

FEBRUARY 2010

## Learn about physics with U Professor Kakalios and his comic book super heroes

Some of you probably took a course in physics. More of you probably deliberately avoided taking a course in physics. Most of you, especially you boys (I use the word advisedly), probably read comic books. And almost all of you have seen a Batman, Superman, or Spiderman movie. Probably none of you ever thought there was a tie between comic book super heroes and physics, not unless you know of the work of our February speaker, Dr. James Kakalios.



Dr. Kakalios is a noted physicist doing important fundamental research that ranges from investigating the properties of very thin films of amorphous silicon (which could contribute to better and cheaper solar cells) to analyzing the voltage fluctuation in rat's brains (which may lead to a better understanding of Parkinson's Disease). But he also developed a freshman seminar entitled "Everything I Know about Physics I Learned from Comic Books," and he published a popular book, *The Physics of Super Heroes*.

His talk will be on the physics of the amazing exploits of comic book heroes: "Can

Superman really leap over tall buildings in a single bound, and what does this tell us about krypton? How much oxygen does the Flash consume in his high-speed travel? James Kakalios suggests that the sociology of comic book adventures is more unrealistic than the physical exploits of their heroes.

His talk is entertaining, educational, and delightful. You will leave the February meeting knowing more about comic books and more about physics than you ever thought possible and having a great deal of fun while all this learning is going on.

— Robert Holt, President

### "Connect with the Internet" workshop follows Feb. program

Join us at 1:30 p.m. after the February 23 program for an UMRA first — a workshop, free for members, that offers practical advice on navigating both our computers and the resources of the Internet.

Although it is not necessary, if you have a laptop computer with wireless capability, you may bring it to the workshop that day. Volunteers will be available to assist you in getting connected to the University wireless network before the workshop begins.

To assist us in shaping the content for the day, please register your intent to attend and provide information about your needs by filling out the questionnaire that was sent to you via the UMRA e-mail listserv or online at the address provided in the e-mail.

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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

FEBRUARY  
LUNCHEON MEETING

Tuesday

February 23, 2010

11:30 a.m. — 1:30 p.m.

#### Featured Speaker

James Kakalios, University of Minnesota professor of physics, "The Physics of Super Heroes"

#### Location

Conference Room ABC  
Campus Club, Fourth Floor  
Coffman Memorial Union,  
East Bank Campus, U of M

#### Cost

Prepayment: \$12 per person;  
\$14 at door, for reservations that  
are not prepaid.

#### Reservation Deadline

Thursday, February 18

To reserve your place(s) and take advantage of prepaid price, send a check, payable to UMRA, to UMRA Reservations, c/o Frank Miller, 979 18th Ave. SE, Mpls, MN 55414. Contact him at mille005@umn.edu or 612-331-2145. Reservations requested after Feb. 18 may be on a waiting list. Please let us know about cancellations by noon, Feb. 18.

#### Parking

Parking is available in the East River Road Garage at UMRA's membership discount, \$5.00 for the entire day.

**Board Meeting at 10 a.m.**

## A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our University is making monumental changes in the organization and delivery of graduate education. When major changes are made in institutions, “old folks” like to look at the history of the institution, some of which they have participated in.

In the beginning: In 1888 the University awarded its first Ph.D. to Charles Burke Elliot. He was born in the proverbial log cabin, took a law degree in 1881 at the University of Iowa, and moved to Minneapolis with his new wife in 1884. He soon became a father and decided to pursue a Ph.D. because, as he states in his diary, he “had no times for unproductive labor.”

In 1885 a research Ph.D. was a hot topic among major universities and President Cyrus Northrop, after talking with Mr. Elliot, decided it was time for the University to give it a try. Elliot was interested primarily in American history and diplomacy. He worked with three professors: Judson, who later became the president of the University of Chicago, McLean, later to become president of the University of Iowa, and Folwell, the first president at Minnesota.

