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Illinois Wesleyan Professor Receives Cottrell College Science Award

June 1, 2005

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Linda French, associate professor of physics at Illinois Wesleyan University, is the recipient of a Cottrell College Science Award from the Research Corporation, America's first foundation for the advancement of science.

The grant is for \$34,000 over two years for the project "Photometric Studies of Primitive Solar System Objects," which continues work that French has been pursuing. With the assistance of Gautham Narayan, an Illinois Wesleyan student who graduated in May and is headed to graduate school at Harvard University, the research has examined two groups of target objects. One of these targets is a group called "damocloids," the asteroids in comet-like orbits that sometimes develop tails as they near the sun. A second group of target objects are those that are likely to be very little changed since the early days of the solar system because of their great distance from the sun. The principal group of interest in the second case is the Trojan asteroids, located at Jupiter's distance but ahead of and behind Jupiter in its orbit.

According to French, the grant will provide summer stipends for her and some Illinois Wesleyan students as well as travel funds to go to observatories. As part of the research, French and Narayan traveled to the Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory high in the Andes Mountains near La Serena, Chile, in 2003.

French will be collaborating with an international team of scientists on the project, including Paul Abell of NASA Johnson Space Center, Yan Fernandez of the University of Hawaii, and Petr Pravec of the Czech Astronomical Institute.

The Cottrell College Science Awards (CCSA) program presents grants to faculty at primarily undergraduate institutions in order to challenge them to explore new areas of science, to make new discoveries that contribute to their discipline and to initiate new research programs that can be sustained by other extramural funding sources, as well as with institutional support. A key element in these research programs is that they involve undergraduate students in meaningful ways. It is also expected that these endeavors will spill over into teaching, thereby raising the quality of undergraduate education.

This is the second time in as many years that Illinois Wesleyan faculty members have received one of the prestigious grants. In 2004, Ram Mohan in the chemistry department and Gabe Spalding in physics both won Cottrell College Science Awards.