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NEWS

For immediate release

Singhal, OBU's Birkett Williams lecturer, urges "new mindsets, new possibilities"

By Meg Gosser

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ARKADELPHIA, Ark.—Delivering a lecture on “Communication and Social Change—New Mindsets, New Possibilities,” Dr. Arvind Singhal was this year’s featured speaker for Ouachita Baptist University’s annual Birkett Williams endowed lecture series. Singhal, the Samuel and Edna Marston Distinguished Professor of Communication at the University of Texas, El Paso, delivered the lecture Oct. 22 in Ouachita’s McBeth Recital Hall.

In a dinner in OBU’s Walker Conference Center preceding the lecture, Singhal had the opportunity to meet several Ouachita students, faculty and staff members and participate in a question-and-answer session moderated by Dr. Steve Phillips, chair of OBU’s William Fenna and Emily Rogers Department of Speech Communication.

Singhal pointed out that a college student’s role is to “question ... and I’d say curiosity. If you want to learn something new, you have to go into a zone of uncertainty.”

Phillips noted that Singhal “loved meeting the people at OBU--especially the students.”

During the lecture, Singhal discussed how Entertainment Education is about encouraging society to change through positive models in the media, popular culture and the entertainment industry. “If there is a medium that can engage, then there is a medium that can educate,” Singhal said. “If you’re trying to change a community norm, then the community should model it.”

“Arvind’s lecture was superb,” Phillips reflected. “He’s a great storyteller, and he always comes back around to make sure the audience understands how each story relates to his theme.”

Singhal explained how social change can be brought about by rethinking perspectives of the issues faced in the world today. “When it comes to human behavior, there are many answers,” he explained. “The mind gives us the ability to take answers and flip them. It’s up to us to take advantage of it.”

Instead of focusing on the problem and overtly telling people how to change, he said that focusing on the solution and showing what is possible is more effective. “It’s easier to act your way into a new way of thinking, not think your way into a new way of acting,” he added.

Singhal, who also is director of research and outreach for the Sam Donaldson Center for Communication Studies at UT-El Paso, has presented lectures in more than 60 countries on five continents. The author or editor of eight books, he has served as an advisor to the World Bank, the United Nations’ Food and Agricultural Organization, UNICEF, the U.S. Department of State, the BBC World Service Trust, Procter and Gamble and other private and public organizations.

“Dr. Singhal is the world’s leading authority in the field of Entertainment Education,” Phillips noted. “EE essentially uses various entertainment channels to persuade people to adopt pro-

social innovations.

“The audience learned change and communication are complex processes, which can't be summed up in a few sentences—or ‘wrapped up in a neat little package’ as he said in his lecture,” Phillips added. “Making complex material sound simple is the mark of a superior communicator; I believe Arvind accomplished his goal.

“Arvind never stops growing and learning—he epitomizes the concept of the ‘lifelong learner,’” Phillips said. “I believe it was Bruce Barton who said, ‘When you're through growing, you're through.’ Dr. Arvind Singhal will never be through.”

Ouachita's Birkett Williams Lecture Series honors the late Birkett Williams from Cleveland, Ohio, a 1910 graduate and benefactor of Ouachita. In 1977, Williams established a generous endowment to extend the concepts of a liberal arts education beyond the classroom environment.