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ETH professor Nenad Ban awarded first Max Rössler Prize

Nenad Ban from the Institute of Molecular Biology and Biophysics has become the first person to win the Max Rössler Prize. The ETH Zurich professor won the award and 200,000 Swiss francs in prize money for his outstanding teaching and research in the field of molecular structural biology.

What can you do to encourage talented professors who are just embarking on a great career in science? Recognize their work and provide ample means for them to conduct free and creative research, according to Professor Peter Chen, Vice-President of Research and Corporate Relations at ETH Zurich. These means should be assigned at a point in the researcher's career where they have the highest impact. With the Max Rössler Prize, ETH Zurich now has an ideal instrument for honoring professors and their achievements. Potential candidates are any ETH-Zurich professors who have been granted a full professorship in the last two years. Moreover, with 200,000 Swiss francs' worth of prize money, the Max Rössler Prize is one of the most highly remunerated advancement awards in Switzerland.

First winner researches giant molecules

The winner of the first Max Rössler Prize is extraordinary in many respects. 43-year-old Nenad Ben, professor of molecular structural biology at the Department of Biology, joined ETH Zurich in 2000 as an assistant professor and became full professor in 2008. Nenad Ban is being honored for his groundbreaking structural analyses of biological macromolecules, which went a long way towards explaining the subunit of a ribosome. As ribosomes play a crucial role in antibiotic resistance, this was a major step in the development of drugs.

Another giant molecule that Ban is researching is fatty acid synthase. Fatty acids are essential for life because, as part of biological membranes, they play an important role in energy storage and signal transduction. Complex protein molecules are responsible for the production of these fatty acids. The detailed structure of fatty acid synthase makes it easy for researchers to find specific weak points against fungal diseases.

Strategic funds for high-quality projects

For Nenad Ban, the Max Rössler Prize is an acknowledgement of the research work of his whole team, which has now been working intensively and successfully together for a number of years. "The prize tops off this period perfectly and marks the beginning of a new one", says Nenad Ban. The prize money is not designated for any project in particular, and the team is free to spend it on their research as they see fit.

The prize was made possible by a donation of 10 million Swiss francs from Max Rössler and the "Max Rössler Funds of the Empiris Foundation" to the ETH Zurich Foundation. The Foundation uses donations to support strategic projects and outstanding scientific talents. An awards committee elects the prize winners from candidates nominated by ETH Zurich. Alumnus and donor Max Rössler explains his involvement by pointing to the importance of providing qualitatively superior education: "Switzerland is more reliant on well-educated, innovative engineers, mathematicians

and scientists than ever."

ETH Zurich

ETH Zurich (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich) has a student body of fifteen thousand students from 80 nations. More than 360 professors teach mainly in engineering sciences, construction and geomatics, natural sciences and mathematics, system-oriented sciences, management and social sciences, as well as carry out research that is highly valued worldwide. Distinguished by the successes of 21 Nobel laureates, ETH Zurich is committed to providing its students with unparalleled education and outstanding leadership skills.