

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Item Name: **Appointment of Regents Professors for the University of Arizona (UArizona)**

Action Item

Requested Action: The University of Arizona asks the board to approve the appointment of five Regents Professors: Sama Alshaibi (School of Fine Arts); Jean-Luc Brédas (Chemistry and Biochemistry); Juanita Merchant (Department of Medicine); David Pietz (Department of History) and Donata Vercelli (Cellular and Molecular Medicine).

Background/History of Previous Board Action

The University of Arizona requires all nominations for Regents Professor to come from groups of tenured faculty members and to be reviewed by an Advisory Committee. After this process, the President considers the recommendations provided from the committee and decides which names should be submitted for the Board's consideration.

Discussion

On this occasion, five names are recommended. Each individual has the full support of the Advisory Board and the President.

Sama Alshaibi (College of Fine Arts)

Multi-award-winning Professor Sama Alshaibi joined the School of Art in 2006. Due largely to her international fame and tireless efforts, the School of Art Photography, Video and Imaging program has grown substantively, and is currently ranked third in the nation. An immigrant, Alshaibi has used her artwork to create space, both for herself and others, where little had existed previously. Her projects forcefully engage with the visual legacy of colonialism and subsequent cultural erasure historically and in the present. Further, through a series of deeply provocative choices around process and its relation to her content, she explores in innovative and compelling ways the extent to which her chosen medium of photography is implicated in that legacy. Projects interrogate western depictions of the Middle East and Islam while also exploring her personal history and identity as a woman refugee. Set against contemporary issues of our region, her work resonates deeply with the continuing humanitarian crisis unfolding along the U.S.-Mexico border.

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Alshaibi's professional accolades include an extensive list of fellowships, exhibitions, publications and awards at both the national and international level. Milestone recognitions for her work include exhibition at the 2014 Venice Biennale, a monograph published by Aperture, a 2014 Fulbright Research Fellowship to the West Bank city of Ramallah, a 2019 Artpace residency, and a 2021 Guggenheim fellowship. As well, the inclusion of her work in recent important exhibitions such as Women in the Face of History and Migration(s) and Meaning in Art reveal the immediacy and relevance of her work within broader societal dialogues. The reach of her work is further demonstrated by its sheer ubiquity with 82 selected presentations (she is a gifted speaker) and over 200 citations listed in her CV. These are exceptionally high numbers for visual artists. While only a portion of her activity, such accomplishments represent an artist who is at the top of her field.

Sama Alshaibi's multifaceted efforts in research, teaching, and service are interconnected and integral. She brings a level of talent and dedication to her work that is extraordinary, and as such, her impact as scholar, artist, mentor, and colleague is incalculable.

Jean-Luc Brédas (College of Science)

Colorful cell-phone displays, high-efficiency optical components in telecommunications, and the development of thin-film solar cells require scientists and engineers to design new materials and the methods to fabricate them into devices. An essential prerequisite to the successful design of new materials is understanding and control of their electronic energy levels. Over the past thirty years, Jean-Luc Brédas and his group have been at the vanguard of devising theoretical approaches to materials at molecular length scales that could then guide experimentalists in the design of new systems for optoelectronic device architectures. The success of this theoretical approach by Brédas and his group has led to a revolution in materials design. A substantial theoretical component is now an essential centerpiece of any major multi-investigator research effort in the design of devices and materials. Of course, enhancements in computational capabilities have greatly facilitated these advances, but without Brédas' insight and innovative spark, such developments would have been insufficient to guarantee the success and impact his work has had in this arena.

The national and international impact of Brédas' research has been recognized by multiple awards: 2013 David Adler Award in Materials Physics of the American Physical Society; 2016 Award in the Chemistry of Materials of the American Chemical Society; 2019 Alexander von Humboldt Research Award; 2020 Materials Theory Award of the Materials Research Society; 2021 Centenary Prize of the UK Royal Society of Chemistry. He has been elected as a Member of the International Academy of Quantum Molecular Science, the Royal Academy of Belgium, and the European Academy of Sciences. According to Google Scholar, his *h*-index (an author-level metric that measures both the productivity and citation impact of the publications) currently is 156 with over 116,000 citations. He is ranked #459 in the career list and first among UA faculty members.

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Jean-Luc Brédas has a unique ability to distill complex concepts down their essence and present them in a manner that is accessible to broad audiences. This ability underlies his invitation to deliver over 600 presentations at international conferences and institutions. He has supervised and mentored over 45 graduate students and 70 post-doctoral scholars, a great many of whom now hold prestigious academic positions at universities across the globe.

He has an impressive service record which includes leadership on national and international organizations in his field, as well as service to the University of Arizona. Since 2008, he is Associate Editor of Chemistry of Materials, an American Chemical Society journal, for which he has now handled several thousand submissions. At University of Arizona Chemistry and Biochemistry (CBC) he chairs the CBC Awards Committee (which he helped establish) and the new Standing Promotion & Tenure Committee. In all of these functions, he has remained dedicated to diversity and inclusion, a recent example of which is his 2020 editorial in Materials Horizons (the flagship materials journal of the Royal Society of Chemistry), addressed to the Materials community at large.

Juanita L. Merchant (College of Medicine)

A pioneering leader in research on the physiology, pathophysiology, development and cancer of the stomach, Professor Merchant is a most accomplished, distinguished and celebrated member of the faculty of the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Tucson. Previously the H. Marvin Pollard Professor of Gastrointestinal Sciences at the University of Michigan Medical School, she joined the University in 2018 as Professor and Chief of Gastroenterology and Hepatology and since then has become, in addition, Professor of Physiological Sciences and Interim Associate Director of Basic Science for the Arizona Cancer Center.

