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Thompson, Ruess, Sparrow honored with Usibelli Awards

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Staff Report newsroom@newsminer.com

FAIRBANKS — Joseph Thompson, Roger Ruess and Elena Sparrow are the recipients of the 2014 Emil Usibelli Distinguished Teaching, Research and Service Awards, which are presented each year to top faculty at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Thompson, an associate professor of philosophy and humanities in the College of Liberal Arts, received the teaching award. Ruess, a professor of biology at the UAF Institute of Arctic Biology and College of Natural Science and Mathematics, received the research award. Sparrow, a research professor and education outreach director at the International Arctic Research Center, received the service award.

Thompson joined the university in 1999 and has taught a wide range of undergraduate courses, from introductory philosophy to core humanities classes to advanced senior thesis, according to a UAF news release.

College of Liberal Arts Dean Todd Sherman called him a student favorite, as well as “a hard-working and successful teacher who challenges his students to think critically and to be able to communicate their ideas through the

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spoken and written word.”

Ruess joined the faculty at UAF in 1989, after postdoctoral and faculty positions at Syracuse University and two years as a postdoctoral fellow with the National Science Foundation.

Ruess is an ecologist whose research has focused on the boreal forest. For the past three years, he has served as principal investigator for the Bonanza Creek Long Term Ecological Research Program, which involves approximately 20 researchers from UAF and other institutions.

Sparrow has worked at UAF since 1985, focusing on work to share science with elementary and secondary school students.


Her work with the Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment program works to engage students and teachers as citizen scientists. GLOBE is an international science and environmental education program in which students and teachers gather and analyze environmental data.

Each year, a committee that includes members from the faculty, the student body and a member of the UA Foundation Board of Trustees evaluates the nominees. Each of the winners receives a cash award of \$10,000.


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