



**EMBARGOED (6 November 2009)**

**Contact: Susan Musante, AIBS, 202-628-1500  
Susan Rust, BSCS, 719-219-4103**

**Biologists, Educators Recognize Excellence in Evolution Education**  
*Leonard C. Yannielli receives 2009 NABT Evolution Education Award*

Washington, DC –

The National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) will recognize Leonard C. Yannielli, professor of biological sciences at Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) in Waterbury, Connecticut, with the 2009 Evolution Education Award during the NABT annual professional development conference to be held 11-14 November 2009 in Denver, Colorado.

The Evolution Education Award is cosponsored by the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) and Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS). The award is presented in recognition of innovative classroom teaching and community education efforts to promote the accurate understanding of biological evolution. Professor Yannielli will receive a plaque, a \$1,000 cash prize, and a set of resources provided by AIBS and BSCS to support the teaching of evolution.

“AIBS, BSCS and NABT are doing important work with this award as it says loud and clear that evolution education is important,” said Yannielli. “I’m humbled to be recognized by peers and feel I’m sharing the honor with many educators who have toiled courageously under very difficult situations.”

For over 41 years, Yannielli has been teaching biology courses that have placed emphasis on evolution and evolutionary origins. His microbiology courses, for example, highlight the evolutionary interplay between microbes, humans, and disease, thereby encouraging students to shed egocentric approaches to thinking about evolution. “Evolution is the central organizing principle of the biological sciences. Teaching with it is like having a built-in GPS system for navigating life patterns and processes, from what happened to the dinosaurs to the immune response to a microbial invasion,” stated Yannielli.

“Students have had quite an impact on both my colleagues and me, having taught us that we need to be sensitive to those students holding religious views...listening to students is important for effective evolution education,” said Yannielli upon learning that he had been selected to receive the 2009 Evolution Education Award.

Yannielli began his career teaching evolution in a small-town public high school where he frequently encountered resistance from religious fundamentalists. After several years of working in the precollege arena, Yannielli moved on to NVCC. “I found community college teaching fertile ground for dovetailing

all [my] goals,” said Yannielli. In addition to teaching biology courses at NVCC, Yannielli has also developed innovative instructional materials and organized numerous discussions about evolution.

Yannielli has worked to educate colleagues across the academic disciplines about the importance of teaching evolution. He presented an active learning approach to evolution education at the University of Oxford and has initiated several panels on evolution education for faculty and students at NVCC. Dr. Bonnie Simon, a colleague at NVCC, said that Yannielli “epitomizes a creative, effective teacher who is dedicated to collaborating and promoting the accurate understanding of biological education.”

Yannielli earned his bachelor’s degree in zoology with a minor in chemistry from the University of Connecticut and has two master’s degrees (one in science education and one in ecology) from Southern Connecticut State University.

Previous honors and awards for Yannielli include the United Way Community Service Award and a NVCC Merit Award for an evolution teaching initiative. Yannielli was also awarded an Earthwatch grant in 2001 that allowed him to work with Chilean colleagues to do field research and prevent the potentially detrimental introduction of non-native salmon on Navarino Island in Chile.

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***About AIBS:***

The American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) scientific association dedicated to advancing biological research and education for the welfare of society. Founded in 1947 as a part of the National Academy of Sciences, AIBS became an independent, member-governed organization in the 1950s. Today, with headquarters in Washington, DC, and a staff of approximately 50, AIBS is sustained by a robust membership of some 5,000 biologists and 200 professional societies and scientific organizations; the combined individual membership of the latter exceeds 250,000. AIBS advances its mission through coalition activities in research, education, and public policy; publishing the peer-reviewed journal *BioScience* and the education website [ActionBioscience.org](http://ActionBioscience.org); providing scientific peer review and advisory services to government agencies and other clients; convening meetings; and managing scientific programs.

***About BSCS:***

Headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colorado, the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS) is a non-profit research and development organization that endeavors to improve all students' understanding of science and technology by developing exemplary curricular materials, supporting their widespread and effective use, providing professional development, and conducting research and evaluation studies. For more information, please visit [www.bsccs.org](http://www.bsccs.org).

***About NABT:***

Headquartered in Washington, DC, the National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT) is a non-profit professional association for biology educators. NABT empowers educators to provide the best possible biology and life science education for all students. To date, more than 9,000 educators have joined NABT to share experiences and expertise with colleagues from around the globe; keep up with trends and developments in the field; and grow professionally. For more information about NABT, including information about its publication, *American Biology Teacher*, conferences and workshops, or regional affiliates, please visit [www.nabt.org](http://www.nabt.org).

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