

April 27, 2022

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Radenka Maric, Ph.D.



Interim President | University of Connecticut

RE: Recommendations for Designation as Board of Trustees Distinguished Professors,
Academic Year 2021-2022

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Trustees accept the recommendation of the Distinguished Professor Review Committee and designate the following faculty members as University of Connecticut Board of Trustees Distinguished Professors: Dr. Laurinda Jaffe (Department of Cell Biology, School of Medicine), Dr. Rachel O'Neill (Department of Molecular and Cell Biology, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences), and Professor Richard Pomp (School of Law).

BACKGROUND:

On November 10, 1998, the Board of Trustees voted to establish the title of Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor. This designation is the University's highest academic honor.

Pursuant to the By-Laws of the University of Connecticut, the Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor award is reserved exclusively to recognize faculty who have achieved exceptional distinction in scholarship, teaching, and service while at the University of Connecticut. Faculty chosen must have distinguished themselves in all three of these categories. The designation process occurs annually, as a result of a peer review process.

After careful deliberations, the Review Committee recommended the three individuals named above. I am recommending that the Board of Trustees designate these faculty as its Distinguished Professors.

Dr. Laurinda Jaffe

In her research, Dr. Jaffe has repeatedly made discoveries that have been key to moving forward our understanding of the physiological mechanisms that produce a fertilization-competent egg and initiate embryonic development upon fertilization. Another major focus in her lab has been how membrane receptors and cyclic nucleotides function in the signaling pathways by which the cells that surround the oocyte in the mammalian ovarian follicle control meiosis. These discoveries have contributed greatly to our understanding of fertility mechanisms. They also provide important paradigms for understanding how cyclic nucleotides can coordinate intercellular communication in multicellular systems.

Over her career, Dr. Jaffe has published over 100 scientific papers and book chapters, including five single author or senior author original research papers in *Nature* and *Science*. In 2021, she was elected a member of the prestigious National Academy of Sciences in 2021, one of only three members at UConn.

Dr. Jaffe has actively participated in formal and informal teaching of graduate, medical and dental students at UConn Health as well as in the mentoring and laboratory teaching of doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows. She came to UConn Health in 1981 and has served UConn and the community for over 40 years. Early in her career, she developed and directed the medical and dental school curriculum in Tissue Biology, which was recognized by the 1988 Loeser Award for Outstanding Teaching. She has also contributed to the summer program for incoming medical students with disadvantaged backgrounds, a program designed to improve diversity in education at UConn Health. In 2018, she was honored with the Excellence in Research Mentoring award given by the UConn School of Medicine. Dr. Jaffe also serves on the Graduate Women in Medicine and Science steering committee and has led an initiative to advocate for an increase in endowed chairs for female faculty. For the past 14 years, she has chaired the organizing committee for the annual “Richard D. Berlin Lectureship”, a campus wide event that brings together many departments. In 2015, she helped to organize an event that brought author Rebecca Skloot and the family of Henrietta Lacks to the Storrs campus.

Dr. Rachel O’Neill

Dr. O’Neill’s work centers on how genomes function and evolve. She uses cutting-edge genomic, computational and imaging approaches to gain fundamental insights into chromosome biology and genome evolution in a wide variety of organisms. Her studies on the structure and function of chromosome centromeres, essential for proper chromosome segregation during cell division, have shaped the field of centromere biology. She is highly sought-after as a collaborator on large-scale national and international projects that require a high-level expertise in genome assembly curation.

Dr. O’Neill’s work on repetitive DNA, which makes up about 50% of the human genome but is frequently dismissed as “junk DNA”, has had far-reaching impact, including on normal fetal and placental development, the discovery of novel retroelements, evolutionary breakpoints and chromosome evolution, and continuing challenges to the centromere paradox. She is part of the team that released the first complete human genome sequence, published in a series of papers in *Science*. Her 2010 publication titled “Chromosomes, Conflict, and Epigenetics: Chromosomal Speciation Revisited”, remains one of the most cited reviews from the *Annual Review of Genomics and Human Genetics*. Collectively, Dr. O’Neill has published more than 100 peer-reviewed articles and led or contributed to projects that have brought over \$23 million in extramural funding to UConn.

Dr. O’Neill is also the director of the Institute for Systems Genomics (ISG). As Director of the ISG, she has developed multiple new degree programs, initiated core facilities and programs (including the SARS-COV2 Surveillance Program) and established the iGEM and Genome Ambassadors outreach programs. Most recently, Dr. O’Neill organized and hosted Nobel Laureate Dr. Jennifer Doudna for the ISG Distinguished Lecture series, an event that attracted about 1,800 attendees for the live virtual presentation.

Dr. O’Neill also is part of the team that spearheaded the COVID-19 testing efforts at UConn that have helped UConn remain safe, efforts that were widely praised throughout the country including by White House Coronavirus Response Coordinator (2020-2021), Dr. Deborah Birx.

Dr. O’Neill has been recognized with several honors for her teaching, research and service, including a UConn Excellence in Teaching award, a Connecticut Women of Innovation - Academic Leadership Award, and is an elected member of the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering.

Professor Richard Pomp

Professor Pomp has dedicated his career to promoting fair, efficient, and progressive taxation. States, cities, and countries have valued his guidance on building ethical and sound tax regimes. He is sought after both nationally and globally as a visiting scholar, advisor, and expert witness, counseling cities, states, Indian tribes, the U.S. Congress, the U.S. Treasury, the White House, the Department of Justice, the IRS, the United Nations, the IMF, the World Bank, and numerous foreign countries, including Zambia, Indonesia, Gambia, Mexico, the Philippines, India, the People's Republic of China, Vietnam, and the Republic of China.

He served as the hearing officer for the Multistate Tax Commission, revising the existing rules on state corporate income taxation and drafting alternative solutions. He helped design or draft the Navajo tax code, the Connecticut income tax, the Alaska personal income tax (adoption pending), and the federal Internet Tax Freedom Act. He was Director of the NY Tax Study Commission, and was described by the then-governor as “the father of fundamental tax reform in NY.” He was the only non-resident appointed to the California Commission on the 21st Century Economy. He participates in various capacities in Supreme Court litigation.

Professor Pomp's more than 140 publications and 13 books and monographs consistently place him in the top 10% of the 30,000 authors on SSRN. Professor Pomp's interdisciplinary work has been relied on by judges to justify their decisions in high-profile cases. His casebook, now in its 9th edition, has been translated in part into seven languages. His work has been described as challenging orthodoxy, exposing fallacies and myths, connecting seemingly disparate concepts, and fundamentally changing the profession's views of classical problems.

He has won two awards for his teaching. His classes have been consistently described as transformative, inspirational, innovative, and creative, the reason for coming to UConn Law School.

His views are regularly sought by the media, including CNN, NPR, Bloomberg Radio, Sirius Radio, KCBS, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, the Christian Science Monitor, the Los Angeles Times, the Minneapolis Star Tribune, The International Herald Tribune, and the Hill.

Professor Pomp has received every major award in his field, including NYU's “Outstanding Achievement in State and Local Taxation,” the Bureau of National Affairs “Lifetime Achievement Award,” Tax Analysts “State Tax Lawyer and Academic of the Year,” the Council on State Taxation's “Excellence in State Taxation Award,” and the Connecticut Law Tribune's “Professional Excellence Award.”