Virginia Trimble is a Legacy Fellow

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In February, Virginia Trimble, an astronomer in the UCI Department of Physics and Astronomy, became a Legacy Fellow of the American Astronomical Society (AAS). This is the first time in its 121-year history that the AAS has given fellowships of any kind to its members, and, through its Legacy Fellows, the society is shining a light on members who sculpted astronomy into the field it is today.

Trimble's legacy began dawning when she was a graduate student at Caltech in the 1960s. For her PhD research, she studied star structure and evolution, and white dwarfs in the Crab Nebula. Trimble, now 76, then charted a career among the stars, and her work and service to her science shines through to today. That is why the AAS made her one of some 200 inaugural Legacy Fellows — about a third of whom are women.

Trimble discovered she got the fellowship when she saw her name on the list of fellows that came with the press release announcing the recipients. "The AAS custom has been that we were all equal members, and I liked the idea," Trimble says. "Honors nearly always please those who receive them, but can often distress those who don't."

What does receiving the fellowship mean, then? "It means you get a star next to your name in the directory," says Trimble, who nowadays has her sights set not on the night sky, but back here on Earth. Nowadays, she studies science and scientists so she can figure out what forces make science itself stay — or not stay — in orbit.

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