.

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