Senior Faculty Research Excellence Award

Niles Lehman, Ph.D.

Niles Lehman, professor of Chemistry, has served Portland State University for 16 years. He leads the internationally renowned Lehman Lab, part of PSU’s Center for Life in Extreme Environments; there, he and his team investigate the biochemical and genetic processes that drove the origins of life on Earth some four billion years ago and still drive the evolution of organisms today.

Professor Lehman earned his Ph.D. in biology at the University of California, Los Angeles. His thorough training and extensive experience in both chemistry and biology have distinguished his work from that of virtually every other researcher in the field. He is perhaps the first classically trained evolutionary biologist to work with systems of catalytic RNA evolution, a distinction which, combined with the high caliber of his work, puts him at the cutting edge of a large and growing field. His research has garnered significant support from distinguished sources such as NASA, the National Science Foundation, and the Templeton Foundation.

Prodigious in his research output, Professor Lehman has authored 67 peer-reviewed research articles and 26 other reviews, book chapters, commentaries, and editorials. His ground-breaking work has been published in such esteemed scientific journals as Nature and the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences. He has served on the editorial boards of the journals Astrobiology and Trends in Evolutionary Biology and is now editor-in-chief of the Journal of Molecular Evolution as well as editor-in-chief of the Chemistry Section of Life.

In addition to distinguishing PSU through his research, Professor Lehman is an outstanding member of PSU’s teaching faculty. He has twice won the John Elliot Allen Teaching Award for his classroom instruction in general chemistry, prebiotic chemistry, advanced biochemistry, and his general course on the Origins of Life on Earth. He is also highly regarded by the undergraduate and graduate students in his lab for his mentorship and training.

The Senior Faculty Research Excellence Award is given annually to a full professor whose important, original, and prolific research work consistently meets the highest academic standards. Recipients of this award exemplify PSU’s commitment to excellence and to “let knowledge serve.”