



Appointment
Of
Regents Professorship
Dr. Robert C. Thomas

In recognition of his outstanding service to The University of Montana Western and the Montana University System, the Board of Regents for the State of Montana appoints Dr. Robert C. Thomas as a Regents Professor. During his 17 years of service to the Montana University System, Dr. Thomas has been an exemplary teacher, providing and advocating for experiential education. He helped transform The University of Montana Western into the first public university in the history of the United States to adopt an experiential, immersion-learning system known as Experience One. As a result of his use of this system to enhance experiential education for his students, he was awarded the nation's highest teaching honor.

The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) acknowledged Dr. Thomas's role in the development and use of Experience One in 2009 by awarding him the prestigious Baccalaureate Colleges U.S. Professor of the Year Award. He is the first Montana professor to receive this highest national award for "extraordinary dedication to undergraduate teaching." In addition to the Carnegie/CASE award, Dr. Thomas has recently been recognized by several other professional societies and universities, including the University of Montana Geosciences Alumnus Recognition Award (2010), election to Fellowship in the Geological Society of America, a recognition bestowed upon the "best of the profession" (2008), the Humboldt State University Distinguished Alumni Award (2008), and the Geological Society of America's Distinguished Service Medal (2007). He was featured in the Journal "The Montana Professor" in 2007 in their "Outstanding Montana Professor" series and has been asked to give the commencement address at the University of Washington in June of 2010.

Dr. Thomas is a first-generation college graduate and was encouraged to pursue a career as a teacher by a passionate instructor at a community college. He earned a baccalaureate degree in geology from Humboldt State University, a Master's from The University of Montana-Missoula, and a Ph.D. from the University of Washington. After teaching at Vassar College, Dr. Thomas joined the faculty at Montana Western in 1993, in part, due to the extraordinary professional educational opportunities presented by serving on a campus in transition.

Dr. Thomas is a passionate, dedicated teacher who inspires his students to achieve great accomplishments. He considers his students to be developing professionals and collaborators that learn best when engaged in classes that emphasize genuine hands-on, service-learning activities. As a result, his students' graduate with extraordinary experience and portfolios that are filled with numerous professional reports, presentations and publications. His work with his students on the upper Big Hole River, for example, has received state and national press coverage and has directly resulted in employment and graduate school opportunities for his students.

Dr. Thomas is a visionary who is able to facilitate sweeping change by convincing others of the merit of his ideas, while making sure that they have ownership in the effort and receive recognition for their success. A gifted communicator, he has not only been able to improve education at Montana Western, but has been an advocate for experiential learning through his professional societies and throughout higher education in the U.S. His work has been featured in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, on Montana Public Radio and numerous other media outlets.

Dr. Thomas is an active scholar with over 50 peer-reviewed publications and nearly a half-million dollars in extramural funding to his credit. However, his passion is public outreach, so he has also co-authored 25 geological interpretive signs placed along the Lewis and Clark Trail in Montana, and has constructed numerous assessment reports with his students for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on their fluvial Arctic grayling recovery program on the upper Big Hole River. He is working with colleagues on three layperson geology books, including an extensive update of the popular book, *Roadside Geology of the Yellowstone Country*, which has been accepted for publication in the spring of 2011.

Dr. Thomas has also performed an exceptionally large amount of professional service, including over 10 years of GeoVenture field trips for the Geological Society of America, for which he was awarded the Society's Distinguished Service Medal. He was the first geologist in Montana to receive a major award of any kind from this organization, which is the largest professional society of geologists in the world. In addition, Dr. Thomas has organized numerous geological symposia, professional field trips and he serves on the boards of several professional societies.

On campus he served for three years as the first Faculty Senate Chairperson. It was during his tenure as chair that many of the curricular and other academic details of Experience One scheduling were resolved, with Dr. Thomas playing a central and facilitating role. He has also served on a number of key campus committees and task forces, typically playing a central and productive role wherever he has served. He helped to form the Department of Environmental Sciences in his second year on campus, started the first science colloquium ("On the Rocks"), started Terra Verde, which is the student organization of the Environmental Sciences Department, and

helped to bring campus radio to Montana Western, for which he has contributed an educational radio show entitled *Drive Time with the Rock Doctor* for nearly a decade.

In the Dillon and surrounding communities, he has served as a mentor for elementary, middle and high school students, and accepted numerous civic speaking engagements. Dr. Thomas relates very well to all age groups, from young children to Elderhostel groups, and is able to communicate to them his passion for understanding how the Earth works and the importance of understanding that we all need to be better stewards of the planet.

The rank of Regents Professorship is the highest honor in the Montana University System. It is our distinct honor and pleasure to bestow this award on Dr. Robert C. Thomas of The University of Montana Western.

Approved this ____ day of April, 2010

Richard D. Storey, Chancellor
University of Montana Western

George M. Dennison, President
The University of Montana

Sheila M. Stearns
Commissioner of Higher Education

Clayton Christian, Chairman
Montana Board of Regents of Higher Education