

Physics Honors Day 2004

[See pictures from the Honors Day Celebration](#)

Physicists young and old assembled with great anticipation to find out who among them would be recognized at the physics department's annual honors day celebration on April 28.

Professor and Head Soren Sorensen kicked off the ceremony with a brief welcome before turning things over to **UT Classics Professor Chris Craig**, who gave the honors day address. Illuminating the study of science and math within an ancient framework, he explained that had you asked learned people in antiquity why they studied physics, the response would simply have been, "to be happy."

The term physics actually traces its origin to the Greek word for nature and "for the Greeks," Dr. Craig said, "order is beautiful." His own heroes from the realms of science and mathematics are Pythagoras, Epicurus, and Socrates. Pythagoras revered numbers as holy. Epicurus believed that to be happy, one had to live in accordance with nature. And Socrates?

Socrates was annoying and somewhat obnoxious, always asking questions. "And so," Dr. Craig said, "he was labeled a natural scientist," even though in reality he was not.

While some of the ancients may have viewed scientists in such a dim light, that certainly is not the case for Dr. Craig, who recognized many of the physics students in the audience and praised their broad-minded approach to studying arts and sciences.

"The physics students I know are very far from humanities-blind," he said. "Enjoy the larger human context of what you're doing," he challenged. "The details of what you do can be beguiling."

At the conclusion of Dr. Craig's talk, Dr. Sorensen and **Dr. James Parks** got on with the with business of handing out awards. First up was the induction of students into **Sigma Pi Sigma**, the physics honor society. The department added 16 new members to the UT chapter, including graduate students **Watheq Al-Basheer, Jason Haraldsen, Qinghong Kou, Valentina Kuznetsova, Ching-Tsai Lee, Robert Moore, and Juan Urrego-Blanco**. Undergraduates received into this prestigious society were **James Alsup, Jesse Henderson, Robert Higginbotham, Eric Mueller, Anton Naoumov, Olga Ovchinnikov, William Overcast, Daniel Passmore, and Gail Zasowski**.

Next came the presentation of individual awards. The awards and their respective recipients were:

The Outstanding First Year Student Award recognizes exceptional achievement by a student in his or her first year of physics study. **Michael Ashworth** took home the honor, which included copies of the Feynman lectures.

The Robert Talley Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Research went to **Anton Naoumov** and **Scott Outten**. Each received copies of the Feynman lectures.

The Robert Talley Award for Outstanding Undergraduate Leadership went to **Olga Ovchinnikov**, who also received copies of the Feynman lectures.

The Douglas V. Roseberry Award was a \$500 prize and went to **Joey Nicely**.

The Robert W. Lide Citations went to **Dragoslav Grbovic** and **Brandon White**. Each received a plaque and \$350.

The Outstanding Graduate Teaching Assistant Award recognizes the GTA who has earned the best evaluations from students enrolled in the undergraduate physics and astronomy labs. The \$500 award went to **Phil Evans**.

The Paul H. Stelson Fellowship in Physics (a \$2,500 prize) went to **Valentina Kuznetsova**.

The Fowler-Marion Outstanding Graduate Student Award (a \$1,000 prize) went to **Anota Ijaduola**.

The Colloquium Awards were introduced this year to recognize the students who present the most thorough write-ups on the various colloquia topics presented throughout the year. **Suzanne Parete-Koon** and **Valentina Kuznetsova** each received copies of the Feynman lectures.

The Society of Physics Students Teacher of the Year Award offers students the opportunity to select the faculty member they feel provides the best instruction. This year the undergraduates chose **Dr. Marianne Breinig** and **Dr. Jon Levin**. Each received a plaque and a stylish SPS T-shirt.

Special recognition also went to **John Carruth**, the 2003-2004 recipient of the Dorothy and Rufus Ritchie Scholarship. John has just finished his first year in physics. **Dr. Kermit Duckett** also presented Astronomer Extraordinaire **Paul Lewis** (better known as the director of astronomy outreach) with a poster of an X-15 aircraft autographed by Scott Crossfield, who flew the X-15 to become the first rocket pilot to fly three times the speed of sound-over 2,000 miles per hour. "He may be the biggest proponent of aerospace education of anyone I know," Lewis said of Crossfield.

Students, faculty and guests adjourned to the hallway for a reception following the presentation. Esteemed guests from the College of Arts and Sciences were **Dr. Lynn Champion**, Director of Academic Outreach; **Dr. Don Cox**, Associate Dean of Academic Programs; and **Dr. Carolyn Hodges**, Interim Associate Dean of Academic Personnel. Also in attendance were emeritus physics professors **Dr. Ed Deeds** and **Dr. David King**.

About the Awards

A striking element about these honors is how personal they are. Half are named for people who had or have a connection with the department--individuals who studied or taught in the University of Tennessee Department of Physics and Astronomy.

Dr. Robert Talley learned the intricacies of the infrared under the tutelage of Dr. Alvin Nielsen, earning his master's and doctoral degrees here. The Robert Talley Awards were introduced this year as a means of acknowledging students for their research expertise and leadership capabilities. Dr. Talley has established a fund at UT to support undergraduate physics education.

In the fall of 1959 the Phi Sigma Kappa fraternity established the Douglas V. Roseberry Award to honor their fraternity brother and physics major **Doug Roseberry**, whose life was cut short by an aneurysm just five months before he was to graduate. Doug took on research and teaching duties in addition to his undergraduate coursework, spending time at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama. The Roseberry award has traditionally been reserved for an upper-division student who exemplifies similar dedication and excellence.

The Lide Citations were introduced in 1998 to honor the **Robert W. Lide**, who joined the physics faculty in 1957. Over three decades in the department he worked tirelessly organizing the undergraduate laboratories, a practice he continued even after his retirement in 1991. The department chose to honor his contributions with citations that recognize students of like qualities.

Dr. Paul Stelson was an adjunct professor of physics at UT from 1967 until his death in 1992, mentoring many young physicists along the way. He finished his Ph.D at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at the age of 23. In 1953 he joined Oak Ridge National Laboratory as a nuclear physicist, becoming associate director of the physics division in 1971 and director in 1973. During his tenure, the Holifield Heavy Ion Research Facility was funded, built, and became operational. His family established the Paul H. Stelson Fellowship in 1993 to support young scientists as they complete their graduate education and to carry on the strong relationship in physics research between UT and ORNL. The fellowship goes to a first or second year graduate student who shows the greatest potential for success in graduate school and demonstrates tremendous promise as a researcher.

The Fowler-Marion Award is named for **Dr. Joseph Fowler** and **Dr. Jerry Marion**. Dr. Fowler earned his master's degree in physics at UT in 1938 before going on to earn a doctoral degree at Princeton. He later became head of the ORNL Physics Division. In 1960 he teamed up with Dr. Marion of the University of Maryland to edit a textbook called *Fast Neutron Physics*. They donated the royalties to the physics department. Funds from that gift have provided support for the Fowler-Marion Graduate Student Award, which acknowledges an advanced graduate student who has excelled in scholarship, research, service and leadership.

The physics department has not historically drawn the corporate sponsorship for awards enjoyed by engineering or chemistry, both fields with more intimate ties to industry. Yet the honors offered each spring draw on the very personal and passionate legacy of individuals who learned here, taught here, and continue to make a difference.