

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

College Park, Maryland, United States, November 19, 2008

Nobel Laureate George F. Smoot Recognized for Outstanding Leadership in Physics Education

The American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT) announced today that the Oersted Medal will be awarded to George F. Smoot, Nobel Laureate, an astrophysicist at Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory since 1974 and a University of California at Berkeley physics professor since 1994, in recognition of his outstanding, widespread, and lasting impact on the teaching of physics.

The Oersted Medal will be presented to Dr. Smoot at a Ceremonial Session of the AAPT Winter Meeting in Chicago, Illinois, on Saturday, February 14, 2009. Following the presentation, Dr. Smoot will deliver his keynote address titled, "The History and Fate of the Universe."

Regarding the award, Smoot stated, "Thank you for this esteemed award. I am honored to be part of this recognized group of scientists. It is special to me since I recently taught my freshman physics class about Oersted's discovery that electric currents cause magnetic fields. It is wonderful to show the relation between teaching and research. The past two years have been very memorable and exciting for me, and this award is part of that process. I hope that my contribution will help pave the way for the next generation and for their teachers."

Dr. Harvey Leff, Chairman, AAPT Awards Committee, said, "It is a great honor to present the Oersted Medal to Dr. George Smoot, who has measured properties of the universe as it existed nearly 14 billion years ago. His detailed study of fluctuations in the cosmic background radiation has led to an understanding of why galaxies formed as they did. This is remarkable physics of the most fundamental kind."

"AAPT is very pleased to present the Oersted Medal, AAPT's highest award, to Dr. Smoot for his significant contributions to our understanding of the universe and for communicating the importance of these discoveries to the general public," stated Warren Hein, AAPT's Executive Officer.

Professor Smoot was born in Yukon, Florida. His father was a hydrologist for the U.S. Geological Survey and his mother was a science teacher and school principal. Smoot says his parents instilled in him a joy for learning and an interest in science and math. He received his Ph.D. in physics at MIT in 1970 and decided to enter the field of cosmology, a frontier of fundamental science that was ripe for exploration.

Smoot was one of the first pioneering astrophysicists who devised ways to conduct experiments that produced data and information about the early universe. "People have contemplated the origin and evolution of the universe long before the time of Aristotle," he says. "Although cosmology has been around since the time of the ancients, historically it has been dominated by theory and speculation. Very recently, the era of speculation has given way to a time of science. The advance of knowledge and of scientific ingenuity means that at long last, we can actually test

our theories."

Professor Smoot is an author of more than 200 science papers and is also coauthor (with Keay Davidson) of the popularized scientific book *Wrinkles in Time* (Harper, 1994) that elucidates cosmology and the COBE discovery. Another essay entitled "My Einstein Suspenders" appears in *My Einstein: Essays by Twenty-four of the World's Leading Thinkers on the Man, His Work, and His Legacy* (Ed. John Brockman, Pantheon, 2006).

About the Award

The Oersted Medal is named for Hans Christian Oersted (1777-1851), a Danish physicist who, in the course of creating a demonstration for teaching his class, discovered that electric currents caused a magnetic field. This was a crucial step in establishing the theory of electromagnetism so important in building modern technology and modern physics. The award was established by AAPT in 1936 and is given annually to a person who has had outstanding, widespread, and lasting impact on the teaching of physics.

The previous Oersted award went to Mildred Dresselhaus. Other recipients include Arnold Arons, and Nobel Laureates Hans Bethe and Richard Feynman.

The complete list of winners can be found at <http://www.aapt.org/Grants/oersted.cfm>.

About AAPT [AAPT](#) is the leading organization for physics educators—with more than 10,000 members worldwide. Our mission is to advance the greater good through physics teaching. We provide our members with many opportunities for professional development, communication, and student enrichment. We serve the larger community through a variety of programs and publications. AAPT was founded in 1930 and is headquartered in the American Center for Physics in College Park, Maryland.

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