

## Academic Award in Memory of Stephen B. Sweeney



**DR. MICHAEL E. OROK**

*The Academic Award is presented to an academic leader or institution that has made a significant contribution to the formal education of students pursuing careers in local government. This year's award is presented to Dr. Michael E. Orok, chairman of the Department of History, Political Science and Public Administration, Albany State University, Albany, Georgia.*

When Dr. Michael E. Orok accepted a job as associate professor of public administration at Albany State University in 1991, the MPA program had just two faculty members and fewer than 20 students. Furthermore, the entire state of Georgia had only two chapters of the American Society of Public Administration (ASPA). Believing

that such association was a critical element of effective education, Dr. Orok began making connections with others in the southwestern part of the state. Within a year, he had founded the Southwest Georgia Chapter of ASPA and has remained president since its inception.

Dr. Orok has played a critical role in expanding the size and stature of the Master of Public Administration program at Albany State University. In large part because of his commitment to public management and to the university, Albany State's MPA program today boasts six faculty members and nearly 130 students.

Dr. Orok gives the students in his classes an excellent springboard for positions in federal, state, and local government, as well as in the private sector. His effectiveness as a professor derives in part from his dual erudition in public administration (in which he holds a master's degree) and political science (in which he has a Ph.D.), as well as superb teaching skills. The courses he teaches—whether an advanced graduate course in budgeting and finance or an introductory American government class for undergraduates—are comprehensive in both content and approach.

Dr. Orok believes in the ability of each student to excel; he drives students to develop critical thinking skills by linking theory to real-world examples. To accomplish this, he makes extensive use of case studies and analysis and often seeks out the practitioner's point of view to shed light on controversial issues or bring added

depth to an otherwise dry discussion.

As part of this learning process, Dr. Orok encourages students to learn directly from practitioners by participating in professional development opportunities and attending conferences. His students are seen regularly at professional conferences, contributing to a renewed interest among Georgia students about careers in public administration and public service.

In an annual evaluation process in which students are asked to rate professors' performance according to their expertise, motivation of students, teaching techniques, relations with students, testing and grading, fulfillment of responsibilities, and overall effectiveness, students consistently rate Dr. Orok highly: His average overall rating by students on a scale of 1 to 5 is 4.9. In 1999 he was named Albany State University's Teacher of the Year.

Dr. Orok has also been recognized by his peers. He became director of the Master of Public Administration program in 1999 and chairman of the Department of History, Political Science and Public Administration the following year. In April 2000, ASPA admitted Dr. Orok into its Hall of Champions in recognition of his work.

Despite these accolades, Dr. Orok continues to look for ways to improve his courses and strengthen the learning experiences of students. This ongoing commitment to his students has enriched not only his students, but also the local government profession and the communities it serves. ♣