Elliot began by writing a dissertation on a controversy with England over Newfoundland fisheries, which had been simmering for years. He spent six months going through reams of documents. He submitted his work in 1887 and the University immediately published it as a book entitled *The United States and the Northeastern Fisheries*. Shortly after it came out, a major crisis developed. Warships from both countries sailed to the Grand Banks, and Elliot’s book became a hit. The chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee ordered copies to be sent to every senator; it was widely quoted in debates and in leading newspapers. Henry Cabot Lodge, James Russell Lowell, and George Bancroft engaged the young scholar in correspondence. John Jay, the U.S. Ambassador to England sought his advice. Cool heads prevailed; a negotiated settlement emerged.

Still, Elliot did not yet have his Ph.D. He continued his studies while the history professors tried to decide how

he would be examined. Then President Northrop stated that it was not the responsibility of history professors to decide; it was clearly a University responsibility. He added three professors to the examining committee from Geology, Latin, French — all with Ph.D.’s. Thus the precedent was set that it should be the faculty from throughout the University who would set the requirements for the Ph.D. and decide the procedures that must be followed.

Northrop saw to it that graduate studies remained directly in the hands of the faculty. In 1906 this was formalized by the establishment of the Graduate School. A history of the University published in 1910 clearly describes the intent: “The graduate school was established... to include in a single organization under one faculty the graduate work of all colleges and schools in the University leading to higher non-professional advanced degrees. The administration of the college is entrusted to the dean and its faculty consists of those professors in the university who offer courses leading to the degrees it offers.”

This vision of graduate education and its organization was adopted by the first Graduate School dean, Henry T. Eddy and in 1913 by Guy Stanton Ford who served into the 1940s. As one history puts it, he led the University into its maturity. The Graduate School that most of us in UMRA knew was the product of Ford’s work. When, in 1957, a respectable assessment of graduate programs nationally was published, Minnesota looked pretty good with more highly ranked programs than Stanford.

Minnesota is now moving dramatically away from the vision of Northrop and Ford. As an observer of both the local and the national scene, I am interested to see that over the past decade some of our greatest research universities have actually moved closer to the Northrop–Ford vision. At both Berkeley and Stanford there is a faculty committee reporting to a faculty senate that sets all the policies and procedures relating to graduate education. The administrative apparatus of graduate education is the “operating arm” of this committee.

— Robert Holt, UMRA President

### Join the Campus Club: Where the University Community Meets

Reminder from the Campus Club — UMRA members can be members of the Campus Club for the new low rate of \$96 annual dues. You can pay dues annually or quarterly. Call 612-625-1442.

— Phil Platt, Marketing and Membership Director

## Professional Development Grants for Retirees enters second cycle

Arrangements are in place for the second cycle of Professional Development Grants for Retirees. As was the case with the very successful first cycle of awards, funding is provided by President Bruininks and his vice presidential colleagues. The deadline for submission of this year's grant proposals was December 15. The Review Committee has been appointed and will meet on February 26 to make funding recommendations.

Vice President Tom Sullivan will announce the awards in mid-March. Information concerning the process for the Call for Proposals and the first cycle of awards is available on the UMRA website at [www.umn.edu/umra](http://www.umn.edu/umra).

The Professional Development Grants program will be supported for one more year by soft money provided by central administration. An UMRA committee is hard at work developing plans for obtaining permanent funding of the program. Colleagues with ideas or suggestions should contact the committee's chairperson, John Howe, at [howex002@umn.edu](mailto:howex002@umn.edu).

## Assist Red Cross blood donor centers

The Red Cross has the unenviable task of responding to emergencies worldwide. The current earthquake disaster in Haiti has the spotlight now, but, day-to-day, Red Cross services are also needed in our own community. Blood donation is an ongoing need.

The University Retirees Volunteer Center (URVC) helps supply volunteer support needed in facilitating these contributions. When you go to a bloodmobile or blood donor center, the first person you meet is the greeter who registers you for the donation. Again, upon completion of your donation, the last person you see is the canteen worker who provides you with refreshments and snacks while you rest after making your donation.

URVC has a long history of providing volunteers for these positions. The demand for these workers is great, and we want to increase our activity in this category. When the Red Cross cannot fill the positions with volunteers, they hire temp workers, an unnecessary cost for a nonprofit.

Please consider this opportunity to provide an important service to your community and the world. You may volunteer for single shifts of 3–5 hours and determine the number of shifts you will work per month. We make the travel distance convenient by offering locations reasonably close to your home. Call the URVC office (612-625-8016) or e-mail [urvc@umn.edu](mailto:urvc@umn.edu).

