

## Two new University Professors named

### Geoscientist, biologist honoured

By [Ailsa Ferguson](#), posted *Thursday, June 3, 2010*

Two of U of T's top researchers -- a geologist and a biologist -- have been awarded the title University Professor, the highest academic honour the university accords its faculty.

The appointment of Professors **Barbara Sherwood Lollar** of geology in the Faculty of Arts and Science and **Marla Sokolowski** of biology at U of T Mississauga were approved by Academic Board at its June 2 meeting.

University Professors are chosen by a committee of distinguished scholars, chaired by the vice-president and provost. Selection is based on their unusual scholarly achievement and pre-eminence in their particular fields of knowledge. They receive a \$10,000 research stipend for five years and retain the title until retirement when it becomes University Professor Emeritus.

Sherwood Lollar, an environmental geoscientist and Canada Research Chair in Isotopes of the Earth and Environment, said she was surprised by the news. "The best way to put it would be to say I am still stunned by the news," she said. "It is a tremendous honour and opportunity. I am deeply grateful to the University of Toronto and to the University Professors, all of whom are leaders in the powerful integration of their research and teaching efforts with public communication and impact on the community."

Contamination of groundwater resources with petroleum hydrocarbons and chlorinated solvents represents one of the most urgent challenges facing water quality today. Sherwood Lollar's research group was one of the first to use compound-specific stable isotopes to investigate controls on the origin, transport and fate of these low-level dissolved pollutants in the subsurface. In parallel with the development of her research program in contaminant hydrogeology, she built on her long-standing research inquiries into deep gasses and fluids in the Earth, and her accomplishments in this sphere are equally innovative and recognized.

Director of the Stable Isotope Laboratory, Sherwood Lollar said she intends to use the stipend to continue to support the efforts of the laboratory in its research and teaching in the area of investigation of the Earth and the environment.

For Sokolowski, a Canada Research Chair in Genetics, the designation is equally thrilling. "I'm very excited about it, it's an honour to be given it and to be in the same category with the people who have it," she said. "You work very hard for many years on your research and teaching and it's fantastic for it to be recognized at this level of accomplishment, at your own institution."

Sokolowski's research has pioneered studies of the genetic and molecular underpinnings of normal variation in behaviour, using the fruit fly *Drosophila* as a model. Her major focus has been the regulation of food-related behaviours and her team has uncovered genes and molecules that influence food intake and food-related locomotion in a variety of organisms. She is best known for her discovery of the foraging gene, a cGMP dependent protein kinase that encodes rover and sitter foraging behaviour in *Drosophila*. As well she is a trailblazer in the development of a new branch of the field of behaviour genetics that addresses the genetic and molecular bases of natural individual differences in behaviour.

Sokolowski sees the stipend as "an opportunity to maybe do something a little bit different and reach out to an area you've been holding back on or that isn't traditional for granting agencies to support or maybe you don't have the preliminary data you need for a grant," she said. "So it's really nice to have it." She said she had three possibilities in mind but "I'm just not sure which yet."

"It is a great pleasure to welcome Barbara Sherwood Lollar and Marla Sokolowski into the ranks of the University Professoriate," said Professor **Cheryl Misak**, vice-president and provost. "The depth and breadth of talent we have at the University of Toronto never fails to impress the committee charged with deciding who, from an enormously strong list of nominees, will be awarded this distinction."