Private Support Can Move a Research Program from Great to Stellar

In a future that will demand increasing reliance on efficient, renewable energy sources, you may someday capture the sun’s energy through thin polymer solar cells painted on your roof or wall or laminated between window panes. Innovations like this are emerging from research teams led by Professor Alex Jen, Boeing-Johnson Chair of Materials Science & Engineering and Director of the UW Institute of Advanced Materials and Technology.

Jen and his graduate students are pioneers in using organic/polymer materials. Their discoveries will help transform energy generation, electronics, communications and medical diagnostics. While federal and industry research grants provide core funding for their work, resources that transform a research team from great to stellar come from private support in the form of professorships and fellowships.

Two members of Jen’s research team, Hinlap (Angus) Yip and Taedong Kim, each won competitive endowed fellowships that reward the best students for their outstanding work. “The chance to win such a fellowship was a driving force to work hard,” said Yip, now a key leader of the solar cell team. “It has allowed me to fully concentrate on my research and has opened the door for interdisciplinary collaborations.”

What does the future hold for renewable energy sources? It may be happening right now in Alex Jen’s lab—thanks to your support.

Create the Future of Engineering

A genuine benefit of being Dean of the College of Engineering is having a hand in students’ achievement of personal goals. It’s great fun to see them succeed. I hope you feel the same way. The generosity of our alumni, friends and corporate partners has made opportunities available for students. To be specific, in this campaign you have established 60 new endowed scholarships and 45 graduate fellowships. Lives touched by this support will be forever changed—lives like student Alexei Czeskis and Maggie Ramirez (see page 2).

We are closing in on the final months of Campaign UW: Creating Futures and its successful completion is on the horizon. That said, the needs of students don’t end. Endowments for student support established before June 30, 2008 are eligible for a unique 50% match—leveraging your personal investment. The Students First Initiative helps maximize need-based scholarships and fellowships across the UW. To date, the College of Engineering is proud to have thirty-three Students First endowments. Perhaps you’d like to create such an endowment or be part of a college consortium endowment for student support.

The impact of gifts made over the last eight years is already being felt—on my research and has opened the door for interdisciplinary collaborations.”

Almost any graduate student would have eagerly snapped him up, and indeed, he received a fellowship offer from a computer science program ranked in the top four nationwide.

Generous Fellowships Trump the Competition for a Top Student

Czeskis turned that down, in part because the fellowship confined him to one research team. “UW Computer Science & Engineering extended a far better, and more flexible offer,” Czeskis said. “I’ve been called an intellectual omnivore, and now in my first year at CSE I have the freedom to explore my many interests.”

He is one of the initial recipients of the new Students First fellowships—the Hacherl Endowed Graduate Fellowship established by alumnus Don Hacherl (’85). He also received a $10,000 Clairmont L. Egtvedt Fellowship, a College of Engineering recruitment award.

Czeskis is now immersed in computer security research under the mentorship of Assistant Professor Yoshi Kohno, who last fall was recognized by Technology Review as one of the nation’s top 35 innovators under age 35.

“Alexei shows a great combination of technical skills, drive, and desire to do research that will benefit humanity,” Kohno said.

“He wants to develop security solutions that will ensure individual privacy as information technology expands in sensitive areas. He is a perfect fit for our program.”

“Alexei Czeskis, doctoral student

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