



## DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARDS

Richard C.J. Somerville '61



**To Richard C.J. Somerville for his distinguished career as an atmospheric scientist and his contributions to the field of climate change science.**

When he was 10 years old, Richard Somerville already knew that he wanted to study meteorology after reading a book that turned him into what he calls a “weather buff.” Today, Somerville is one of the world’s leading atmospheric scientists, and his climate research has been at the forefront of the field for decades. Somerville is especially interested in improving understanding of how clouds and climate interact.

A high point of Somerville’s career came in 2007 when the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) shared the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize with Vice President Al Gore. Somerville had spent three years helping to write the IPCC Fourth Assessment Report, published in 2007. He co-headed a team of scientists from around the world writing one chapter of the report, a 35-page history of climate change science.

“Working with the IPCC was tremendously rewarding,” said Somerville. “Of course, IPCC receiving the Nobel Peace Prize was

memorable, but the entire experience was uplifting, educational, and thrilling.”

Somerville has also authored an award-winning book, *The Forgiving Air: Understanding Environmental Change*. A revised and updated edition of this book was published in 2008. Somerville is also active in informing policymakers about climate change and most recently testified before Congress in March 2011.

“Climate change science has become central to public policy, and now the whole world is aware of it,” Somerville said. “The research shouldn’t be confined to technical papers, but should be clear and relevant and digestible for everyone—the public, Congress, and the media.”

He has recently held workshops to teach scientists how to communicate better with the media and other non-scientists. “It’s not dumbing down science. It’s trying to understand the mindset of your listeners,” Somerville said, “learning how to speak in terms that are meaningful and relevant to them.”

Somerville has spent most of his career at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography of the University of California, San Diego,

which he joined in 1979 as a professor of meteorology. He remains there today. He was the first atmospheric scientist on the faculty at Scripps, where he has been able to collaborate with scientists from other disciplines who also study climate.

“Scripps is absolutely a first-class research center, and Scripps scientists and students are extraordinary,” Somerville said. “It’s located on the beach in San Diego, and that is very pleasant, but the great thing is the caliber of the people.”

After receiving his Ph.D. in meteorology from New York University, Somerville held postdoctoral appointments at the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) in Boulder, Colo., and the NOAA Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory in Washington, D.C. and Princeton, N.J. Before Scripps, he also held research positions at the Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences of New York University, the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, and again at NCAR.

Although Somerville formally retired in 2007 and is now a distinguished professor emeritus and research professor at Scripps, he remains active in research, education, and outreach. He spends several months each year in a remote

village in the south of France, from which he communicates with his research collaborators and his Scripps graduate student advisees via e-mail and Skype. “I really have the best of both worlds,” said Somerville. He finds rural France a “peaceful and inspiring place to work” that also gives him and his wife, Sylvia, a chance to reconnect with her European family.

Somerville has won awards as an author, an educator, and a researcher. He is a fellow of both the American Meteorological Society and the American Association for the Advancement of Science. At Penn State, the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences named him a Centennial Fellow (1996) and awarded him the Charles L. Hosler Alumni Scholar Medal (2009).

When not in France, Somerville and his wife, who have two adult sons, live in Carlsbad, Calif.

