Faculty Focus

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Professor Eric Kingson, a nationally recognized expert on Social Security, joined the School of Social Work last fall.

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>
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Bringing Beltway experience to the classroom

It's hard to categorize a professor like Eric Kingson. He regards his role as an academic not as a self-fulfilling one, but as one that allows him to contribute to society. He has done so in various ways—as a prolific writer, a leading national expert on Social Security, and a teacher who helps students make their own discoveries. Each aspect of his professional life influences and enhances the others. "There has to be an end that you are trying to serve," Kingson says. "Academics have a responsibility to share their work. The information has to get out if it is to be useful. With teaching you make a different kind of contribution to the future of society. That is an incredible responsibility."

Kingson, who joined SU last fall after 11 years at Boston College, quickly settled into his office, which has a comfortable, homey feel. One student who drops by for a chat is offered a giant pretzel from a jar Kingson keeps next to his computer. Books—including several bearing his own name—share shelf space with photos of family and friends. Kingson proudly displays photos of the children's soccer teams he's coached, saying he envisions himself as a coach in the classroom as well. "Teaching is much like coaching," Kingson says. "You're basically guiding students, helping them reach their own conclusions."

Kingson strives to balance academic pursuits with practical application. He spent years researching the Social Security system, particularly the generational issues that influence its effectiveness. In 1982, he served as an advisor to the National Commission on Social Security Reform and gained a deep appreciation for the legislative system. "I view Social Security in the context of a very big, community-serving institution," he says. "The legislative process certainly isn't perfect, but when it works it can be a vehicle for doing great things."

The commission was formed in response to a government shortfall that could have meant the end of Social Security by 1983. The expert advisors had only a few months to devise a plan to save it. "It was literally that close," Kingson says. "The money wouldn't have been there the following year. Congress wasn't about to let that happen."

In 1995, Nebraska Senator Bob Kerrey asked Kingson to return to Washington to serve as a senior policy advisor on his Bipartisan Commission on Entitlement and Tax Reform. Although Washington may not seem the most likely place to occasionally find a man who describes himself as a pluralist, Kingson enjoys the policy-making process because it challenges his thinking on issues connected to his research. "I like the idea of people bringing a lot of different ideas to the table," he says. "That's also what I love about teaching."

School of Social Work Dean William Pollard believes Kingson's presence at SU is a recruiting coup. "He teaches an area—policy—that is receiving a great deal of national attention and is of great interest to

our students," Pollard says. "He adds greatly to our capacity to become a national school of social work."

While Kingson's work in the legislative arena is impressive, he views it as simply another extension of his academic responsibilities. "It's not like the president is calling me up all the time," Kingson says with a shrug. "I give a presentation in Washington once, maybe twice a year. Lots of people do it."

For now, Kingson is sharing his knowledge primarily with his students. He says the decision to come to SU was an easy one. Having several acquaintances among the SU faculty, Kingson was aware of the University's rising reputation. Within the School of Social Work, Kingson sensed a true commitment to bringing the school to the next level. "This is a very talented group of people," he says. "Research and writing are important to the faculty, but no matter how much the school grows, there will always be a real emphasis on teaching."

—TAMMY CONKLIN

Computer engineering professor Shiu-Kai Chin maintains an active presence on campus and in the community. In addition to teaching, research, and volunteer work, he directs the CASE Center at SU.
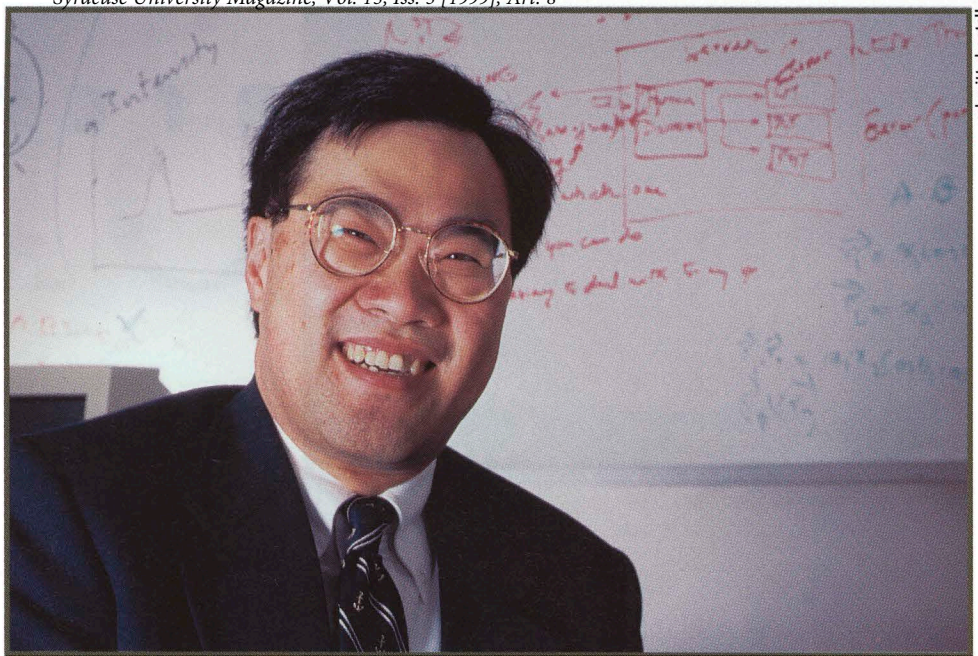
Sharing lessons of lasting value

