

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE DUBLIN
HONORARY CONFERRING
Thursday, 5 December 2019 at 11 am

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY **PROFESSOR PETER CLINCH, UCD Environmental Policy** on 5 December 2019, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Science, *honoris causa*, on **THOMAS STERNER**.

Good morning. Thomas Sterner is Professor of Environmental Economics at the University of Gothenburg Sweden and an expert in the design of environmental policy instruments for climate and environmental policy. He has published over 100 articles in refereed journals such as *Nature* and *Science*, and more than 20 books and monographs. In addition to his academic accomplishments, Prof Sterner's Environmental Economics Unit at the University of Gothenburg is recognised for remarkable achievements in the creation of environmental economic capacity to aid development across five continents.

Professor Sterner is past president of the European Association of Environmental and Resource Economists, a Fellow of The Beijer Institute of the Swedish Royal Academy, a Fellow of the Norwegian Academy of Sciences and a Member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. He was Chief Economist at the Environmental Defense Fund, amongst the largest environmental organizations with two million members globally, and is a member of the research board of several developing-country networks. He has advised the OECD, World Bank and several Swedish Ministries, was a member of the Informal Expert Advisory Panel on Climate Change to the Irish Government, and a Member of the Scientific Council for Sustainable Development to the Swedish Government. He was coordinating Lead Author of chapter 15 on policy instruments in the AR5 of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). And, at the same time, Thomas is one of the nicest and most humble people you could meet in academia.

It is a great pleasure for us at UCD, and my great pleasure, to present him for UCD's highest degree award, an honorary Doctorate of Science.

Professor Sterner was an early pioneer of the field of environmental economics. He started the Environmental Economics Unit at the University of Gothenburg in 1990. Since then his group has become a global leader in the field. Professor Sterner has tirelessly brought the gospel of environmental economics to the world, with a particular focus on working with other disciplines to effect change. Thomas's research group has a global reach through the Environment for Development Initiative that has 15 member-centres around the world and is still growing. His group has produced more than sixty PhD graduates and hundreds of other graduates. These graduates work across the world and are dedicated to using the fruits of research to improve the environment and to aid development in their home countries. Several of his students have gone on to play important roles in their countries as Ministers and senior civil servants.

The hallmark of Professor Sterner's academic contribution has been his passion for, and unwavering enthusiasm to, applying the tools of economics to the world's greatest environmental challenges. His combination of curiosity and deep concern for the environment, together with his broad methodological skills, have led to contributions in many areas of environmental economics as evidenced by his impressive publication record – 108 peer reviewed research articles, 21 books and monographs, and 29 book chapters.

His pioneering work explains how policy instruments, and institutions, should be designed to make real improvements in environmental quality through the clever design of environmental policy instruments such as carbon taxes, emissions trading and subsidies for clean technology. His seminal work, "Policy instruments for environmental and natural resources management", has been translated into multiple languages. He has applied the findings of his research to the economics of energy, industry, transportation, chemicals, fisheries and soil management. He has also made important contributions on the choice of instruments when polluters are so powerful, or have such a superior grip on information and other resources, that they tend to be successful in resisting taxation and regulation. He has applied this research in both developed and developing country contexts.

One of the most important, and most controversial, factors affecting our response to climate change is how we discount future benefits of action against the cost of taking that action now. His contribution to the literature on discounting is perhaps where Professor Sterner has made his most profound scientific contribution. He has been particularly influential when it comes to our understanding of the long-term costs of climate change and how we can address this through policies such as carbon taxes and dual discount rates.

Thomas Sterner is not only active in theoretical research, and applied interdisciplinary work, but also in practical policymaking. For example, Professor Sterner's work on climate change has built on the renowned "Stern Report" through what is known as his "Even Sterner Review".

He has been active in public debate most notably when serving as Chief Economist of the Environmental Defense Fund in New York, where he interacted regularly with members of Congress and the Senate on environmental policy. He has advised the Swedish, Irish, French and Ethiopian governments, amongst others, as well as the World Bank and several regional banks. His research has led to policy changes in countries such as the United Kingdom, France and the Netherlands and in changes to World Bank policies in developing countries.

His expertise, and the high esteem in which he is held by the global research community, is reflected in him being appointed as Lead Coordinating Author for the policy chapter of the influential Intergovernmental Panel and Climate Change AR5 report.

The renowned poet and former UCD Professor Seamus Deane sets out in his poem, Scholar II, the difficulty for academics in balancing high intellectual thought with carrying the debate outside of academia, when he writes:

*I remember at times
How irresponsible I have
Become. No ruling passion
Obsesses me, although passions
Are what I play among
I'll know the library in a city
Before I know there is a slum.
I could wish the weight of
Learning would bring me down
To where things are done.*

A few notable academics are able to make substantial and original contributions to knowledge and also to come down to where things are done. And when it concerns the environment and, perhaps, the greatest challenge facing humankind – climate change – getting things done is of paramount importance.

Thomas Sterner is one of those noble few. And, today, UCD awards him with the Doctor of Science degree *honoris causa* for his outstanding lifetime contribution to our understanding of how economics can protect our environment and, in particular, how to design policies to protect us from the perils of climate change.

Praehonorabilis Praeses, totaque Universitas,

Praesento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad Gradum Doctoratus Scientiae; idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.