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French Honored in First Class of American Astronomical Society Fellows

Feb. 28, 2020

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Illinois Wesleyan University Professor of Physics Linda French has been named to the inaugural class of American Astronomical Society (AAS) Fellows in recognition of her contributions toward the AAS mission of enhancing and sharing humanity's scientific understanding of the universe.

"I was both honored and humbled to be named a Fellow of the American Astronomical Society," French said. "My work as a professor at a small university has involved teaching, mentoring students, and service to the IWU community and beyond, as well as research. It is the combination of all these aspects of professional life that I have found most rewarding in my career, and it is doubly rewarding to be recognized for them."

AAS, the major organization of professional astronomers in North America, established the new accolade, "[Fellow of the AAS](#)," to honor members for extraordinary achievement and service. An initial group of more than 200 "Legacy Fellows" — including French — was designated by the AAS Board of Trustees. This group of honorees includes past recipients of certain awards from the AAS or its topical divisions, distinguished AAS elected leaders and volunteer committee members, and previously unrecognized individuals with long histories of outstanding research, teaching, mentoring, and service.

For the past three years, French served as Program Director at the National Science Foundation (NSF) Division for Astronomical Sciences where she was responsible for the CAREER program, a highly-prestigious five-year grant for young tenure-track scientists. French's additional work with the NSF included organizing panels for review of research proposals, recruiting panelists, running the panels, and then, evaluating and passing on the panels' recommendations for funding. French was also responsible for programs in planetary and stellar astronomy research and in astronomy education.

French joined Illinois Wesleyan's faculty in 2002 and was promoted to Professor of Physics in 2008. In 2016, [she earned the Kemp Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence](#), the University's highest teaching honor.

A native of Hagerstown, Indiana, French earned a bachelor's degree in astronomy from Indiana University and a master's and Ph.D. from Cornell University. She also did post-doctoral work at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

French's scientific research, funded by the NSF, concerns the study of the shapes and surfaces of asteroids and comets. A main-belt asteroid, 3506 French, is named for her. French has also published widely and presented lectures and papers on the life and work of 18th-century astronomer John Goodricke of York, England.



Professor of Physics Linda French

By John Twork