

SUNY Cortland News

Richard Wheeler, Physics Professor and Chair, to Retire on August 31

Released: 4/28/2008

Richard M. Wheeler, who has served on the SUNY Cortland faculty for 35 years, will retire on Aug. 31. Wheeler, who was honored with a 1986 SUNY Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, will earn the designation of professor and chair emeritus of physics.

Born in Washington, D.C., he grew up in Arlington, Va., and received a Bachelor of Arts in Physics, with general honors, and a Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md.

Wheeler completed one postdoctoral fellowship in the tandem VandeGraaff Laboratory at Purdue University and a second one with the T. W. Bonner Nuclear Structure Laboratory at Rice University.

Early in his career, he was an instructor at Purdue University, a research assistant at the VandeGraaff Laboratory at Johns Hopkins University, and an assistant instructor at Johns Hopkins University.

He joined the SUNY Cortland's Physics Department in 1973 as an assistant professor and was promoted to the rank of professor in 1982. Wheeler has chaired the department since 1995. He was also acting chair in Fall 1987.

At SUNY Cortland, he teaches introductory through advanced courses in physics, independent studies in physics and computer programming, and the College's introductory course for freshmen, COR101. Since 1973, he has also served as the mentor to more than 50 SUNY Cortland students who were undertaking independent projects in physics, advanced electronics, computer applications or science education.

Wheeler founded SUNY Cortland's computer applications minor and coordinated it from 1990-97. In 1998, he served as acting director of the College's Center for the Advancement of Technology in Education.

Since 1990, he has also taught as a visiting professor of physics at Cornell University's summer school.

Wheeler has focused his scholarship on ion-atom interactions, inner shell x-ray production cross-sections, x-ray fluorescence with synchrotron radiation, proton induced x-ray emission techniques, trace element analysis in medical physics, VandeGraaff accelerator techniques, ion impact perturbed angular correlations, nuclear g-factors of deformed nuclei, Mössbauer Effect Spectrometry following Coulomb Excitation, and physics teacher education.

Since 1983, Wheeler has served as a visiting scientist at the University of North Texas. For many years, he was a visiting scientist with the National Synchrotron Light Source at Brookhaven National Laboratory. He used the Cornell High Energy Synchrotron Source in his studies and had a research contract with Oak Ridge National Laboratory for 11 years.

In 1964-65, his summers were spent as a physicist at the Meteorological Satellite Laboratory in Suitland, Md., working for the U.S. Weather Bureau. During the previous three years, Wheeler was a student trainee at the U.S. Weather Bureau in Washington, D.C. He also was a student trainee for the U.S. Naval Weapons Laboratory, Dahlgren, Va., in the summer of 1960.

His research has been supported by grants from the National Science Foundation, including a more than \$111,000 award for him to co-direct with a colleague a two-year Summer Institute in Enrichment in Modern Physics in 1988-89. He received many other research grants from the College as well as SUNY Research Foundation, New York State/United University Professions, the Cortland College Foundation and the SUNY Cortland Alumni Association. Wheeler has frequently presented his findings at academic meetings and is the author or co-author of many scholarly articles published in journals in his field, including *The Physical Review*, *Physics Letters*, *Nature*, *Medical Physics*, *Nuovo Cimento* and *Nuclear Instruments and Methods*. His invited papers were shared at conferences and subsequent proceedings.

He was inducted into the American Physical Society, the undergraduate liberal arts and sciences honor society Phi Beta Kappa, the Society of Physics Students, the Sigma Pi Sigma physics honor society, the Sigma Xi honorary research society and the Johns Hopkins University Economics Honor Society.

Wheeler's university service has been extensive. He started the Earth and Sky Learning Community in 2002 and served as its coordinator until 2006. He currently heads the Manley Hutchinson Scholarship and the William Joseph Phelps '69 Scholarship selection committees. Previously, he served on and chaired the Arts and Science Curriculum Committee, the General Education Committee and the Math/Science Personnel Committee. In 1982, he served on the committee that proposed the original All-College Basic Studies Program. Since 1997, he has served as the assistant director of the Center for the Advancement of Technology in Education.

He lives in Ithaca, N.Y., with his wife, Amelia. They have a son, Richard, who currently works for the Environmental Systems Research Institute in Redlands, Calif. Wheeler's retirement plans include continuing to teach summer school at Cornell, traveling, working on his photography collection and bringing his father's genealogy studies up to date.