

2026 Oersted Medal Shared by Ruth Chabay and Bruce Sherwood

Ruth Chabay and Bruce Sherwood Share the 2026 Hans Christian Oersted Medal



The American Association of Physics Teachers (AAPT) has announced that Ruth Chabay and Bruce Sherwood will share the prestigious Hans Christian Oersted Medal. The Medal will be awarded at a Ceremonial Session of the AAPT Winter Meeting where they will also deliver a plenary lecture.

The Oersted Medal citation recognizes "their revolutionary and lasting impact on the teaching of physics through the creation of Matter & Interactions, their work transforming introductory physics to integrate computation and emphasize fundamental principles, their influence on curriculum reform internationally, and their pioneering work which set a new standard for innovation in physics education and inspired generations of educators and students."

Chabay earned a Ph.D in physical chemistry from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is Professor Emerita in the Department of Physics at North Carolina State University and has also taught at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Carnegie

Mellon University, High Point University, and the University of North Texas. She is a Fellow of both the American Physical Society and AAPT.

Sherwood's Ph.D is in experimental particle physics from the University of Chicago. He is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Physics at North Carolina State University. He has also taught at Caltech, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Carnegie Mellon University. He is a Fellow of the American Physical Society, AAPT, and AAAS.

From the early 1970s to 2025, their work on the PLATO system at UIUC, physics courseware (numerous Physics Academic Software titles), the programming language cT, the VPython library and Web VPython, the textbook Matter & Interactions, and numerous influential papers in the American Journal of Physics has been foundational to integrating computation and reimagining the content in the introductory, calculus-based physics course. VPython allows students to easily create three dimensional models of physical systems and lets teachers employ computing for instruction in incredibly exciting ways. The influence of Matter & Interactions on physics education cannot be overstated. Their work is widespread and the curriculum they have developed over the years is becoming more and more well-known as time goes on. The fact that their textbook is now being released in its 5th edition provides evidence of their lasting impact on the teaching of physics.

Regarding their selection for this award they noted, "We're honored to be included in the list of luminaries who've received the Oersted award, especially Richard Feynman, whose Lectures on Physics inspired both of us at early stages of our careers."

About the Award

The Oersted Medal is named for Hans Christian Oersted (1777-1851), a Danish physicist who, in the course of creating a demonstration for teaching his class, discovered that electric currents cause a magnetic field. This was a crucial step in establishing the theory of electromagnetism so important in building modern technology and modern physics. The award was established by AAPT in 1936 and is given annually to a person who has had outstanding, widespread, and lasting impact on the teaching of physics. Some previous Oersted award winners are S. James Gates, Shirley Jackson, John Winston Belcher, David Sokoloff, Gay Stewart, George F. Smoot, Mildred S. Dresselhaus, Carl Wieman, Lillian McDermott, Hans Bethe, Carl E. Sagan, Edward Purcell, and Richard Feynman. The complete list of recipients can be found at <http://www.aapt.org/Programs/awards/oersted.cfm>.