

Source: Harald E.L. Prins, 785-532-4966, prins@k-state.edu
Website: <http://www.k-state.edu/media/mediaguide/bios/prinsbio.html>
Photo available. Contact media@k-state.edu or 785-532-2535.
Note to editors: Doctoraal is correct.
News release prepared by: Beth Bohn, 785-532-2535, bbohn@k-state.edu

Media Relations
9 Anderson Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506-0117
785-532-6415
Fax: 785-532-6418
E-mail: media@k-state.edu
k-state.edu/media

Wednesday, July 14, 2010

AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION NAMES K-STATE'S HARALD PRINS TOP UNDERGRADUATE TEACHER IN ANTHROPOLOGY

MANHATTAN — Teaching and mentoring future anthropologists is something Harald E.L. Prins has been doing — and doing well — since joining Kansas State University 20 years ago.

Prins, a university distinguished professor of anthropology who has been recognized both at the university and national levels for his teaching, is now being honored by his peers as the 2010 recipient of the American Anthropological Association/Oxford University Press Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching of Anthropology.

"This is the national teaching award for his discipline, and no one is more deserving than Harald Prins," said Betsy Cauble, head of K-State's department of sociology, anthropology and social work.

The award was established in 1997 to recognize teachers who have contributed to and encouraged the study of anthropology. Prins will receive the honor at the American Anthropological Association's annual meeting Nov. 17-21 in New Orleans.

Making the award even more significant for Prins is that several of his former students nominated him for the honor. The process was spearheaded by Michael Wesch, now an associate professor of cultural anthropology at K-State, and Lucas Bessire, a K-State alum who just earned his doctorate in anthropology from New York University. The two organized a nomination packet for Prins, which included letters of support from around two dozen of the professor's former students.

"Students don't just 'go through' an anthropology course with Dr. Harald Prins; the course goes through them, turning them into more open-minded, critically aware, global citizens. I know this because before I was a colleague of Dr. Prins, I was his student," said Wesch, who knows something about what makes an excellent teacher. Wesch is the 2008 Council for the Advancement and Support of Education/Carnegie Foundation Professor of the Year for Research and Doctoral Institutions.

"Thirteen years ago I sat spellbound with 399 other students as Dr. Prins took us from the country comfort of Kansas to explore the world as we had never known it before," Wesch said.

(more)

"His energy and dramatic persona transformed an otherwise drab lecture hall into a true theater. He took the stage and relentlessly, yet tactfully, managed to shift the very conceptual ground on which we understood our own lives. In some ways it was frightening, but more than anything it was liberating," Wesch said. "If the university's primary goal is to teach students to think critically and creatively — and I think it is — then a course in anthropology from Dr. Harald Prins must be the most important course a student will ever take."

Teaching wasn't something Prins had in mind when he was pursuing his undergraduate and graduate degrees in his native Netherlands.

"Truth be told, I never thought of becoming a teacher and had no formal training," he said. "Back home in the Netherlands, I don't think university professors at the time cared all that much about teaching. They seemed to be more interested in culling the herd and focusing on their research."

But Prins did have a role model. His father was an internationally known anthropology professor who studied the seafaring peoples of East Africa and the Middle East. Prins said his father wanted him to become an archaeologist but that he didn't think his son had what it took to become a serious scholar.

"I heard my father lecture once. It was a public event, and colleagues and former students had come from far away to hear him. He was impressive; he never even once looked at his notes. Later I found out that he'd forgotten his glasses," Prins said.

"I've been told I'm at my best when improvising — lecturing by heart," he said. "When accepting my award at the ceremony in New Orleans I'll be thinking of my father, as I now realize he was my first real mentor."

Prins studies indigenous peoples of South and North America, most notably the Mi'kmaq Indians, and is a visual anthropologist who has been trained in 16-mm filmmaking. He said his teaching has been shaped by his experiences as a film school student — seeing himself on film taught him he was coming across as dull and boring — and his research and advocacy work for a landless Mi'kmaq band in Maine, which helped him hone more effective communication skills. Prins assisted this poverty-stricken Indian community in its quest for native rights and land claims.

Prins believes strongly in using his research work in the classroom. He is the co-author of three documentaries, and his film work has been honored with several awards. He is the author or co-author of three books, co-author of four widely used textbooks and co-editor of three volumes, and he has written more than 175 scholarly articles, book chapters, reviews and encyclopedia entries in eight languages.

"For me, research and teaching are completely intertwined activities, as is publishing," Prins said. "What's the point of research if data and explanations are not disseminated?"

"Research is important because our students feel inspired by teachers who are passionate about their scholarship and are eager to share their discoveries with the rest of the world," he said. "When we inspire a dozen or more of our students, we also multiply our own rewards. So I'd say an ounce of passion is worth more than a pound of pedagogy."

At K-State Prins has been recognized for outstanding undergraduate teaching with the university's Conoco and Presidential awards, and he was named K-State's 2004-2005 Coffman Chair for Distinguished Teaching Scholars. He earned K-State's highest academic ranking of university distinguished professor in 2005. Nationally, he was named the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching/Council for the Advancement and Support of Education 2006 Kansas Professor of the Year.

Prins has a doctoral degree from the Radboud University of Nijmegen in the Netherlands and a doctorate from the New School for Social Research. He taught at Bowdoin College in Maine before joining K-State in 1990.