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Two professors, one student claim Thomas Jefferson Award [1]

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DENVER ? Two professors and a graduate student are the winners of the 2010 Thomas Jefferson Award, one of the highest honors conferred on faculty, staff and students at the University of Colorado.

This year?s honorees are Michael Eisenberg, Ph.D., a University of Colorado at Boulder professor of computer science who blends art and math to inspire students of all ages; Stephen Hartnett, Ph.D., a University of Colorado Denver communication associate professor and an advocate for prison reform and education; and Eamon Aloyo, a CU-Boulder political science doctoral candidate who organizes charity bike rides to raise money for women in developing nations.

The award recognizes faculty, staff and students who advance the ideals of Thomas Jefferson, the nation?s third president and a Founding Father acclaimed for his broad interests in the arts, sciences, education and public affairs. CU has been bestowing the award on selected honorees since 1962. Award funding stems from earnings on a McConnell Foundation endowment and a bequest by CU alumnus Harrison Blair.

?Whether I?m meeting with state lawmakers or community and business leaders throughout Colorado, I always talk about the high quality of our faculty, staff and students,? said CU President Bruce D. Benson. ?This year?s Thomas Jefferson Award winners further highlight the excellent academic and service work that occurs on all four CU campuses every day, and advances Colorado in so many ways.?

To be considered for the award, nominees must demonstrate the following: a broad interest in literature, arts and sciences and public affairs; a strong concern for the advancement of higher education; a deeply seated sense of individual civic responsibility; and a profound commitment to the welfare and rights of the individual. In addition, their efforts must combine excellence in the performance of regular academic or work responsibilities with outstanding service to the broader community.

A selection committee, comprised of CU faculty and staff members, alumni and students, selects the award winners. Recipients receive an engraved plaque and a $2,000 cash honorarium, and are recognized formally by the CU Board of Regents. The regents and President Benson are expected to recognize this year?s award recipients at an April board meeting.

Eisenberg, also a CU President?s Teaching Scholar, earned his master?s and doctoral degrees in computer science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He has won other recognition for his teaching and scholarship, including the Charles Hutchinson Teaching Award from the CU-Boulder College of Engineering and Applied Science and the Boulder Faculty Assembly Excellence in Teaching Award.

Besides distinguishing himself in the classroom, Eisenberg is a playwright and songwriter who inspires his students to incorporate art into learning, and shares his passion for computer science and math with K-12 students through CU-Boulder?s renowned Science Discovery Class Program.

?Mike is one of our best-loved teachers, even though he insists on deep thinking and hard work,? wrote computer science Professor Elizabeth Bradley in her nomination letter. ?And Mike?s teaching extends well beyond the university classroom. His Ph.D. students do wonderfully creative work and move on to build their own research programs in some of the very best universities in the world.?

For his part, UC Denver?s Hartnett is a prolific and nationally recognized scholar and writer who teaches Thomas Jefferson?s texts and speaks publicly about the U.S. president?s legacy. He participated in a convincing re-enactment of the 1858 senatorial debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas at UC Denver in 2008, earning him local and international recognition. Hartnett also has received many other accolades for his academic and community work, including the Northwestern Communication Association?s 2008 Human Rights Award.

His books include the forthcoming Executing Democracy, Volume One: Capital Punishment and the Making of America and 2002?s Sweet Freedom?s Song: ?My Country ?Tis of Thee? and Democracy in America. Hartnett also has earned a national reputation as an opponent of the nation?s prison system and is an experienced and successful prison educator.

?Hartnett thus embodies the Jeffersonian ideals of the public man of letters committed to enhancing the norms of democratic deliberation,? wrote Daniel J. Howard, Ph.D., dean of the UC Denver College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in a nomination letter. ?Dr. Hartnett is a scholar who strives to embody the democratic ideals, intellectual daring, and artistic creativity that we have come to know and love as the legacy of Thomas Jefferson.?

Aloyo, this year?s student winner, is a doctoral candidate in the CU-Boulder political science department who is studying international development and political theory and works as a teaching assistant. As part of his efforts to broaden his experience of other cultures, he has studied in Spain, Italy and Argentina, and has been involved with humanitarian efforts in the United States and abroad. Aloyo has helped organize bicycle fundraisers, including a cross-country event to help alleviate poverty in developing nations.

?I have seldom encountered a graduate student with such a strong social conscience and burning desire to be of help to others,? wrote CU-Boulder political science Professor David Mapel in his nomination letter. ?Eamon is determined to use his graduate training to be of practical use in the world.?

The University of Colorado is a premier public research university with four campuses: the University of Colorado at Boulder, the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, the University of Colorado Denver and the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. More than 56,000 students are pursuing academic degrees at CU. The National Science Foundation ranks CU seventh among public institutions in federal research expenditures in engineering and science. Academic prestige is marked by the university?s four Nobel laureates, seven MacArthur ?genius? Fellows, 18 alumni astronauts and 19 Rhodes Scholars. For more information about the entire CU system, and to access campus resources, go to www.cu.edu [2].

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