

# ASSIGNED READING

Chemistry professor Bassam Shakhshiri is best known for his nationally televised annual program, *Once Upon a Christmas Cheery, in the Lab of Shakhshiri*. Clad in his red “science is fun” T-shirt, he conjures clouds of smoke, color-changing liquids, and disappearing packing peanuts. As the camera pans to the audience, viewers are treated to delighted reactions from children that are even more entertaining than the multiple explosions and the appearance of a big-headed Bucky Badger wearing giant safety goggles.

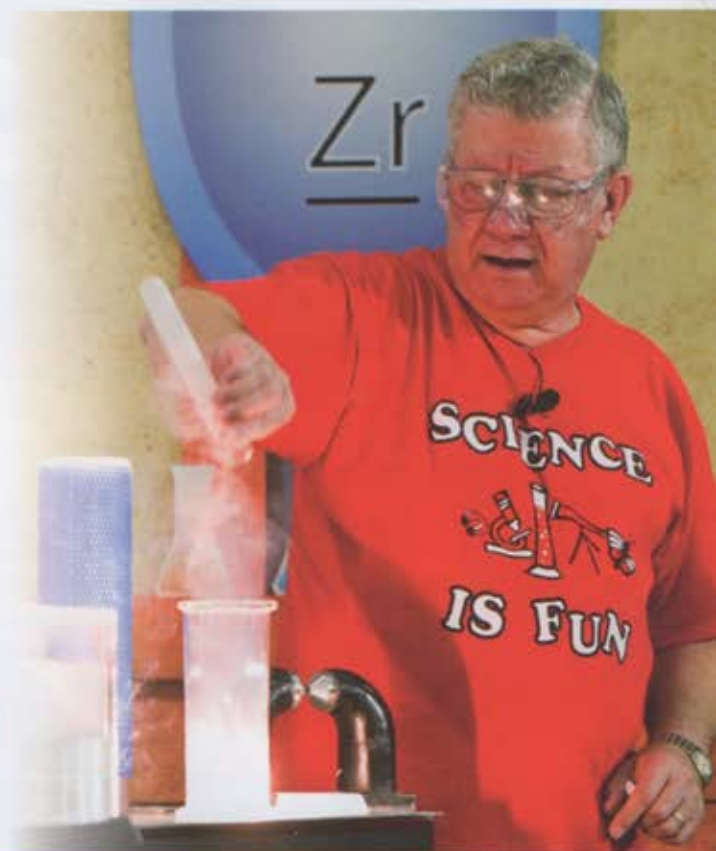
All told, this legendary advocate for science education has given more than 1,500 lectures and presentations around the world and has been featured by numerous media outlets ranging from the *New York Times* to *NBC Nightly News*.

On the university faculty since 1970, Shakhshiri is the recipient of dozens of awards for teaching and public service. He has served as president of the American Chemical Society and as an assistant director at the National Science Foundation. Shakhshiri has presented his Christmas program for nearly half a century (2019 will mark its 50th year). His successful formula for promoting science might just turn out to be one of chemistry’s most useful equations.

By Niki Denison

## BASSAM SHAKHASHIRI

PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY AND THE FIRST HOLDER OF THE WILLIAM T. EVJUE DISTINGUISHED CHAIR FOR THE WISCONSIN IDEA



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### MY ASSIGNED READING CURRENTLY INCLUDES:

*The Death and Life of the Great Lakes* by Dan Egan. Water is the only substance that exists naturally on Earth in all three physical states of matter — gas, liquid, and solid. It is essential to life as we know it. I have always been attracted to water, beginning with my youth in Lebanon on the eastern shores of the Mediterranean, and continuing through my past five decades on the shores of Lake Mendota. As human activity continues to affect this precious resource, we must better harness science and technology to strengthen our stewardship of Earth and its people.

### I'M CURRENTLY READING:

*The Politics of Resentment* by Katherine Cramer '94 and *The Influential Mind: What the Brain Reveals About Our Power to Change Others* by Tali Sharot. I'm also watching Fox News.

### SOME FAVORITE PIECES I'VE BEEN WORKING ON HAVE BEEN:

“The Triumphs and Failure of the Wisconsin Idea,” “The Rewards and Responsibilities of Freedom,” “Opportunities and Challenges in Graduate Research and Education,” “Science and Religion: The Strongest Forces in Society,” and “Science Demonstrations and Perception.”

### I LIKE TO REREAD:

*On Fourth Lake: A Social History of Lake Mendota* by Donald Sanford; *The Age of Reform* by Richard Hofstadter; and the “Sifting and Winnowing” plaque that is affixed to the side of Bascom Hall. Every year between May 24 (the date I was sworn in as a U.S. citizen) and July 4, I reread the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

### THE ONE THING EVERYONE NEEDS TO READ IS:

*Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Accounts Right Now* by Jaron Lanier.

### I KEEP MEANING TO GET AROUND TO READING:

*Testament: A Priest's Dying Confession* by Jean Meslier and *The River of Consciousness* by Oliver Sacks.

### THE TITLE OF MY MEMOIRS — IF I EVER WRITE THEM — WOULD BE:

*Connecting Science and Society: Science is Fun and the Joy of Learning.*