Professors Franklin Dollar and Aomawa Shields receive Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers

The awards from President Biden are the highest honor awarded by the U.S. government to early career scientists.

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Professors Aomawa Shileds and Franklin Dollar of the UC Irvine Department of Physics & Astronomy.

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Yesterday, The White House announced that President Biden is bestowing 400 U.S. scientists with the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE) – a distinction that honors scientists who demonstrate the highest degree of promise in their chosen fields. UC Irvine professors Franklin Dollar and Aomawa Shields, both from the UC Irvine Department of Physics & Astronomy, are two PECASE recipients.

PECASE recognizes not only the capacity to make field-defining discoveries, but to help others in their profession do the same. The National Science Foundation nominated Dollar and Shields for PECASE after being able to select just 23 scientists each year from across the nation for the honor.

Dollar serves as the Associate Dean for Graduate Studies at the UC Irvine School of Physical Sciences, and is a laser physicist whose lab, among other topics, studies pulses of light that happen on the shortest timescales – mere millionths of a billionth of a second.

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“I'm extremely honored and humbled to receive this award,” said Dollar. “Being able to study and build the most powerful lasers to explore the frontiers of physics has been such a privilege, and being able to give back to the community and nation to enable those who come next is really what makes the job worth it.”

And Shields is an astronomer whose research group models the potential climates of distant exoplanets in the search for extraterrestrial life. Shields is also Founder and Director of a nonprofit program called Rising Stargirls, which seeks to help young girls from underrepresented backgrounds feel more connected to the universe using the creative arts. Last year, Shields published a memoir: *Life on Other Planets: A Memoir of Finding my Place in the Universe.*

“The PECASE award is a tremendous honor,” said Shields. “Knowing that the work I’ve done – to explore and quantify the potential habitability of extrasolar planets, and to develop personal connections between girls from historically marginalized groups and the universe of which they are an integral part – is valued by the U.S. government to this extent means a great deal.”

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