

# University Distinguished Professor Dennis Ray Makes Significant Impact

By Susan McGinley

As a University Distinguished Professor, Dennis Ray is honored for his longstanding and continued record of excellent contributions to undergraduate teaching over more than two decades, not only in the classroom, but also through his involvement in the university-wide general education program. He is a professor of both plant sciences and arid lands studies in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

According to his colleagues, Ray has had a powerful and positive impact on the quality of the general education program and on academic advising. He has worked with faculty at all three Arizona universities and at Arizona's community colleges in the statewide articulation effort, and in the assessment of the quality of the University of Arizona's general education curriculum.

"I've always been very committed to teaching," says Ray, whose research focuses on the development of new crops such as guayule, guar and lesquerella for arid and semi-arid regions. "I think the next generation of students needs to know

how important plants are to us so they can make informed decisions. They need to know where their food comes from, who grows it, and how plants in general are important in our lives."

In the classroom, this translates to steady attendance that does not decline through the semester, students say, because Ray's dedication as a teacher, tutor, mentor and scholar keeps them coming back.

"He has a gift for making incredibly complex scientific concepts appear simple and straightforward," says a former student who is now a doctor at the Yale University of Medicine.

"Dennis' success as a teacher is not just his ability to present interesting and clear lectures, but he also has the unique ability to motivate students to want to study and learn," adds Robert Leonard, head of the plant sciences department. "His knack for engaging students in learning is really special."

Beyond the classroom, Ray serves as a faculty fellow for students at Cochise Hall, speaks at various colloquia, offers student



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advising workshops, and is active in student honorary societies. He has mentored a large number of graduate assistants and undergraduate preceptors.

Ray's numerous other awards include the Honors College Five Star Faculty Award for Outstanding Teaching; his election as a Fellow in the American Society for Horticultural Sciences; the UA Provost General Education Teaching Award; the College of Agriculture Faculty Teaching Award, and many other national and international honors.

Yet he says his own accomplishments are not what is most important to him.

"Most significant would be some student I have reached who will do something great someday." ☒