

Dr. Peterson

Faculty/Staff Honors Luncheon: Distinguished Professor Award Presentation

Tuesday, April 19, 2011

It is my privilege to present the Class of 1934 Distinguished Professor Award, the highest honor given to a Georgia Tech professor. The award is presented to a professor who has made significant, long-term contributions to teaching, research and public service. It includes a prize of \$20,000 made possible by a generous grant from the Class of 1934.

The 2011 recipient is Mark Hay, professor and Teasley Chair in Environmental Biology. Mark is a distinguished scientist who has made numerous significant contributions to the fields of ecology, marine sciences and chemical signaling. He is an outstanding educator who has mentored numerous graduate and postdoctoral students who have gone on to distinguished careers of their own in academia, government and industry. Many of those former students, along with other leaders in the field, submitted letters in support of Mark receiving this award. Let me share an excerpt of a letter from John Parker, a staff scientist at the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center in Edgewater, Maryland:

“Since venturing out on my own from Mark’s lab, I’ve met scientists from around the world, including universities and research stations in Sweden, Panama, Belize, Czech Republic and the U.S. No matter where I am and who I am talking to, everyone knows Mark and his contributions to the field. Rightly or wrongly, this ‘honor by association’ lends me an immediate sense of credibility, and is one of the enduring legacies of having worked with Mark Hay. Mark’s guidance is also the primary reason I have a job today. He is easily the most rigorous scientist I know, and my work has benefitted from his teaching. I inwardly smile every time I pass off a ‘Hay-ism’ to my own lab, prodding them to push onward in the face of adversity by telling them ‘if it was easy, someone else would have already done it.’

One former Ph.D. student and now a professor at Florida International University has worked with Mark on a variety of research projects. They even spent ten days together living underwater in a research station on a coral reef off Key Largo, Florida. He noted: “Some professors are stellar researchers while others are gifted teachers and mentors. Mark is both.”

Peter Steinberg, director of the Centre for Marine Bio-Innovation in Sydney, Australia, wrote that Mark has done more than anyone else on the planet to put marine chemical ecology firmly on the map as an important marine discipline.

Mark has been instrumental in bringing international recognition to Georgia Tech in the area of ecology. He secured Georgia Tech’s first NSF-funded Integrative Graduate Education and Research Training Grant. This positioned Tech as the nation’s premier trainer of Ph.D. students in aquatic chemical ecology and signaling, and involved interdisciplinary research training between the Schools of Biology, Chemistry and Biochemistry, and Civil and Environmental Engineering. This grant supported 48 Ph.D. and master’s students, and every Ph.D. student nearing completion of their degree obtained post-doc or job offers. He also brought together researchers in the Schools of Biology, Chemistry and Biochemistry, and International Affairs to secure Tech’s first International Cooperative Biodiversity Group grant for an effort focused on chemical ecology, drug discovery, and conservation of coral reefs in Fiji.

In his 11 years at Georgia Tech, Professor Hay has published 95 scientific papers, and secured more than \$13 million in research grants. He serves on the editorial boards of numerous scientific journals, as well as national and international advisory boards. And yet, he always seems to have time for students. As one example of his commitment, when recent faculty departures resulted in additional teaching needs in the School of Biology, Mark volunteered to co-teach introductory biology to 300 undergraduate students.

Mark Hay characterizes the essence of sustained excellence in teaching, research and service. Please join me in congratulating him.