ABOR Confirms Five New Regents' Professors at UA

News

Posted by : webmaster
Posted on : 2019/4/16 9:30:01

The Arizona Board of Regents on April 11 confirmed the appointments of University of Arizona faculty members Alfred McEwen, John Rutherfoord, Dr. Marvin Slepian, Rod Wing and Lucy Ziurys as Regents' Professors.

The title of Regents' Professor is reserved for full professors whose exceptional achievements merit national and international distinction. Regents' Professor appointments are limited to no more than 3 percent of the total number of the university’s tenured and tenure track faculty members.

Rod Wing has had a remarkable career in plant science. To read the information that plant genomes carry, their DNA must be turned into libraries: cut into shorter, overlapping pieces and inserted into vectors that can be propagated, stored and, most importantly, precisely sequenced. In the early 1990s, when the field of genomics began to explode, most available vectors were based on yeast artificial chromosomes, which were nimble enough to accommodate very large pieces of DNA but had the inconvenient habit of rearranging the inserted DNA in ways that no longer mirrored its original structure. This serious hurdle was overcome when Wing developed BACs – artificial chromosomes based on bacteria rather than yeast. Many years have passed, but BACs remain the cornerstone on which DNA libraries from plants and all sorts of other organisms are still constructed.

Armed with unique tools, several of which he developed, Wing moved on to tackle one of the most formidable challenges in plant sciences: the sequencing on the genome of rice, a crop eaten daily by more than 3 billion people worldwide. Wing was the U.S. leader of the 10-nation team that sequenced the rice genome, the completion of which was announced in Tucson in November 2004 and published in Nature in 2005. Rice was the first crop genome to be sequenced and remains the highest-quality genome available for any crop.

Since 2005, Wing has continued his work on many other genome projects including maize, Drosophila, or the common fruit fly, and the wild relatives of rice.

Wing has been recognized by numerous awards, including being elected as a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science this year. He is director of the Arizona Genomics Institute and the Bud Antle Endowed Chair Professor in the School of Plant Sciences’ Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology in the UA College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.

His commitment to excellence is also revealed by his service and teaching record at the UA. He has taught several undergraduate Honors Colloquia, all centered on understanding and solving
the problem of feeding the world's growing population. He is also dedicated to outreach for elementary school students and their families, and introduces them to the plant sciences at Plant Science Family Nights.

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