Fifteen years ago, a researcher published his findings about a molecule best known at the time for its role in depleting the ozone layer. But rather than its environmental impact, he was studying the part this molecule played in the human body. His findings, it turns out, were groundbreaking.

Tadeusz Malinski had figured out a way to measure the cellular output of nitric oxide. His discovery opened the door for developing new methods for the earlier detection and treatment of some of the leading diseases of our time, including heart disease, Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s.

His work has had profound influence around the globe — exactly what a committee of his faculty peers was looking for when it named Malinski the 2006 choice for Distinguished Professor, the university’s highest faculty honor.

Malinski, the Marvin and Ann Dilley White Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry, joined the university in 2000. He works in the subfield of nanoscience, which extends existing sciences into the realm of the extremely small.

For years, researchers had suspected human cells produced nitric oxide, but only through indirect evidence, because it couldn’t be measured. Malinski’s breakthrough was the creation of a nanosensor that could detect the molecule, allowing researchers to study the role it plays in regulating critical body functions.

Malinski says the Distinguished Professor award is a reminder that all the hours spent in the laboratory studying very small things have significance in the bigger picture. “To be recognized by your peers,” he adds, “has long been considered the highest recognition one can receive.”

The Distinguished Professor award was made possible by an endowment created by alumni Edwin and Ruth Kennedy. First given in 1959, it recognizes professors’ research or other contributions to their field.

Although his research alone was enough to put Malinski over the top, the committee also was impressed by his recent decision to chair the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry.

“It shows he’s also concerned with developing and growing this university,” says David Drabold, a physics professor and the 2005 Distinguished Professor.

— David Forster

Once a popular perch for campus photos, this Civil War cannon was a College Green fixture until being donated to the World War II scrap metal drive. A relative of one of the photogenic women shown here recently identified her in a letter to the alumni association. Seated fourth from the left is Birchie Jones, who attended the university in the early 1900s. The Men’s Union can be seen across East Union Street on the site later used for the original Baker Center. For a link to hundreds of historic university photos and information on how to share copies of your campus images with the Mahn Center for Archives and Special Collections, visit www.ohio.edu/ohiotoday.
Students having fun in numbers

350 registered student organizations exist at Ohio University, covering every interest area from politics to club sports. Here are a few facts about some of the organizations that make up that ever-growing number.

6: The number of steps in the jitterbug, the preferred dance of the Jitterbug Club. The group also offers lessons in other dance steps.

$49,268 was the total winnings of a Game Show Appreciation Society member on “The Price is Right.”

50 Singing Men of Ohio members aren’t music majors. Heard in performances on and off campus and known for their beautiful harmonies, the 72-member group has an impressive five-octave range.

3 and 58: That’s how many propellers and screws, respectively, go into the unmanned, helicopter-like aerial vehicle that gives the Aeromobile Club its focus.

7 members of the Women’s Ultimate Frisbee team are allowed on the field at one time. The farthest Frisbee throw by a team member is 70 yards.

15 feet is the height of the biggest wave surfed by members of the Surf Club.

1,000 weather forecasts are issued by the Meteorology Club each year on the Scalsa Lab forecast Web site, which had 185,000 visits last year.

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Four sports lose varsity status

Director of Athletics Kirby Hocutt announced at an emotional press conference in January that four sports programs would lose varsity status this spring.

The elimination of men’s indoor and outdoor track and field (counted as two sports), men’s swimming and diving, and women’s lacrosse reduced the number of varsity sports to 16. The lacrosse team elected to disband before the spring season so players could maintain eligibility if they transferred to another school.

The university had the second-largest program in the Mid-American Conference in terms of sports offered; however, its athletics budget ranks in the bottom half of the MAC. Ohio is the eighth school now in the conference to have eliminated sports programs since 1999.

In addition to financial implications, the quality of the student-athlete experience and compliance with Title IX were factors in the decision, Hocutt said.

