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THREE PROFESSORS RECEIVE N.C. A&T RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AWARDS

Researchers in animal science, industrial engineering, and civil engineering are the winners of the 2011 Research Excellence Awards at North Carolina A&T State University.

Senior Researcher of the Year: Dr. Mulumebet Worku

The Senior Researcher of the Year is Dr. Mulumebet “Millie” Worku, professor of animal sciences. Her current research studies the immune systems of cattle, goats, and sheep to help reduce disease, improve food safety, and promote animal and public health.

A member of the awards selection committee summed up her appraisal of Dr. Worku with one word: “Awesome!” Her funded research projects have included “Biologically inspired adaptive and reconfigurable systems: Modeling, synthesis, and simulation”; “Genomic diversity and innate immune system response”; and “Harnessing the power of genomics to determine the effect of post-harvest technologies on N.C. heirloom tomatoes.”

She has been a principal investigator (PI) or co-PI on 29 successful grant proposals at the university, worth a total of more than $7.5 million.

She was named the 2007 Teacher of the Year in the School of Agriculture and Environmental Science. She has taught courses in agricultural genetics, bioinformatics, dairy cattle production, microbiology, and techniques in biotechnology. She developed the school’s course in bioinformatics and genome analysis.
Dr. Worku came to North Carolina A&T in 1999 as a visiting professor and instructor in microbiology. She previously served as a researcher with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration. She was an International Atomic Energy Agency research fellow at the University of Glasgow in Scotland.

Dr. Worku holds a Ph.D. and master’s degree, both in animal sciences, from the University of Maryland, and a bachelor of science degree from the University of Alemaya in Ethiopia, also in animal sciences.

The Senior Researcher of the Year award is presented annually to a tenured faculty member.

**Outstanding Junior Researcher: Dr. Zhichao Li**

The Outstanding Junior Researcher of the year is Dr. Zhichao Li, professor of industrial and systems engineering. His research focuses on modeling, simulation, and optimization of advanced manufacturing processes.

“Dr. Li is a highly active, innovative, and skilled researcher,” one member of the selection committee wrote in evaluating his nomination. Since coming to North Carolina A&T in 2008, he has received a National Science Foundation Career research award, published eight scholarly papers and had two more accepted for publication. For the past four years, he has served as a symposium chair for the International Manufacturing Science and Engineering Conference. He was the university’s research Rookie of the Year in 2010.

He teaches courses in computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing, integrated product and process design, and advanced special topics in industrial engineering: lean thinking for the renewable energy era, among others.

Before coming to the university, Dr. Li was a post-doctoral research fellow in at Kansas State University. Dr. Li holds a Ph.D. in industrial engineering from Kansas State, a master’s in industrial engineering from Tianjin University of Technology and Education in China, and a bachelor’s degree in mechanical and electrical engineering, also from Tianjin University.

The Outstanding Junior Researcher of the Year award is presented annually to a tenure-track faculty member.

**Rookie of the Year: Dr. Elham “Ellie” Fini**

The Rookie of the Year is Dr. Ellie Fini, assistant professor of civil engineering. Her current research focuses on sustainable alternatives for asphalt binder.
Members of the research awards committee characterized her research ability as “extraordinary” and “exceptional.” She is currently is the lead investigator on four National Science Foundation grants. She has developed a sustainable infrastructure material laboratory, filed two patent applications, and published four journal articles.

She teaches courses in transportation and pavement design, advanced material characterization, transportation engineering, civil engineering, and construction engineering and management, among others.

Dr. Fini holds a Ph.D. in civil and environmental engineering from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a master’s in civil engineering from Sharif University of Technology in Tehran, Iran, and a bachelor’s degree, also in civil engineering, from Isfahan University in Tehran.

The Rookie of the Year Award is presented annually to an untenured faculty member in his or her second year of tenure-track teaching and research at the university.

About the awards

The 2011 Research Excellence Award winners were announced on March 15 at the university’s Honors Convocation. They will be invited to make presentations on their research on Faculty Research Day, Thursday April 14, and will be honored at the annual Research Awards Luncheon Thursday April 14.

Each college and school at the university has the opportunity to nominate a candidate in each category. This year’s nominees included:

Senior Researcher of the Year: Dr. Yusuf Adewuyi, Department of Chemical & Bioengineering, College of Engineering; Dr. Lyubov Kurkalova, Department of Economics, School of Business & Economics; and Dr. Tyra Whittaker, Department of Human Development and Services, School of Education.

Outstanding Junior Researcher: Dr. Zhaoqiong Qin, Department of Manufacturing Systems, School of Technology.

Rookie of the Year: Dr. Quintin Boston, Department of Human Development and Services, School of Education; and Dr. Jenora Waterman, Department of Animal Sciences, School of Agriculture and Environmental Sciences.
About North Carolina A&T

North Carolina A&T is a public, high research activity, 1890 land-grant university committed to exemplary teaching and learning, scholarly and creative research, and effective engagement and public service. The University offers degrees at the baccalaureate, master’s and doctoral levels and has a commitment to excellence in a comprehensive range of academic disciplines. Our unique legacy and educational philosophy provide students with a broad range of experiences that foster transformation and leadership for a dynamic and global society.

The Division of Research and Economic Development (DORED) manages A&T’s $60 million-a-year research enterprise. DORED’s mission is to lead the university in:

- **Exploring** possibilities by providing service to the campus and an enabling research environment that fosters creativity, collaboration and community;
- **Discovering** the future by empowering faculty and students to achieve innovative solutions to the world’s most daunting challenges in energy, climate change, drug discovery, nanoengineering, and global health;
- **Becoming** a brand name in research innovation leading to economic prosperity, and a place where scholars are globally engaged to seek solutions to local, national, and global social, health, and economic problems.

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