## Update on U retirees' health plans

The new enrollment figures are now in for the 2010 Retiree Health Plan. According to Employee Benefits, some 2,238 of us (1,595 retirees and 643 spouse/partners) signed up for medical and healthcare coverage during last fall's open enrollment, down slightly (0.4 percent) from last year.

By plan, Blue Cross/Blue Shield's U of M Retiree Plan continues to be the most popular option at 40.8 percent, with 914 enrollees (665 retirees, 249 spouse/partners), down 1.6 percent; followed by Health Partners 65+ at 32 percent with 717 (494 retirees, 223 spouse/partners), up 0.4 percent; Medica's Group Prime Solution at 14.6 percent with 327 (230 retirees, 97 spouse/partners), up 0.9 percent; and U Care for Seniors at 11.6 percent, up 0.4 percent, with (189 retirees, 70 spouse/partners).

An interesting trend to note: Although Blue Cross/Blue Shield's plan option, with its higher premium cost, is still in the lead position among University retirees and their spouse/partners, its market share has been eroding in recent years. It may be that new retirees, who had opted for Medica and Health Partners coverage when they were active employees, are choosing to stay with those less costly plans.

— Ted Litman, UMRA Representative  
to the U Benefits Advisory Committee

## Welcome new members

Please give a hearty welcome to new members who recently joined UMRA. Greet them at the next lunch program and add this information to your 2009–10 directories.

Gail M. Fraser, IT Student Affairs  
2201 Minneapolis Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55406  
612-339-5731

Patricia S. Tomlinson, Nursing  
1570 Vincent St., St. Paul, MN 55108  
651-645-4127

Jack Zipes, German, Scandinavian, & Dutch  
3245 Irving Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55408  
612-825-9060

## In Remembrance

We report the passing of UMRA members as we learn of losses to our UMRA community. Our condolences to the family and friends of:

James Gremmels, Morris-Humanities, d. September 25, 2009. His wife, Ruth, is a member of UMRA.

Ardis Nier, d. December 16, 2009. Ardis was the widow of Alfred O. C. Nier, Physics and Astronomy.

Beatrice Smith, d. December 26, 2009. Beatrice was the wife of Lloyd Smith of Fisheries and Wildlife.

University of Minnesota  
McNamara Alumni Center  
Room 264, Suite 250  
200 Oak Street S.E.  
Minneapolis, MN 55455-2002

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**Attend the celebrated Swedish Radio Choir Concert  
February 26; use your UMRA discount**

Northrop Music presents the Swedish Radio Choir, Friday,  
February 26, 8 p.m. at Ted Mann Concert Hall. Ragnar  
Bohlin, Special Guest Conductor.

“...beautiful melodies and floating, enchanting harmonies,  
with the gentle voices balanced against the robust tension of  
the strings.” – *New York Times*

A capella music, ranging from baroque, gospel, folk, and  
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from the home country and celebrated maestros of the past.

**Call 612-624-2345 to order your tickets. Use the promo  
code “UMRA” to receive your 20 percent discount. With  
your discount, ticket prices are \$45 and \$37.**

For additional information about this performance see  
<http://www.northrop.umn.edu/event/swedish-radio-choir> .

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Keep current on UMRA news, programs, and discounts  
with a visit to the association’s  
new and improved web site: [www.umn.edu/umra](http://www.umn.edu/umra)

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**Internet Workshop — continued from page 1**

Webmaster Ron Anderson will lead the workshop, be-  
ginning by demonstrating the new UMRA web site and  
reviewing the links to resources of interest to retirees before  
turning to some of the more technical aspects of navigating  
our computers and the Internet.

Some of the technical issues we will address are:

- accessing the Internet, connecting at home and while traveling
- browsers and browser setup
- tools, such as enlarging text, the link bar, setting and organizing “favorites”
- security and privacy: defending our computing with antivirus and anti-spyware programs
- spam and cookies
- backups and trouble shooting
- time for your questions and answers

Participants will get a list of web site links and Internet tips to take home. If you have questions about the workshop or your participation, e-mail Ron Anderson ([rea@umn.edu](mailto:rea@umn.edu)).