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Foreword

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Foreword

Sukant K. Tripathy (1952–2000)

Professor Sukant Tripathy was a remarkable motivator for all who had the good fortune of interacting with him on various occasions. His remarkable enthusiasm and active participation in a variety of things that mattered the most gave a new dimension to the lives of people who knew him. Sukant empowered individuals, research groups and the University as a whole to reach greater heights. He was instrumental in getting UMass Lowell on the world map for research in the area of electronic and photoresponsive polymers.

I joined Sukant's research group as a graduate student, inspired by his drive and motivation as well as his energy and enthusiasm. I first met Sukant at the annual Chemistry Department barbeque and after a brief conversation, he permitted me to attend his weekly research group meeting. At the group meeting, one of his graduate students presented his research, which was also his 'practice talk' as he was one of the finalists for the ACS Sherwin Williams Award. Sukant listened to the research presentation very intently and at the end walked up to the projector and said, "you have to be excited about your research and you should be able to convey this excitement to the audience." In the fifteen minutes that followed, Sukant made an inspiring presentation using the very same slides prepared by the student. I was determined to do whatever it took to be Sukant's graduate student and ever since, he has had a profound influence on my life.

Sukant led by example and was always full of energy and excitement. Apart from being a sharp scientist he had the gift of quickly assessing people, spotting talent and assembling teams to achieve maximum synergy. As an excellent team leader, he managed to elicit the best from his close collaborators and students. He ensured that each individual in his team was happy, highly motivated and did their best to succeed. He always gave the feeling that "we are all in this effort together and we will make this a win-win for everyone."

Sukant had remarkable foresight on the 'next big challenge and opportunity' in the world of materials research. Almost a decade before interdisciplinary research became popular, he made it clear to us that great discoveries or inventions occur most often at the interface of fields. His strong fundamentals in science and insatiable appetite for adventure allowed him to move boldly into new areas of research that most physicists would not to pursue in their career. His ability to adapt allowed him to switch from computational physics to macromolecular science, on to electronic and optical properties of polymers and in the later stages to biocatalysis and organic photovolatics rather seamlessly. To a large extent this was possible because of Sukant's strong fundamentals, positive attitude, patience and realistic expectations when dealing with students and researchers as they ventured into new areas. He always took the time to talk to students and post-doctoral researchers, often opening the conversation with his favorite phrase "What's exciting?" He picked up on the positive aspects of the research and motivated researchers towards other exciting possibilities before offering his criticism or suggesting improvements.

Although most of us came to know of Sukant for the pursuit of science (in professional circles), he quickly became a good friend, since he genuinely cared for people and helped in their progress. While we often come across people who are either brilliant scientists, adventurous individuals

or adaptable and caring friends, it is impossible to find someone like Sukant, who had a unique combination of all these traits.

The legacy of Sukant – a gifted scientist, inspiring teacher and adviser, humanitarian and above all a good friend, who from very humble beginnings transcended societal and scientific boundaries, should be truly inspirational for generations to come.

This special issue dedicated to the memory of the late Professor Sukant Tripathy, summarizes the results from papers presented at the Sukant Tripathy Annual Memorial Symposium held on 4th of December 2009. The symposium reflected the varied interests of Sukant in science and engineering.

I thank all the participants and authors for the research papers contributed to this issue. This is certainly one of the most fitting ways to remember Sukant and his contribution to materials science and engineering. I would like to acknowledge the dedication of Professors Jayant Kumar, Daniel Sandman, Dr. Ashok Cholli and Ms. Michele Vercellin in organizing this symposium every year for almost a decade. I also thank the Executive Editor, Dr. Russell A. Gaudiana and Managing Editor, Ms. Lyn Roberts for all their help in publishing this special issue.

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