

Mark W. Zemansky

**Recipient of the 1956 Oersted Medal for
Notable Contributions to the
Teaching of Physics**

The American Association of Physics Teachers has conferred upon Mark W. Zemansky, Professor of Physics at The City College, New York, the twenty-first of its annual awards for notable contributions to the teaching of physics. The address of recommendation printed below was made by R. Ronald Palmer, Chairman of the Committee on Awards, and the presentation of the medal and certificate was made by Walter C. Michels, President of the Association, at a ceremony in the Staller Hotel Ballroom, New York, New York, on January 31, 1957, during the twenty-sixth annual meeting.



Presentation of Mark W. Zemansky as 1956 Oersted Medalist

R. RONALD PALMER

Chairman of the AAPT Awards Committee

(Received January 3, 1957)

Remarks made by the Chairman of the Committee on Awards for 1956 in presenting the medalist for the Oersted Medal, awarded to Mark W. Zemansky, Professor of Physics at The City College, New York, in recognition of notable contributions to the teaching of physics.

THE Oersted Medal of the American Association of Physics Teachers is awarded annually for "notable contributions to the teaching of physics." The 1956 medal will be presented at this time to Mark W. Zemansky, Professor of Physics at City College, New York City. This, the twenty-first annual award, maintains a tradition which has gained strength and significance as the roster of names of distinguished medalists has grown.

Mark Waldo Zemansky was born in New York City, of native New York parents, in the year 1900. Dr. Zemansky is a product of New York schools: P. S. 128, New Utrecht High School in Brooklyn, and City College in Manhattan. Immediately following his graduation in 1921, he accepted an instructorship at City College, and, with the exception of an occasional leave, he has been connected with that institution ever since. He has risen steadily through the ranks, and is

now chairman of the department of Physics at City College. He completed work for his Ph. D. in 1927, under Professor H. W. Webb at Columbia University, while at the same time carrying a full teaching load at City College.

Dr. Zemansky spent two post-doctoral years as a National Research Fellow at Princeton University where he worked under Dr. K. T. Compton, and a third year at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin, under Professor R. Ladenburg. Both his doctoral and post-doctoral research activities were concerned with resonance radiation and collision problems involving excited atoms. This interest led to the publication of *Resonance Radiation and Excited Atoms* in 1934, with Allen Mitchell as co-author. His more recent research has been in the field of low temperature physics, using the facilities of the cryogenic laboratory at Columbia University, in collaboration with Professor H. A. Boorse.

Today we honor Professor Zemansky for his contributions to the teaching of physics. This has been a threefold contribution: first, through his publications; secondly, through the many students he has reached; and finally, through his activities for physics at large.

All teachers of physics are familiar with the excellence of the first-year texts, *College Physics* and *University Physics*, prepared in collaboration with Professor F. W. Sears. Whether these books are adopted as texts or not, they are widely referred to as models of clarity. Zemansky's *Heat and Thermodynamics* has also become a widely accepted text at the advanced undergraduate level. He is the editor of the section on "Heat" in the forthcoming AIP Handbook.

The large number of students who have been directly reached by Professor Zemansky, among them thirty-one Honor Students, attests to his superiority as a teacher. As reported by one of them: "Everyone knows that Mark is a very careful and conscientious lecturer. His proofs are usually elegantly simple. His blackboard work is beautifully done. As you know, he is inordinately and unbelievably neat. Occasionally he got mad at students in class, and his temper was something to behold. He inspired many students with the importance of original research."

Another student recalls an incident which reflects another side of Professor Zemansky's personality. "I was fortunate to be appointed a teaching fellow, and during the summer session was assigned to present the demonstration lecture in General Physics. This latter distinction is normally reserved to the senior staff, and only

during the summer series could a lowly teaching fellow have a chance to give one of the lectures. Professor Zemansky came into my office one morning and asked if I would *permit* him to watch my forthcoming performance. I gladly extended an invitation, and after the lecture was most pleased to be congratulated on a fine performance. From someone who is a past master at such lectures, the praise was most heartening."

Professor Zemansky has served the American Association of Physics Teachers in many capacities: as one of the associate editors of the *American Journal of Physics* for six years; as chairman of the Visual Aids Committee for several years, during which time the committee prepared twelve films for the teaching of physics; as AAPT representative on the Governing Board of the American Institute of Physics; as Vice-President of AAPT in 1950, and as President the following year. He has been an active participant in a number of national and international committees. These include: the Technical Advisory Committee of the National Bureau of Standards; committees on Symbols, Units, and Nomenclature in Physics; and the Post-Doctoral Fellowship Committee of the National Research Council. This past year he was selected to succeed Dean Pegram as treasurer of the American Institute of Physics.

Mr. President, it is with a great deal of personal pleasure that, in behalf of the AAPT Committee on Awards, I am able to present Mark W. Zemansky as our 1956 Oersted Medalist.

Microfilm Edition of the *American Journal of Physics*

The attention of subscribers is called particularly to an action of the Council of AAPT, on January 31, 1957, authorizing the American Institute of Physics, on behalf of AAPT, to enter into a contract with University Microfilms Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, for the preparation of microfilm editions of the *American Journal of Physics*. Distribution of these microfilm editions is to be limited to regular subscribers to the *Journal*. Inquiries as to prices and availability of particular volumes should be addressed directly to University Microfilms Inc., 313 North First Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan.