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Professors get Leontief economics prize

by Lula Lakeou
Daily Editorial Board
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Columbia University
Professor Richard Nelson
speaks about technology
and economic development
Thursday in Ballou Hall.
(Jeff Chen/Tufts Daily)

Two economists received awards from Tufts
Thursday evening, and one compared the other
to Anthony Hopkins.

The Global Development and Environmental
Institute gave the Leontief Prize for Advancing
the Frontiers of Economic Thought to Dr. Richard Nelson and Dr. Ha-Joon
Chang.

The ceremony - "Rethinking Development in the 21st Century: Globalization,
Innovation, and the Role of the State" - was held in Ballou Hall. The institute
is affiliated with the School of Arts and Sciences and the Fletcher School.

Nelson, the Henry R. Luce Professor of International Political Economy at
Columbia University, studies the role of technology in long-term
development.

"A lot of my work has been concerned with how technological change drives
the economy," Nelson said in an interview before the ceremony. "Enabling
and supporting the development of very poor countries is the most important
challenge for economists and policy makers."

In his speech, Nelson discussed the measures developing countries need to
take to catch up to developed nations, which he called "frontier countries."

Developing nations can no longer simply replicate the economic methods of
frontier countries. "The current environment is different than what it had
been," he said. "[Poorer nations] need to develop technologies suited to their
own conditions."

The focus of the developing countries should be on higher-level training in the
fields of science and technology to improve their economic conditions, Nelson
said. He expressed an interest in the training provided by public universities in
poor countries.

"Domestic universities are responsible for the bulk of the training," Nelson said. "Simple working experience no longer suffices." Universities that allow students to study abroad provide the developing countries with "a basis for breaking into international networks," he said.

Chang, the Assistant Director of Development Studies at the University of Cambridge, studies the effects of state planning and globalization on economic development.

He analyzed the trends of economic development in poor countries. "History shows that things can be better," he said.

Chang criticized the idea of a "level playing field," arguing that unequal tariffs are necessary. "The notion of reciprocity cannot be discussed without considering the relative conditions of the countries involved," he said. Developing countries should be free to impose tariffs that will protect their industries.

Both economists said they appreciated the award. "Needless to say, I feel honored and flattered and highly gratified to receive it," Nelson said.

The award is named for Wassily Leontief, the 1973 winner of the Nobel Prize in Economics. "Leontief himself was a great economist," Nelson said. "It is an honor to receive the prize in his name."

Students attending the ceremony were impressed by the range of applications of the economists' research. "I learned a lot from the lectures," sophomore economics major Adure Obioha said. "It definitely gave me a new appreciation for the subject of economics."

Chang said he admired Nelson and his accomplishments. "He is one of my intellectual heroes," Chang said. "I feel like a young actor sharing an award with Anthony Hopkins."
