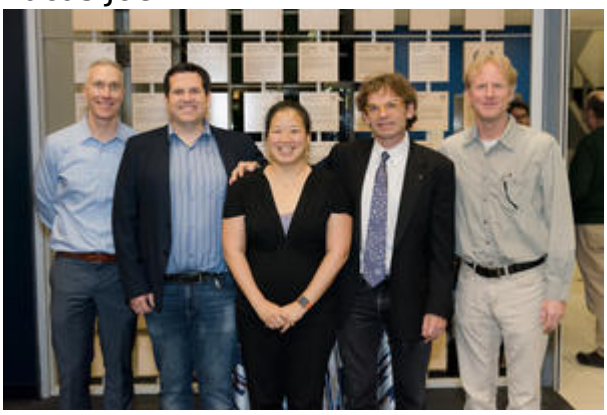
Three Academic Senate Awards for Physical Sciences Professors

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On February 19, Professors Eric Rignot, Timothy Tait and Jenny Yang all received 2019-2020 Distinguished Faculty Awards from the UCI Academic Senate during an evening ceremony at the Newkirk Alumni Center. The professors swept the Senates' research awards categories; Professor Rignot received the Distinguished Senior Faculty Award for Research, while Professors Yang and Tait received the Distinguished Mid-Career Faculty Award for Research and the Distinguished Early-Career Faculty Award for Research, respectively.

"I am very satisfied to have received the award," says Rignot, who is Chair and Donald Bren Professor in the Earth System Science Department. "The most gratifying element of it is that it is attributed by a committee of experts out of my field, which means that some of what we do is appreciated and recognized by a broader community."

The Senate gauges the whole of a researcher's career before bestowing an award — but the scientists can point to moments in their work thus far that pushed their fields forward. Last year, Yang, who is an assistant professor of chemistry, published research that shines a light on a chemical reaction that reduces carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere. "To accomplish this discovery, we took inspiration from enzymes, which perform these reactions very efficiently in nature," she says.

Tait, meanwhile, who is Chair and Professor of physics and astronomy, gave a talk last year that led to him proposing that forces at work when the universe was young were different than forces at work today. "It kind of amazes me that someone giving me an undefined talk has inspired an interesting direction of physics research," he says.

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