“Our financial situation has prohibited us from providing the level of experience that we as an administration and our university expect,” he said. “We have not met our goal of compliance with Title IX. We are not in the financial position to add a women’s program, and therefore must take alternative measures to continue our commitment to compliance.”

Swimming and diving became a varsity sport for men in 1935, while track and field has competed since the early 1900s. The women’s lacrosse program was reinstated in 1999 after competing in the 1900s. The women’s lacrosse program is now in the conference to have eliminated sports programs.

Eighty-seven student-athletes were affected by the decision. Those who plan to stay at Ohio will continue to receive grants-in-aid for a period equal to their remaining eligibility. Ohio Athletics is assisting those who plan to transfer.

“We have made an extremely difficult decision that will place us in the very best position to be successful in the future,” Hocutt said. “If we don’t make these tough decisions now, we would lose our entire program at risk.”

— From Ohio Athletics reports

Russ Prize goes to biomedical engineer

The Russ Prize goes to biomedical engineer Cheng “Bert” Fung, recipient of the 2007 Russ Prize.

The late Fritz Russ, BSEE ’42, and his wife, Dolores, created the $500,000 prize — one of the top three engineering prizes in the world — with a multimillion-dollar endowment to Ohio University in 1999. Awarded biennially by the National Academy of Engineering, the Russ Prize recognizes engineering education and recognizes achievement that improves the human condition.

A professor emeritus of bioengineering at the University of California, San Diego, Fung is regarded as the father of tissue engineering, encourages engineering education and recognizes achievement that improves the human condition.

With his spindly legs, long necks and bright plumage, flamingos are a curiosity of nature. Now a new discovery by a team of Ohio University researchers reveals an anatomical oddity that helps flamingos eat: erectile tissue.

Flamingos are known for their peculiar feeding behavior. While standing in shallow water, they bend their necks, tilt their bills upside down in the water and swish their heads from side-to-side. Their large tongue acts like a piston, sucking water into the front of the bill and pushing it out the sides. Fringed plates on the tongue trap algae and crustaceans in the circulating water.

A 3-D view of a flamingo’s head was created using a scanning laser technique the team developed to highlight blood vessel anatomy. The researchers noticed large oval masses of erectile tissue located on the floor of the mouth on either side of the tongue.

“We were investigating the evolution of jaw muscles in lizards, birds and dinosaurs,” says Casey Holiday, PhD ’06, who served as lead author on the study. “By sheer luck we discovered something new about flamingos.”

Police interrogation tactics can prompt a criminal suspect to make a false confession, says Professor of Psychology Daniel Lassiter. When police videotape these interrogations for use in trials, they focus the camera only on the suspect.

Lassiter’s research shows this practice can bias trial participants. In a recent study that received coverage in Newsweek magazine, Lassiter and colleagues asked 23 judges and 24 law enforcement officers to view different versions of a videotaped mock confession. They considered the version of the confession that showed both the suspect and detective or just the detective. New Zealand, Wisconsin and Virginia and the nonprofit Innocence Project have used Lassiter’s work to push for amended regulations in law enforcement policy.

— From university reports

By the Way...

This time, a glimpse at interesting research and creative activity

SAGE, an astronomy-themed exhibit on display through mid-December at the Kennedy Museum of Art, helps viewers to visualize not just the universe, but also their relative place in it. Pieces range from a 10.5- by 85-foot drawing of the Milky Way (picted below with the students who helped create it) to a telescope that shows how a grain of sand can obscure 25,000 galaxies.

This brainchild of Assistant Professor of Art John Sabraw represents a collaboration of several university partners, including the Aesthetic Technologies Lab, art students and astronomers with the Astrophysical Institute.

By highlighting cultural connections in an astronomical contest, Sabraw hopes to “shatter the viewers’ sense of scale, in relation to themselves, other humans and the universe.”

— Colleen Girtwe