

Department of Physics & Astronomy

2014-2015 ANNUAL REPORT

DONOR IMPACT: DR. MANI L. BHAUMIK

Dr. Mani L. Bhaumik has always been passionate about “the logic of science and the beauty of math.”

A scientist, entrepreneur and philanthropist, Bhaumik recently established the Mani L. Bhaumik Presidential Endowed Chair in Theoretical Physics in the Department of Physics and Astronomy. His gift will support the recruitment of an exceptional faculty member to bolster the UCLA theoretical physics group.

Bhaumik grew up in a rural village in West Bengal, India, in the midst of the struggle for Indian independence. He credits his father, a schoolteacher and revolutionary, with inspiring him to succeed in his studies. His success earned him a scholarship at Calcutta University for graduate studies under the renowned Professor Satyendranath Bose of the Bose-Einstein fame. Bhaumik went on to become the first student to receive a Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur.

Bhaumik came to UCLA in 1959 as a postdoctoral scholar on a Sloan Foundation fellowship. His village raised the money for his airfare, and he recalled arriving in Los Angeles with “three dollars in my pocket.” In 1961, he joined the Quantum Electronics Division at Xerox Electro-Optical Systems as a laser scientist. Subsequently, he became Director of the Laser Technology Laboratory of the Northrop Grumman Corporation.

Throughout his career, Bhaumik has made significant scientific contributions to the development of high-power lasers, including presenting the first evidence that excimer lasers—used in Lasik eye surgery today—could have sufficiently high efficiency for practical applications.

The help he received from others early in his career inspires his philanthropy.

“I thought I should establish the endowed chair for two reasons: I would not be who I am today without the people who paved the way before me,” he said. “As a scientist, I understand the importance of supporting basic research, especially theoretical physics that is at the foundation of all sciences.”

In addition, as a member of the Division of Physical Sciences Board of Advisors and a long-time supporter of Professor Zvi Bern’s distinguished research group on quantum gravity, Bhaumik has witnessed the effects of significant cuts in government-funded grants on the ability of faculty to pursue “outside-the-box” research that could lead to pioneering discoveries.

Bhaumik hopes his gift will inspire others to support UCLA Physics and Astronomy. “I consider UCLA my home, and I also want people to learn more about science,” he said. “Every moment of the day, we are touched by science and technology. I believe that we physicists can do a better job of showing how technology spawned by physics has affected all of our lives. This is essential to eradicate the public apathy in supporting research in basic sciences.”

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