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HEAD OF THE CLASS: Physics Honors 2011 Mechanics Scholars

COLLEGE STATION -- A dozen Texas A&M University students enrolled in Physics 218 (Classical Mechanics) this spring have been honored by the Department of Physics and Astronomy as its latest [Addison Wesley/Benjamin Cummings Mechanics Scholars](#).

The students, selected for their top-scoring marks on a special end-of-semester "Challenge Exam" open to all Physics 218 students and covering material from all related sections taught during the spring 2011 semester, were honored Thursday (May 5) during an awards banquet in the [George P. and Cynthia Woods Mitchell Institute for Fundamental Physics and Astronomy](#). The event featured a presentation by Dr. David Toback, professor of physics and astronomy and Thaman Professor for Undergraduate Teaching Excellence, on career possibilities in physics and related fields. Each student was presented with a certificate commemorating their accomplishments by Associate Department Head, Dr. A. Lewis Ford.

This semester's top three performers -- sophomore computer science major Matthew Barry (first), junior mathematics major Joshua Keneda (second) and freshman mathematics major Zhentao Tong (third) -- also received copies of the Physics 208 textbook, "Young and Freedman, Volume II," (valued at around \$90) as well as monetary awards (\$200 for first place, \$100 for second and third) to be used toward academics.

Before handing out awards, Toback encouraged the students to continue taking physics courses and to strongly consider the numerous career options a degree in physics can offer. Physics majors are highly sought in numerous industries, Toback explained.

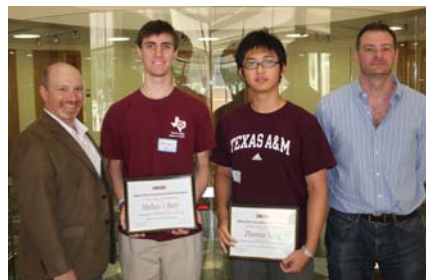
"The world needs the best and brightest, the top performers, to be doing great things," he said.

Although considered one of the department's toughest physics courses, Physics 218 routinely attracts about 800 students across its eight sections each spring semester and about 1,500 in the fall, according to Toback. This year, all three of the top performers came from the same

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Spring 2011 Addison Wesley/Benjamin Cummings Mechanics Scholars (from left) Zhentao Tong, Collin Dart, Matthew Summers, Joshua Keneda, Reid Scofield, Matthew Barry, Preston Pope, and Amber Gertson; (bottom) Bradley Talbert, Robert Lee, and Edgar Bonilla. (Not pictured: Michael Scholze.)



(left to right) Dr. David Toback, sophomore computer science major Matthew Barry (first), freshman mathematics major Zhentao Tong (third), and Dr. Ricardo Eusebi.

section, 521-525, taught by Assistant Professor of Physics and Astronomy Dr. Ricardo Eusebi.

"We often have excellent students in the 218 courses, and this semester was no exception," Eusebi said. "These students come in all shapes and sizes. Some are very vocal and some very quiet, but they are all very driven, and most of them are just starting to discover their own potential."

The event is part of the Mechanics Scholar Program, founded by the department in 2002 to celebrate the best students in Physics 218 and encourage career exploration in physics.

For more information on the program, including lists of past winners, visit <http://faculty.physics.tamu.edu/toback/MechanicsScholar/>.

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