Two Science Faculty Earn Top Teaching Honors

COLLEGE STATION – Chemist Dr. David Bergbreiter and physicist Dr. David Toback are among 10 Texas A&M University faculty members honored with 2012 University Professorships for Undergraduate Teaching Excellence (UPUTE), announced last week by the Office of the Dean of Faculties and Associate Provost.

Bergbreiter was appointed to his third consecutive Eprright Professorship, while Toback earned selection to his second straight Thaman Professorship. Each of their three-year appointments carries an annual salary supplement of $5,000 provided by the university and an annual discretionary income to support his teaching program and related professional development.

The prestigious UPUTE awards are reserved for the university's most distinguished teachers of undergraduates -- faculty who have exhibited uncommon excellence and devotion to the education of undergraduate students at Texas A&M.

Bergbreiter, an expert in organic chemistry and polymer science who received his first Eprright appointment in 2002, joined the Texas A&M faculty in 1974 after receiving his Ph.D. that same year from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Renowned both for his teaching and research prowess, he is one of four College of Science faculty to earn the lifetime distinction of Presidential Professor for Teaching Excellence, Texas A&M's highest award for classroom achievement. In addition, he has received university-level Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement Awards in Teaching (2005) and Research (2008), as well as the Exxon Education Foundation Award, the ARMCO Mentorship Award and the Wells Fargo Honors Faculty Mentor Award. In 2011 he was named an American Chemical Society Fellow after previously being recognized with the 2008 ACS Southwest Regional Award for his extensive research and career achievement in polymer chemistry. In his 36 years at Texas A&M, Bergbreiter has directed the research of more than 100 co-authors of his 240 peer-reviewed publications, has been selected as a Fish Camp
namesake, and has "had the pleasure of introducing thousands of sophomores to the enchantment of Ochem [organic chemistry]."

Toback, a high-energy physics expert who received his bachelor of science in physics from M.I.T. in 1991 and his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1997, has been a member of the Texas A&M faculty since 2000. He has received many awards for his teaching and research, including the Honors Teacher/Scholar Award (2011), his first Thaman Professorship (2008), the Texas A&M University System's Student-Led Award for Teaching Excellence (Fall 2008, Spring 2010), The Association of Former Students Distinguished Achievement Award in Teaching at both the university (2007) and college levels (2004) and the Center for Teaching Excellence's Montague Scholarship Award (2002). Toback has worked tirelessly to improve the introductory physics courses for engineers and to develop a course on the Big Bang and Black Holes for non-scientists. In addition to a reputation as a dynamic and motivating teacher with a knack for using comic relief to teach physics concepts at 8 a.m., Toback has developed multiple web-based systems to aid student learning. These systems were so successful that they have been adopted in all the introductory physics courses, published in a top physics education research journal and presented in invited talks on web-based learning. He also implemented and oversees the department's Mechanics Scholar Program.

Other 2012 UPUTE recipients besides Bergbreiter and Toback include: Dr. John Crompton (Recreation, Park and Tourism Sciences), Dr. Patricia Smith (Biological and Agricultural Engineering) and Dr. Jeffrey Savell (Animal Science), Cintron Professorships; Dr. Louise Abbott (Veterinary Integrative Biosciences) and Dr. Barry Boyd (Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communications), Thaman Professorships; Dr. Dennis Berthold (English) and Dr. Kim Hall (Political Science), Eppright Professorships; and Dr. Ben Wu (Ecosystem Science and Management), Kincaid Professorship.

The endowment for the Cintron Professorship is provided by the Hoblitzelle Foundation of Dallas in honor of Dr. R.H. Cintron '46. The remaining professorships are made possible through generous endowments from George and Irma Eppright, Arthur J. and Wilhelmina Doré Thaman and John Kincaid '28.

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