American Chemical Society honors UMBC's Lee Blaney for commitment to mentoring student researchers

Last Thursday, UMBC's **Lee Blaney** was honored for his impact as a chemistry educator and mentor who closely involves students of all levels in collaborative research.

Blaney is an associate professor of chemical, biochemical, and environmental engineering. He received the 2020 George L. Braude Award from the Maryland section of the American Chemical Society. Blaney was nominated for the award by **Mark Marten**, chair of chemical, biochemical, and environmental engineering at UMBC. During the virtual meeting of the society, Blaney presented his research on the occurrence of contaminants of emerging concern in the Chesapeake Bay.

Past and future mentors

Blaney shared that he was honored and humbled to receive the Braude Award for his efforts to mentor undergraduate and graduate students in research. During his lecture, he emphasized the impact of his own mentors on his mentoring approach.

Arup SenGupta (Lehigh University), Desmond Lawler (University of Texas at Austin), and Lynn Katz (University of Texas at Austin) changed his life through their mentorship, Blaney said. He has incorporated their advice and his own experiences into his mentoring approach at UMBC.

"Seeing my students succeed is the most gratifying aspect of being a professor," he reflects.

Although the event could not be held in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of Blaney's students were able to attend the virtual lecture. He noted that the presence of his students made the

celebration even more special. Upon receiving the Braude Award, Blaney emphasized to his students, “This is our award.”

Lee Blaney, left, receiving his award from Louise Hellwig of Morgan State University. Photo courtesy of Hellwig.

Mamatha Hopanna Ph.D. ‘22, environmental engineering, conducts research in Blaney’s lab and attended the virtual lecture. “I am amazed by how much he cares to support each student’s learning style and needs, she said. “I have always felt his sincerity, commitment, and enthusiasm towards his students’ success”

She continued, “It is so encouraging to see Dr. Blaney celebrate each of his achievements as our achievements. I, personally, aspire to be a mentor to inspire and motivate other students in the same way as Dr. Blaney has inspired me.”

Combining research and student success

The Braude Award honors professors from institutions in Maryland who involve students and postdoctoral fellows in exceptional research in particularly notable ways. The award was created in memory of George Braude, who served as chair of the Maryland section of the ACS.

This latest award follows several other honors which have enabled Blaney to further his innovative research. In 2017, Blaney received an **NSF CAREER Award**, which focuses on how contaminants of emerging concern impact the environment. Later that year, he was recognized by the Maryland Science Center with the **2017 Outstanding Young Engineer Award**.

Blaney is the third UMBC faculty member to receive the Braude Award. In 2006, then-UMBC professor Catherine Fenselau, former chair of chemistry and biochemistry, received the award. **Michael Summers**, distinguished professor of chemistry and biochemistry and Robert E. Meyerhoff Chair for Excellence in Research and Mentoring, received the award in 2010. Summers is internationally known for his HIV research and his work with UMBC's Meyerhoff Scholars Program.

Update: James J. Morgan Award

In December 2020, Blaney also received the **2021 James J. Morgan *Environmental Science & Technology* Early Career Award** from the ACS. The award is one of the most prestigious honors in environmental engineering, recognizing early-career scholars who are leading the field.

An editorial announcing Blaney's award notes, "He is considered a leading researcher with a broad vision, innovative research ideas, and an outstanding commitment to developing a sustainable research program that is diverse and focused on grand challenges."

Banner image: Lee Blaney. Photo by Marlayna Demond '11 for UMBC.