Having earned M.D. and Ph.D. degrees at Yale University and completed residency training and a research fellowship at Massachusetts General Hospital and a gastroenterology fellowship at UCLA, Dr. Merchant began her independent career in academic medicine at Michigan in 1991. Her research program has been supported for more than 25 years by competitively awarded research grants from numerous sources, including mainly the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and she has an enviable record of highly valued, impactful publications.

Dr. Merchant's record as a teacher and mentor is no less stellar than her accomplishments as a physician-scientist. As is evident in her extraordinary record, Dr. Merchant is a rare winner of the medical trifecta – highest achievement as a practicing physician, laboratory researcher, and teacher/mentor. Her many honors, testifying to the high regard in which she is held by her peers, include: election to the National Academy of Medicine, the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and the Association of American Physicians; the Funderburg Research Award in Gastric Cancer (a top honor in her specialty) and the Distinguished Achievement Award in Basic Science and the

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Distinguished Mentor Award from the American Gastroenterological Association; and election to the Council of the National Academy of Medicine.

David Pietz (College of Social & Behavioral Sciences)

Professor of Chinese History and UNESCO Chair in Environmental History, Dr. David Pietz is the world's preeminent scholar of China's environmental transformations. His award-winning research has focused on the management of water in China, as he analyzes the causes and consequences of China's responses to environmental issues that have global reach. Pietz's work has centered on two issues: how China has managed water to advance its state- and nation-building efforts, and the domestic and international environmental consequences of these efforts. His research has been supported by the most prestigious foundations in the country: Carnegie, Guggenheim, Fulbright, and Mellon, NEH, NSF, and the Institute for Advanced Studies (Princeton). Pietz's scholarship is profoundly transdisciplinary. His research is informed by the histories of science, technology, engineering, and environmental change in China.

In spring 2020, Pietz became the University of Arizona's first Andrew Carnegie Fellow, selected because of his capacity to "address important and enduring issues confronting our society." Remarkably, Pietz received the Carnegie at the same time he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship – the two top awards for scholars in the arts, humanities, or social sciences.

The book that capped Pietz's now thirty-year research trajectory was *The Yellow River* (Harvard, 2015). The text, ranging over 2,000+ years, engages the social context of science and technology to explicate ecological disequilibria, answering the question, as one of his external writers puts it, of why and how China "become such an environmental disaster?" The book was transformational in the field of Chinese history. It received the 2016 Cecil B. Curry Book Award from the Association of Global South Studies.

Pietz has leveraged this reputation to serve university, national, and international communities. His continuing research is central to University's strategic priorities, which promote impactful research on global environmental challenges.

Donata Vercelli (College of Medicine)

In a highly acclaimed and brilliantly conceived experiment, the results of which were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and further publicized in many press stories, Professor Donata Vercelli and colleagues used a natural setting to demonstrate that the more the children and their mothers played with and were exposed to farm animals, the fewer asthmatic symptoms the children displayed in later life. Comparing the allergy history of children raised in the Amish tradition in Indiana, where children and their mothers were exposed to horses and domestic animals on a daily basis, with families of Hutterites in South Dakota, whose farming practices were more structured and for whom daily contact with animals was much less, the researchers demonstrated that even though both populations had similar genetic backgrounds and overall living

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styles, the asthma and other allergy symptoms of the former group were significantly lower than those of the latter.

These efforts provided a model system and were a major driver for a large 5-year, \$9-million NIH grant received a year ago that addresses the impact of environmental exposures on prevention of childhood asthma, examining the basis for the surprisingly lower asthma prevalence on the Mexican side of the U.S./Mexico border, both groups under study having similar genetic backgrounds. The broad theme of Dr. Vercelli's studies is the interaction of genetic and environmental factors in the development of allergic diseases. Her investigations, which integrate basic and molecular epidemiologic approaches, have had a profound impact on our understanding of the development of asthma and allergic diseases. Her distinguished body of work has elucidated fundamental mechanisms by which allergens and other exposures contribute to the traits and phenotypes of allergic disease. Her research has garnered much recognition in the forms of major prizes, grant funding (a total of \$40M) and national and international peer accolades. In 2010, she was elected to the Association of American Physicians; in 2018, she was elected Secretary General of the Collegium Internationale Allergologicom.

Communication of discovery and the conveying of excitement about one's subject to a broad range of audiences is a vital part of the mission and, in this obligation, Professor Vercelli excels. She has twice presented the hugely popular College of Science evening lectures, a series greatly appreciated by the Tucson community. She is also an excellent mentor and teacher and, over the years, has supervised forty postdoctoral fellows and graduate students. She is the recipient of many invitations from all over the world to speak at meetings, to give lecture series and simply to interact with other scholars and the general public. She joined the University of Arizona faculty in 1998 where, to our good fortune, she still remains as both Professor of Cellular and Molecular Medicine and Director of the Molecular Genomics, Asthma and Airway Disease Research Center.

Statutory/Policy Requirements

ABOR Policy 6-208 permits the rank of Regents Professor to be awarded only to full professors with exceptional achievements that have brought them national or international distinction. This highest of faculty ranks may be awarded to no more than three percent of the total of tenured and tenure-track faculty members.