

University of Texas gets 32 new chairs, four in physics

The University of Texas announced in April that it has put together a \$32-million fund to provide for the establishment of 32 new endowed chairs in the natural sciences and engineering. This exceptionally large endowment will help build up the university's physics department, which has been strengthening steadily for more than a decade.

The new funding comes from an anonymous contribution of \$8 million, matched by \$8 million from five foundations, matched again by \$16 million in university funds. The funds will be used to endow four chairs in each of eight disciplines: physics, chemistry, mathematics, molecular biology, materials engineering, microelectronics, computer engineering and computer-assisted design and manufacturing.

The four new physics appointments will be in high-energy experimental physics, experimental condensed-matter sciences, experimental quantum optics, and condensed-matter/solid-state theory, according to Roger Bengtson, the chairman of the University of Texas physics department. Bengtson, anticipating that an advisory committee will be set up to consider how the chairs should be filled, said he would be "surprised if all the positions are filled four or five years from now."

The Texas physics department first began to make rapid strides forward, Bengtson said, when it obtained a National Science Foundation development grant in the late 1960s, which enabled Ilya Prigogine and Yuval Ne'eman to spend part of their time at Texas. Significant milestones after that included the arrival eight years ago of John Wheeler from Princeton, the establishment of the Institute for Fusion Study together with the appointment of Marshall Rosenbluth four years ago, and the arrival from Harvard of Steven Weinberg two years ago.

Weinberg observed that the new chairs in closely related fields such as chemistry, materials engineering and mathematics will help make Texas's

physics department more attractive to candidates. Moreover, Weinberg said, there is "no question but that additional faculty slots would have to be made available to bring people there" to fill the new chairs in physics. Weinberg considers it certain, for example, that the appointee to the position in experimental high-energy physics will come to Texas with an agreement similar to the one that brought him to the department.

Weinberg agreed to join the Texas faculty on the understanding that he would have the opportunity to nominate physicists for three tenure-track positions in areas close to his. Weinberg said that two slots already have been filled and that "no other department in the United States has made better appointments in this field in recent years." Willy Fischler took up residence as an associate professor in one of the positions last year, and Joe Polchinski, a Harvard postdoc, will take a position as assistant professor this year.

While Weinberg and other members of the department agree that one of the highest priorities is to assemble a team in experimental high-energy physics, they deny that this has much of anything to do with the university's effort—together with Rice University, Texas A&M and the University of Houston—to have the proposed Superconducting Super Collider (see page 17) built in Texas. Austin Gleason, the physicist who serves as the University of Texas representative on the Texas Accelerator Group that is coordinating Texas's bid for the SSC, said that it is "our intention to build a high-energy group regardless of whether 'Texatron' comes to fruition." Weinberg said that the SSC "is not necessarily going to go somewhere just because there already is a group there." What is "more important," he said, is "that it be built somewhere."

Bengtson, the department chairman, stressed that he "does not want it to be said that chairs are being filled to



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provide bargaining chips for 'Texatron.' The reason "they want an elementary particle physicist" at Texas, Bengtson said, "is because they want one."

Peter T. Flawn, the president of the University of Texas, said he expected that the university's new chairs—together with the university's recent advances in microelectronics and computers—would make it "generally appreciated across the country" as "the place to be during the next two decades."

Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation, a group of high-tech firms, announced last year that it would locate a large research facility in Austin at the Balcones Research Center (PHYSICS TODAY, July, page 65). In return, the university promised MCC it would establish a \$15-million endowment for faculty positions in electrical engineering and computer science, create 30 new faculty positions in electrical engineering and computer science in three years, and pledge \$750 000 per year for 75 graduate fellowships in the computer field, \$1 million in operating funds and \$5 million in capital and laboratory equipment for microelectronics and computer research.

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