

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Nobel Laureate Carl Wieman Recognized for Outstanding Leadership in Physics Education

College Park, Maryland, United States, November 29, 2006

The American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT; <http://www.aapt.org>) announced today that its most prestigious award, The Oersted Medal, has been awarded to Dr. Carl Wieman (University of Colorado at Boulder) in recognition of notable contributions to the teaching of physics. Dick Peterson, Chair, AAPT Awards Committee said, "Carl stands tall in the tradition of those at the very pinnacle of physics achievement who have become deeply involved with the teaching of physics at all levels while also reaching out to motivate the next generation of physicists." AAPT President, Ken Heller added, "Carl not only recognizes the difficulties of teaching introductory physics at the university level, he has done something about it. After identifying basic problems in introductory physics classes, he researched the previous work on those problems and the tools that might be applicable to solve them. He then gathered people who were inspired by his vision, optimism, and insight to work with him to attack these problems. His goals are to advance the level of educational excellence for everyone who teaches at this level."

Dr. Wieman's attitude about, and activities in, physics education are very much consistent with the values of AAPT and its efforts to enhance the teaching of physics at different levels. "Nobel Laureate Wieman exemplifies the rare combination of creative scientist and committed teacher," stated Toufic Hakim, AAPT's Executive Officer. "He brings as much vigor, rigor, and dedication to his classroom as he does his laboratory, very much in line with our association's mantra of better physics through teaching."

Wieman, 55, is currently a Distinguish Professor of Physics, Presidential Teaching Scholar, and Fellow of JILA at the University of Colorado. He has carried out research in a variety of areas of atomic physics and laser spectroscopy, including using laser light to cool atoms. His research has been recognized with many awards including the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2001 for the creation of Bose-Einstein condensation in a vapor. He has worked on a variety of research and innovations in teaching physics to a broad range of students, including the Physics Education Technology Project, (<http://www.colorado.edu/physics/phet>) that creates educational online interactive simulations. He is a 2001 recipient of the National Science Foundation's Distinguished Teaching Scholar Award and the Carnegie Foundation's 2004 U.S. University Professor of the Year Award. Wieman has also been previously honored by AAPT as the 1996 recipient of the Richtmyer Memorial Award. He is a member of the National Academy of Sciences and chairs the Academy Board on Science Education.

Regarding the award, Wieman stated, “It is very gratifying to have my efforts to improve physics education be recognized in this way. However, this would never have happened without the outstanding work of my collaborators at the University of Colorado, particularly Kathy Perkins and Wendy Adams, and the larger community of physics education researchers whose results guide my understanding and efforts.”

The Oersted Medal will be presented on January 10, 2007 at the AAPT Winter Meeting in Seattle, Washington. Following the presentation, Wieman will give an address on “Interactive Simulations for Teaching Physics: What Works, What Doesn't, and Why.”

About the Award

The Oersted Medal is named for Hans Christian Oersted (1777-1851), a Danish physicist and chemist who is best known for discovering the relationship between electricity and magnetism known as electromagnetism. The award was established by AAPT in 1936 and is given annually. The Awards Committee seeks to recognize those who have a clear track record of extraordinary achievement in both physics and in physics teaching. Previous winners include Richard Feynman, Carl Sagan, and Hans Bethe. The complete list of winners can be found at <http://aapt.org/Grants/oersted.cfm>. In addition to the medal, each awardee receives \$10,000 and a commemorative certificate.

About AAPT

AAPT is the leading organization for physics educators—with more than 10,000 members worldwide. The organization aims to strengthen physics education and support physics educators. We serve the larger community of physics educators across the board and provide our members in particular with many opportunities for professional development, communication, and student enrichment. AAPT was founded in 1930 and is headquartered in the American Center for Physics in College Park, MD.

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Sources

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