

Peru State Selects Dr. Clopton For Teacher Excellence Award

(Peru, Neb.) Peru State College Biology Professor Dr. Richard Clopton has been named the institution's 2015 Teacher Excellence Award Winner. Clopton will be honored during the college's graduation ceremony at 10 a.m. Saturday, May 9 in the Al Wheeler Activity Center.

This is the second Teacher Excellence Award bestowed upon Clopton, who also received the honor in 2004.

President Dan Hanson said, "Dr. Clopton is an accomplished researcher and scientist, but also a wonderful teacher. His teaching methods are a perfect example of how the faculty at Peru State works to engage students in active learning. Whether it's collecting insects and parasites in southeast Nebraska, North Carolina, or the Florida Keys, or conducting experimental work in the laboratory, he continually looks for ways to involve students in unique research opportunities that will give them the skills they need to become scientists. That effort often leads to students presenting at conferences and having work published in international scientific journals, which is highly unusual and advantageous for undergraduate students."

Clopton said, "I am pleased to receive this award, which endorses a 20-year effort to make a difference in the lives of our students, to find and train the next generation of scientists from the young men and women of Nebraska. Our research program incorporates undergraduate students as research colleagues who learn science by doing science. They conduct original scientific research, present their findings at regional and national meetings, and publish their results in peer-reviewed scientific journals.

"Science is a discipline learned by working with other scientists and I try to maintain a vigorous, enthusiastic and productive laboratory. I am always looking for students who are interested and motivated to become scientists. I feel I share this award with the rest of my department because one faculty member can't do it alone. Active scientific engagement and student mentoring is the core philosophy of the Natural Science faculty at Peru State and it makes our students among the most successful in the region."

Clopton, who joined the Peru State faculty in 1995, is the Downey Family Honors Chair in Science. He teaches courses in evolution, systematics, and organismal biology and currently serves as chair of the college's Rank Promotion and Tenure Committee. He previously served as chair of both the Institutional Review Board and Higher Learning Commission Self-Study Subcommittee and was head of the Division of Science and Technology. Prior to joining the Peru State faculty, Clopton was a postdoctoral research associate at Texas A&M University and visiting assistant professor of biology at the University of Nebraska.

Clopton's current research is focused on the distribution and biodiversity of North American cockroaches and their gregarine parasites. His research interests include the evolution, biodiversity, and natural history of insects and their parasites, though he is particularly interested in understanding how new parasitic species evolve. Clopton's research has been supported through consistent competitive grant support from the National Science Foundation. Since 1997 he has been awarded eight grants totaling \$1 million.

Clopton and his students recently finished projects on the gregarine parasites of insects in the Nebraska Sandhills, the Texas "Big Thicket," and Belize, Central America. He also recently completed a long-term molecular phylogeny project resolving major trends in gregarine parasite evolution, establishing the first evolutionary systematic arrangement of the group. Over the last two

decades, Dr. Clopton and his students have discovered and named 62 new species of gregarine parasites.

While at Peru State, Clopton served for five years as editor-in-chief of *Comparative Parasitology*, an international scientific journal published by the Helminthological Society of Washington. He is a member of the American Society of Parasitologists, where he has served on numerous committees as well as the executive council; the Southwestern Association of Parasitologists, where he served as president and a representative to the national council; and the Helminthological Society of Washington, where he is also a member of the executive council.

Clopton has published 61 peer-reviewed scientific papers. He serves as a grant reviewer for the National Science Foundation and is a regular peer-reviewer/referee for scientific journals in the United States, Canada and Europe. He has served as an academic and scientific consultant/collaborator for programs in California, Connecticut, Illinois, Nebraska, Oklahoma, and Texas, as well as Canada, Argentina, Belize, Bulgaria, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, the United Kingdom, Egypt, Iran, New Zealand, the Philippines and South Korea.

Clopton holds a Ph.D. in parasitology, a master's degree in entomology, and a bachelor's degree in agriculture and entomology from the University of Nebraska. He also studied molecular genetics at Colorado State University.

The Teacher Excellence Award is given annually to one outstanding full-time faculty member at each of the three state colleges: Peru, Wayne and Chadron. To be considered, a faculty member must have a minimum of four years consecutive employment at the college, have taught a minimum of 15 credit hours during the previous academic year, and have an active and positive record of service to students as an academic, professional or personal advisor. Candidates must also have demonstrated involvement in faculty development programs, a superior level of teaching effectiveness and a record of public service.

Recipients of the campus award from each of the colleges are finalists for the Nebraska State College System's George Rebensdorf Teaching Excellence Award.

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