

Tau Beta Pi Announces 2023 McDonald Mentor Richard J. Spontak, Ph.D.

Knoxville, TN — Tau Beta Pi, The Engineering Honor Society, has named its 17th McDonald Mentor. Established in 2005 by Marion and Capers W. McDonald, *NC Gamma '74*, and the Association, the award recognizes excellence in engineering educators or professionals who consistently support the personal and professional development of their students and colleagues in industry, government, or service organizations.

Richard J. Spontak, Ph.D., *PA B '83*, is the 2023 Tau Beta Pi McDonald Mentor. He will receive \$1,000, a bronze engraved medallion, and replica lapel pin. A \$1,000 grant will be presented to the nominating chapter, the Research Triangle Alumni Chapter in North Carolina.

His biography follows:



Dr. Spontak is a distinguished professor at North Carolina State University (NC State). He earned a B.S. degree in chemical engineering from Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) and a Ph.D. in chemical engineering from the University of California, Berkeley. He also completed two post-grad research fellowships at the University of Cambridge and the Institute for Energy Technology.

The nomination recognized Dr. Spontak for “embodying the true meaning of the word ‘mentor’ through his efforts as an advocate for others, especially students, and taking a genuine interest in individuals” as unique people. He was also cited for being the rare person “that possesses technical prowess and a soul for teaching.” This is evidenced by his research in the field of condensed matter, leading to 300+ publications in peer-reviewed journals and 30+ journal covers.

NC State recognized Dr. Spontak with the Alexander Q. Holladay Medal for Excellence in 2022, considered to be the highest faculty award, and is a member of the Academy of Outstanding Teachers. His career began as a soft materials engineer at Procter & Gamble. He accepted a faculty position at NC State in 1992 because of his love of teaching and mentoring students. Today, he is a Distinguished Professor of chemical & biomolecular engineering, a Distinguished Graduate Professor, and has established the Macromolecular Materials & Morphology Group.

In addition to mentoring K-12 students (via Science Olympiad and MathCounts), undergraduate students (via senior design and undergraduate research), and graduate students (via scientific inquiry and the NC State “Preparing the Professoriate” program), he mentors one other important group of individuals: junior faculty. Dr. Spontak is known to provide both professional advice and personal/emotional support to those in need.

He joined Tau Beta Pi as an undergraduate chemical engineering student at Penn State in 1981, has served as a NC Alpha Chapter Chief Advisor since 2003, previously served as director of the Research Triangle Alumni Chapter, and is a TBP 2021 Distinguished Alumnus.

A colleague stated that as a mentor, “Rich is nothing short of exemplary. He is highly regarded by students in his classes, and has earned the cross-college reputation of being one of the most demanding, but genuinely caring, instructors on campus. As Richard M. Felder, Ph.D., *NYH '62*, (the so-called ‘conscience of chemical engineering’) once put it, student respect for Rich borders on adulation.”