



Professor Named to American Academy of Arts and Sciences

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May 2, 2007, Richard G. Niemi, Don Alonzo Watson Professor of Political Science at the University of Rochester, has been elected a fellow of the prestigious American Academy of Arts and Sciences for his well-respected work in voting behavior and civic education. The academy will welcome this year's new class of 203 Fellows and 24 Foreign Honorary Members on Oct. 6, at the academy headquarters in Cambridge, Mass.

Niemi, who is also associate chair of the Department of Political Science at the University and the director of undergraduate studies, is in good company. Among the scholars, scientists, artists, civic, corporate and philanthropic leaders elected by the academy this year are former Vice President Al Gore, former Supreme Court Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, New York City Mayor and businessman Michael Bloomberg, Israeli biochemist and Nobel laureate Avram Hershko, and economists Gregory Mankiw and Murray Weidenbaum.

"Dick is one of our most distinguished scholars, and he richly deserves this national recognition," said Peter Lennie, the Robert L. and Mary L. Sproull Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Sciences, and Engineering. "His work on public opinion, polling, and the nature of ballots and voting machines has greatly increased our understanding of how voters make decisions."

Niemi has taught at Rochester for 40 years and is an authority on voting behavior. He will release a book later this year that examines the use of electronic voting machines. He worked in partnership with faculty from three other universities on a study and the subsequent book. Niemi and the others focused on usability—the extent to which voting systems are designed to be easily and accurately used by voters. Their work involved analysis by human-computer interaction experts, voting in mock elections, and laboratory experiments. They found that the systems now in use are judged favorably by the electorate, but that better design and more testing could improve a variety of weaknesses present in the machines.

Niemi graduated from Lawrence College (now Lawrence University) in Appleton, Wisc., with a bachelor's degree in government, and then received his doctoral degree from the University of Michigan in 1967. He joined the Rochester faculty the same year. Niemi has been the recipient of many grants and fellowships and has co-authored books on voting patterns, legislative districting, public opinion, and statistics on American politics.

Academy President Emilio Bizzi says fellows such as Niemi are "selected through a highly competitive process that recognizes individuals who have made preeminent contributions to their disciplines and to society at large."

The academy, which has about 4,000 members, was founded in 1780 by John Adams, James Bowdoin, John Hancock and other scholar-patriots. It elects the finest minds and most influential leaders from each generation, and counts George Washington, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Albert Einstein among its ranks. The current membership includes more than 170 Nobel laureates and 50 Pulitzer Prize winners.

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