

# Honorary Fellow A Citation

## Professor Kenneth YOUNG, BS, PhD

To say that Professor Kenneth Young has had a long-standing relationship with this University would be an understatement. Although he took up his first appointment at The Chinese University of Hong Kong in 1973, his first contact was made even before the University was established during a visit to Chung Chi College with his parents—when he was just 10 years old. As we will see, perhaps that left an impression on him.

Just a few years later, in 1965, Kenneth Young left Hong Kong to pursue his university education in the United States, at the California Institute of Technology. ‘Nothing very special about that’ you might say, but recall that this was the mid-1960s, when higher education was hardly international, let alone ‘globalised’. Indeed, the seventeen-year-old Kenneth Young was one of only three or four Hong Kong students in the undergraduate programme at the time. He stayed at Caltech to complete his PhD, and in 1972 moved to the other side of the United States, to take up an appointment as a post-doctoral fellow and instructor at Princeton University. The following year he returned to Hong Kong, to take up what has become more than forty years of unbroken service to The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

We should pause there, and reflect on that statement. If only through its duration it is an exceptional record of service, particularly in today’s higher education world.

But we do not measure a colleague’s worth simply by counting the years—important though those undoubtedly are. Nor do we look simply at the kinds of tasks undertaken over the years—although in the case of Kenneth Young the list is truly prodigious, and embraces those of teacher, researcher, Professor, Department Chair, Faculty Dean, Dean of the Graduate School, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and College Master. And that is without attempting to list the many contributions he has made to

the community beyond the academy. It is clear that his skills and personal qualities have for many years been in demand beyond the bounds of the University.

We look, above all, to the qualities that are revealed in that service. And what do we see, when we put aside the curriculum vitae to confront the man whose academic life it summarises?

First, we see Commitment: Whatever else Kenneth Young’s career reveals, it is commitment to an institution that, in his words, is ‘trying to do the right things’. These ‘right things’ include, above all, the idea that first and foremost in the mission of a University is dedication to educating the young people who enter its doors. And in this respect we should recall that during his forty-some years in the University, Kenneth Young did not give up teaching—not at any point—despite the many demands that his other contributions to the University brought to his desk. And teaching is something to which he remains dedicated because, in his words, he can still learn from his students, he likes to see them grow and move on and, as he would put it, teaching is ‘a lot of fun’.

Second, we encounter Modesty: For someone who has undertaken just about every role that a University can ask of an academic, and done so with success, Professor Young is remarkably understated. Not for him the overblown curriculum vitae announcing his many achievements. What we find is a series of modest descriptions of what he has done. How then does he explain the enduring trust that the University has placed in his skills as an academic leader? His answer is typical: He was simply ‘very lucky’ to be asked to undertake certain roles at particular stages of the University’s development and the development of his own career. (One might ask, parenthetically, how many academics

would say that they were 'lucky' to be asked to become a Pro-Vice-Chancellor, and to remain in that role for seventeen years!)

Third, we see an ability to embrace change: The world of higher education has changed immeasurably since Kenneth Young started his career in this University. A young academic entering the profession today would not recognise the academy that Professor Young entered in 1973. Those were the days of no Research Assessment Exercises; no student evaluation of teaching (or only very rudimentary versions of that); no Quality Assurance visits; no real sense of strategic planning; no international league tables; a world in which most universities saw their missions in exclusively, or at least predominantly, local terms; and one in which governments and legislators did not think it a significant part of their jobs to hold universities to account for their use of public funds.

The world has changed, and we in the universities have embraced that change—sometimes willingly, sometimes less so. And as Kenneth Young has served the University he has helped it to meet the challenges of change, a recent and ongoing example being his contribution to the successful establishment of a new university, based on the guiding principles of this one, in mainland China.

And in his own career he has embraced change. Right about the time when many academics would be thinking of winding down, or of retreating to the relative calm of the laboratory or the library, Kenneth Young took up a new phase in his career as the founding Master of C. W. Chu College.

As we all know, the College system is part of the fabric of our University. It nurtures our students, physically, intellectually and morally. Without it we

would not be what we are today, and it is typical of Kenneth Young that when he was approached to become the Founding Master of one of our new Colleges, he took on that role and gave himself wholeheartedly to the task, seeing through the challenges of the physical construction of the College, the recruitment of staff and Fellows, and, of course, attracting students to a newly-founded College. And even though he has now stepped down as Master, he continues to teach in the College's general education programme and so contributes to the College's mission.

Beyond the University Professor Young's contributions to higher education and to his discipline have been recognised in many ways. He was elected a Fellow of the American Physical Society in 1999; and is a past Vice-President of the Association of Asia Pacific Physical Societies.

It is entirely fitting, then, that in its turn the University should recognise his dedication to our development over more than four decades of service. Mr Chairman, it is my privilege, to present to you Professor Kenneth Young, scholar, teacher and academic leader, for the award of an Honorary Fellowship of the University.

*This citation is written by Professor Christopher Gane*