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Oakland University chapter of Sigma Xi achieves top-tier ranking

The Oakland University chapter of **Sigma Xi** recently achieved a third place ranking after competing with more than 500 chapters in the United States and abroad for the **Sigma Xi Chapter Excellence Award**, which is presented to chapters that have demonstrated exceptional innovation and quality in their overall annual programming.

“On behalf of our Chapter members and officers, we are very excited and want to share our enthusiasm with the community,” said **Dr. Shailesh Lal**, a professor of biological sciences at Oakland University and president of the OU chapter of Sigma Xi for the past 10 years. “Our accomplishments will no doubt help OU improve its national ranking for research at the local and national levels.”

As the world’s oldest and largest scientific research honor society, Sigma Xi is steeped in prestige. More than 200 Nobel prize winners are listed as Sigma Xi members.

According to Dr. Lal, the OU chapter has been “very active” since it was established more than 40 years ago.

“The original OU Sigma Xi Charter, dated March 19, 1975, is proudly displayed in the Eye Research Institute (ERI) in Dodge Hall,” Lal said. “Two of the 39 founding members, Drs. Frank Giblin (ERI director), and Mike Sevilla, (Distinguished professor in the Department of Chemistry) are still active research faculty and supporters of Sigma Xi, representing an amazing continuity of support and leadership for our chapter.”

According to Emma Perry, chair of the Sigma Xi Committee on Qualifications and Membership, the rigorous awards selection process began with the annual reports of chapter activity were submitted in the summer of 2017.

“Regional and constituency directors reviewed these reports and made recommendations to the Committee on Qualifications and Membership,” Perry said. “From the recommended chapters, the Committee then chose the top four to receive the Chapter of Excellence Award.”

The 2016-2017 Excellence Award winners are:

- National Institute of Standards and Technology (1st Place)
- Columbia-Willamette (2nd Place)
- Oakland University (Tied for 3rd Place)
- Rice University – Texas Medical Center (Tied for 3rd Place)

“Chapters are critical to Sigma Xi because they carry out the Society’s mission in their local communities by honoring excellence in research, supporting scientists and engineers, and connecting the public with research,” Perry said. “The Society is grateful for the work of all of our volunteer chapter officers, and I’m pleased to recognize these outstanding chapter winners. The committee was impressed by their exemplary programming that encouraged member involvement throughout the year.”

The OU Chapter of Sigma Xi Executive Board members includes Amy Siebert-McKenzie, who serves as the vice president of the Chapter; Dr. Randal Westrick, secretary; and Kathie



Amy Siebert-McKenzie, vice president of the OU Chapter of Sigma Xi.

Siebert-McKenzie says being an active member of Sigma Xi had a tremendous impact on her decision to choose a career in science research, noting that she got her first break when attended the International Sigma Xi Conference in Montreal, Canada as an undergraduate student at OU.

“It provided me with a wonderful opportunity to present my research at an international forum, and interact with my peers in the field at such an early stage of my career,” said Siebert-McKenzie, who went on to pursue her graduate studies in Dr. Westrick’s laboratory.

As a graduate student, Siebert-McKenzie wanted to become more involved in chapter activities to help provide similar opportunities to aspiring scientists.

“Last spring, I hosted a campus visit for Dr. Thomas Saunders, one of the world’s leading experts in genome editing,” she said. “He gave an amazing talk and over the course of the vi we became friends and collaborators.”

Siebert-McKenzie just graduated with a Ph.D. in biological and biomedical sciences and says that her continued involvement with Sigma Xi has been critical for her career success.

The OU Chapter of Sigma Xi is supported by generous donations from the following offices: OU President, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs, College of Arts and Sciences, the Office of Research Administration, Center for Biomedical Research, the Eye Research Institute and the Department of Biological Sciences. With the money raised the ch sends OU students to attend the Annual International Sigma Xi Student Research Conference.

“For the past five years, OU students have won National Medals in their scientific categories,” Lal said. “This year, we sent a contingent of 16 OU students and representative delegate the Sigma Xi Student Research Conference held in November 2017 in Raleigh, N.C. Our undergraduate student [Genna Wilber](#) won a medal in the Physiology and Immunology category. Genna works in Dr. Luis Villa-Diaz's laboratory in the Department of Biological Sciences.”

To learn more about Sigma Xi at Oakland University, visit www.oakland.edu/biology/sigmaxi/.