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news release

Attention: News, Education and Science Editors

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APPOINTMENTS ADD TO THE OPEN UNIVERSITY'S EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

The Open University's Centre for Earth, Planetary, Space and Astronomical Research (CEPSAR) is today announcing two senior appointments as part of the university's major investment in research activity.

Joining the newly established centre from early 2005 will be:

- Professor Monica Grady, currently Head of the Meteorites and Cosmic Mineralogy Division in the Department of Mineralogy at the Natural History Museum and Honorary Professor of Meteoritics at University College London. Prof Grady carries out research on and curates the national collection of meteorites. In 1979 she received an honours degree from the University of Durham, before completing her PhD at the University of Cambridge. Since then Prof Grady has continued to specialise in the study of meteorites, and carried out this research at Cambridge, and then the Open University, prior to joining the Natural History Museum in 1991. Her research interests are in the fields of carbon and nitrogen stable isotope geochemistry of primitive meteorites and of Martian meteorites, interstellar components of meteorites, micrometeorites, and also in astrobiology and the possibilities of life elsewhere in the cosmos. Prof Grady has had an asteroid named in her honour.
- Professor Charles Cockell, a microbiologist with an interest in studying how microbes live in some of the Earth's most extreme environments. His research has taken him on expeditions to the Antarctic, Mongolia and Indonesia. Formerly at NASA and currently at the British Antarctic Survey, Prof Cockell has an interest in the search for life on other planets and is involved in experiments with the European Space Agency to study how microbes survive in space. He is an author of popular science books - his most recent, *Impossible Extinction*, describes how microbes survive catastrophes on Earth. He is also Chair of the Earth and Space Foundation.

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Prof Grady and Prof Cockell will join a group of world-class researchers from the three OU departments that form CEPSAR: Earth Sciences, the Planetary and Space Sciences Research Institute (PSSRI), and the Astronomy Research Group in the Department of Physics and Astronomy.

CEPSAR studies the origins, systems and processes with respect to the evolution and chemistry of materials that form the stars and planetary bodies, the processes and natural systems that shape the environment of our habitable world now and in the past, and the essential properties of a Solar System that allows life to develop.

Director of CEPSAR Professor Bob Spicer says: “We are delighted that Prof Grady and Prof Cockell will be joining our team. CEPSAR provides an enthusiastic and integrated research culture, forging collaborative alliances across disciplines, to which these two exceptional individuals will add further depth and knowledge.”

The news of the appointments was welcomed by Professor Alan Bassindale, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Staff), who said: “In aiming to undertake research that is distinctive and of the highest quality, CEPSAR requires staff of the highest calibre. Without doubt, these appointments meet that objective and I look forward to the contributions these new colleagues will make to an already significant research area.”

The professorial appointments are the latest outcome of the university's investment in its research activity as it brings together some of the leading researchers in Earth and space sciences, education, criminology and computing in new centres of excellence. CEPSAR is one of five new inter-disciplinary research centres to have been created; it is joined by the Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance; the International Centre for Comparative Criminological Research; the Centre for Research in Computing; and the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology.

EDITORS' NOTES

For more information on CEPSAR see <http://cepsar.open.ac.uk>

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