

University Professor Spencer Barrett elected to American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Barrett joins Nelson Mandela, Bono as 2009 foreign member
By Elaine Smith, posted Monday, April 20, 2009. University Toronto Bulletin.

University Professor Spencer Barrett of ecology and evolutionary biology is among the foreign honorary members elected for 2009 to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The academy, founded in 1780 by future U.S. president John Adams and other scholar-patriots of his era, has included among its elected membership such notables as poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, naturalist John Audubon and inventor Alexander Graham Bell. Past foreign honorary members elected include statesman Winston Churchill and scientist Stephen Hawking. This year's class includes 210 new fellows and 19 foreign honorary members, former South African president Nelson Mandela, actress Judi Dench and singer Bono joining Barrett in that group.

Barrett, Canada Research Chair in evolutionary genetics, is one of the world's leading authorities on the reproductive biology and genetics of flowering plants. He is also known as an outstanding teacher, mentor and communicator of science.

Election to the academy is one in a series of prestigious awards Barrett has earned. He is one of the few Canadian biologists outside the health sciences to be elected to both the Royal Society of Canada and the Royal Society of London. He won the Natural Science and Engineering Council of Canada's EWR Steacie Memorial Fellowship in 1988 and was awarded the province of Ontario's inaugural Premier's Discovery Award in Life Science and Medicine in 2007. He has also received the highest awards given by the Botanical Society of America and the Canadian Botanical Association.

Barrett, who has served on the editorial boards of many international journals, is also the author of more than 200 peer-reviewed articles and is one of the most frequently cited authors in plant evolutionary biology.

After giving an April 20 research seminar at to the Department of Integrative Biology at the University of Texas, Austin, Barrett's hosts informed him of his election to the academy.

"It was a pleasant surprise and a great honour," he said in an e-mail.

U of T administrators were less modest in lauding his accomplishments.

"Spencer Barrett is a brilliant ecologist and evolutionary biologist. As a teacher he has not only made his mark on scores of graduate students but is one of this country's most laudable and dedicated teachers of first-year undergraduates. It is wonderful to see him recognized by such an illustrious and selective organization," said Professor Cheryl Misak, vice-president and provost.

Professor Paul Young, vice-president (research), added, "Membership in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences is one of the most esteemed honours in the field of research and scholarship. Spencer is highly deserving of this rich honour and we are extremely proud of him for his leadership and accomplishments."

This year's membership class at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences includes scholars, scientists, jurists, writers, artists, civic, corporate and philanthropic leaders from 28 states and 11 countries, ranging in age from 33 to 83. They will be inducted at a ceremony Oct. 10 at the academy's headquarters in Cambridge, Mass.