

# New MSU Faculty Members

## Get Acquainted With Mississippi, Each Other

By Maridith Geuder

More than 35 new Mississippi State faculty members who began a trip together as strangers to each other—and to Mississippi—ended it with deeper connections to the university and the Magnolia State.

Faculty members in areas ranging from English to plant and soil sciences participated in the eighth annual Mississippi Tour, a daylong bus journey that introduces newcomers to MSU's work in the state and to the history and culture of Mississippi.

"It has been a tremendous success in bringing the richness of the university and our state into sharper focus," said Peter Rabideau, provost and vice president for academic affairs.

The provost's office sponsors the event, which is coordinated by MSU's government relations office. Mary Foglesong, the wife of MSU President Robert "Doc" Foglesong, also participated in this year's tour, which was held Sept. 27.

Among stops on the 16-hour excursion were MSU's North Mississippi Research and Extension Center in Verona; Elvis Presley's birthplace and museum in Tupelo; Northeast Mississippi Community College in Booneville; Oxford's Rowan Oak, home of celebrated Mississippi author William Faulkner; T.W. Dulaney Farms in Clarksdale, a 3,500-acre farming and seed production operation; and the Delta Blues Museum and Ground Zero Blues Club, also in Clarksdale.

"We have found this is a valuable way to immerse newcomers in Mississippi's heritage, as well as providing a firsthand introduction to MSU's extensive role in the state," Rabideau said. "The tour also allows faculty members who aren't familiar with Mississippi to experience many communities that are home to their students."

Included in this year's tour were those whose countries of origin included Peru, Croatia, Macedonia, China and Turkey.



Assistant Extension Professor Mengmeng Gu tried out the controls of a tractor during the new faculty orientation tour stop at Dulaney Farms near Clarksdale.

An academic component always is featured during the day's stops, and was provided this year by Southern literature specialist Nancy Hargrove, William L. Giles Distinguished Professor of English. Her informal whistlestop lecture about Faulkner was peppered with colorful anecdotes and was followed by a series of lively questions from faculty members.

Croatia native Dasha Radin, assistant professor of political science, said one of the biggest surprises to her was "how involved Mississippi State is in agriculture development, especially through the application of technology."

"I began to see how big an impact the university has on the state, especially its economy," said Radin, who first came to the United States in 1994 as an exchange student and subsequently earned a doctorate at the University of North Texas.

She said she was impressed during the tour with the "sense

of community" at MSU, adding, "I got the sense of belonging to a big family. It made me feel more like I belong."

Like Radin, Natasha Wilkins, an assistant professor of management at MSU-Meridian, said the trip "provided insight about the contributions MSU makes to the state, particularly for those not from Mississippi and not familiar with agricultural processes."

The North Carolina native who earned a doctorate at Jackson State University said, "I was not aware of MSU's comprehensive commitment to agricultural research and development throughout the state via relationships with privately owned farms and Extension."

The Mississippi Tour, she said, "also was a great opportunity to interact with individuals from other disciplines and those in administration whom we would normally not have the opportunity to meet."