Computer engineering professor Shiu-Kai Chin '75, G'78, G'86 may be one of the few people willing to admit he was attracted to Syracuse because of the weather. True, as a New York City high school student he'd visited on a gorgeous summer day. But no matter how big a bluff the weather pulled on Chin, it didn't matter. Chin had found a home in Syracuse University's visionary computer engineering program.

Today, nearly three decades after that first glimpse of Syracuse, Chin's enthusiasm for SU and Central New York remains unwavering. And since last summer, when he was named director of the New York State Center for Advanced Technology in Computer Applications and Software Engineering (CASE) at SU, Chin has been on a mission to advance the area's high-tech economy. "I love it here and I'm a believer in the Central New York area," he says. "We have excellent technical talent and I've grown up with the cluster of related information technologies here, so it's fun to contribute to the technological life of the community."

Before joining the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science faculty in 1986, Chin spent 11 years as a senior engineer and program manager at General Electric's Syracuse lab. While there, he successfully designed a nuclear fuel-rod monitor, a memory manager for a heart imaging machine, and a radar position-control processor. Amid the hectic pace of the corporate world, Chin remained involved in academia, earning master's and doctoral degrees from SU. Ultimately, the idea of teaching and research enticed him into leaving industry for higher education. "Engineers in industry oftentimes don't have the luxury of inventing new knowledge," he says. "As a faculty member, I'm contributing new knowledge to society and giving back to a community that has given me so much."

Chin specializes in computer information security and works in that area for the Air Force Research Laboratory in Rome, New York. He applies mathematical logic to various levels of design—soft-

ware, hardware, networks, etc.—to ensure their secure operation. "This is a long-term and difficult problem," he says. "Proving you have a secure system raises many of the same questions about how you guarantee that assurance."

Chin, however, is recognized for more than his technical expertise. He's received numerous teaching awards and was named a Meredith Professor for Teaching Excellence in 1997. He volunteers with the Alternatives to Violence Project at Auburn, New York, state prison, teaching conflict resolution skills to inmates. He also chairs the All-University Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Committee. "As faculty, we have to ask ourselves what our hopes are for our students and how we know if they're being achieved," he says. "We also have to ask, 'What are the lessons of lasting value that we teach our students?'"

In conversation, Chin moves comfortably and thoughtfully among topics as diverse as the impact of the Internet and virtual communities on education to the importance of social responsibility, ethics, and diversity. Last spring, as part of his Meredith professorship, he organized a multidisciplinary course on conflict resolution and diversity with social work/women's studies professor Diane Murphy, engineering colleague Ed Stabler, and social work graduate student Xenia Becher G'98. The experience proved challenging and enlightening for everyone. "It was a unique course," Becher says. "There was clearly an ongoing process of self-discovery and understanding different perspectives."

The course impressed computer engineering student Josh Weissman '00 and prompted him to join Chin on a research project last summer. "He has a great way of communicating and interacting with people and a teaching style conducive to learning," Weissman says. "He's a brilliant man—a great people person, engineer, and scientist. It's a golden combination."

Chin's actions as a teacher and technologist reflect his view on the value of understanding and appreciating others and their opinions. "What we do defines who we are," he says. "We are an increasingly interconnected society. How we use information and our ability to make quick, wise, ethical decisions will become more and more important."

—JAY COX