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UCSB Physicist Wins Prestigious Plous Award

Tommaso Treu, an assistant professor in the Department of Physics, has received UC Santa Barbara's 2008-09 Harold J. Plous Award. One of the university's most prestigious faculty honors, the award is given annually to an assistant professor from the humanities, social sciences, or natural sciences who has shown exceptional achievement in research, teaching, and service to the university. The award was established in 1957 to honor the memory of Harold J. Plous, an assistant professor of economics.

Treu will have an opportunity to showcase his research when he delivers the annual Plous Lecture next spring. The date has not yet been set.

"Professor Treu is an outstanding choice for this prestigious institutional honor," said Chancellor Henry Yang. "The Plous Award is such a meaningful peer recognition, not only of Professor Treu's leading research achievements in exploring how galaxies formed and evolved over cosmic time, but also of his dedication to teaching and mentoring, and especially his collaborative efforts to connect science and the humanities. We look forward to his Plous Lecture next spring."

A Hubble Fellow at UCLA before joining the UCSB faculty in 2004, Treu received his Ph.D. in physics at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, Italy. His many distinctions include a CAREER Award from the National Science Foundation, a Research Fellowship from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and a Research Fellowship from the

David and Lucille Packard Foundation, all received within the span of one year.

In addition, Treu has been involved with the most advanced earth- and space-based telescopes in operation, including the W.M. Keck Observatory, the Chandra X-Ray Observatory, and the Spitzer Space Telescope. He also serves on a 12-member committee that advises NASA on the operation of the Hubble Telescope.

Treu's research focuses on the nature of galaxy formation, and specifically on the cosmic evolution of three main elements in spheroid galaxies: black holes, stars, and dark matter. His research achievements include the discovery of a "double Einstein ring," a never-before-seen phenomenon of gravitational lensing. This discovery prompted the American Astronomical Society to herald Treu's accomplishment as a major breakthrough in astrophysics. Working with the Hubble Space Telescope Project using a similar technique, Treu was able to examine a tiny galaxy ó the smallest ever seen at that distance ó from approximately halfway across the universe. He will be exploring the possibilities for gravitational lensing on the planned Thirty Meter Telescope and has recently coordinated a program at the Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics on the applications of gravitational lensing.

"The physics faculty is proud and honored that Professor Treu has been selected as this year's recipient of the Plous Award," said Mark Srednicki, chair and professor of physics. "His stellar accomplishments in research, teaching, mentoring, and service are well known in our department, and it is gratifying to see them receive broader recognition as well."

Omer Blaes, a professor of physics who nominated Treu for the Plous Award, said: "He (Treu) cares deeply about advancing the careers of young people, from engaging undergraduates in research to working closely with postdoctoral students.

In fact, many young scientists with prize postdoctoral fellowships have been attracted to UCSB because of him."

Treu has joined with Richard Hecht, a professor of religious studies at UCSB, and Stefania Tutino, an assistant professor of history and religious studies at UCSB to develop an innovative interdisciplinary course titled "Origins: A Dialogue Between Scientists and Humanists." It is offered through both the physics and religious studies departments.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.