Dr. Yoshi Kazu Sasaki, a George Lynn Cross Professor Emeritus of the School of Meteorology within University of Oklahoma, passed away on 12 March 2015 in Shreveport, Louisiana. Dr. Sasaki is known nationally and internationally for his service to the University, the State of Oklahoma, his profession and the Asian American community. He worked tirelessly establishing relationships between the nation of Japan and the State of Oklahoma receiving the "Order of the Sacred Treasure Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon" for contributions to science and international affairs from the Emperor of Japan in 2004, which is the highest award for a civilian in that country.

Professor Sasaki was born in Akita, Japan in 1927. His father, Kosuke Sasaki, and mother, Itsu Sasaki, preceded him in death. He is survived by his wife, Koko of
Dr. Sasaki received his Ph.D. at the University of Tokyo in 1955 with Prof. Shigekata Syono as his advisor (Syono was also the advisor for the late Prof. T. Theodore Fujita). He and his wife, Koko, emigrated to the U.S. in 1956 when Dr. Sasaki began his work at Texas A&M University as a Research Scientist. He subsequently came to the University of Oklahoma in 1960 along with Dr. Walter Saucier to found the Meteorology program at the University. Dr. Sasaki quickly rose through the tenure ranks and became a full professor in 1967. He played a significant role in recruiting faculty to the program and today the School of Meteorology is one of the largest in the nation and known internationally for research on understanding and predicting thunderstorms and severe weather. He was known for enthusiastically working with graduate students to develop their capabilities. In 1980, he became the Director of the Cooperative Institute for Mesoscale Meteorological Studies, an organization linking the University with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration which has thrived under his and subsequent leadership.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to summarize the lifelong work of Dr. Sasaki as an educator, researcher and citizen-statesman. As a citizen of Oklahoma, he was honored by the proclamation of not one, but two, “Yoshi Sasaki Days” by Governors of Oklahoma. The first proclamation was in March 2001 when Dr. Sasaki was named the “Honorary Consul General of Japan” for his many contributions to cultural, economic and academic interactions between Japan and Oklahoma. A 2nd “Yoshi Sasaki Day” was proclaimed by Governor Henry on Sasaki’s 82nd birthday, January 2, 2009, to recognize his many contributions on the Governor’s Advisory Council on Asian-American Affairs. He received several other awards from the Foreign Minister of Japan and Oklahoma City and State organizations for his many contributions to economic development, cultural exchanges and promotion of the arts. Dr. Sasaki touched the lives of many when he played a major role in Japanese companies locating in the Norman area including the establishment of a major Hitachi manufacturing plant, Astellas (formerly Shaklee in Norman), TDK in Shawnee, and the innovation center for WeatherNews America Inc., where he served on the Board of Directors and was a personal mentor to its founder, Hiro Ishabashi. During the past decades, Dr. Sasaki has been an advisor on international issues to OU Presidents and Oklahoma Governors as well as for Japanese scientific institutions and several State committees and delegations. He founded the Japan Oklahoma Society and helped create several sister school and sister city relationships between Oklahoma and both Japan and France.

Dr. Sasaki’s work with industry helped in ways that assisted the University of Oklahoma. He led efforts to fund three endowed chairs at OU: The Hitachi Chair in Electrical Engineering, The Ashai Glass Chair in Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, and the Weather News Chair in Meteorology.
As a researcher, his lifelong focus was to benefit humanity through improved prediction of weather disasters. Dr. Sasaki’s talent was evident even prior to receiving his doctorate degree as in 1954, Drs. Miyakoda and Sasaki published the first attempt to use numerical modeling to predict the track of typhoon/hurricanes. Their research was in response to a ferry disaster and the authors received an award for their groundbreaking research by the Japan Meteorological Society. It was the first of many research rewards received by Dr. Sasaki in his lifetime. His most important contributions lie in the area of numerical weather prediction, which provide the foundation for nearly all weather forecasts of conditions beyond a few hours in the future. One key aspect of his work was on the critical topic of how to define the initial conditions for these prediction systems - an area of research called data assimilation. Dr. Sasaki was a pioneer in proposing the use of variational calculus techniques in deriving these initial conditions. Aspects of this approach are still widely used in prediction systems today, which are done on today’s super computers. Lacking these modern computers, Dr. Sasaki’s calculations were undertaken on experiments utilizing calculators.

Within the University of Oklahoma, Dr. Sasaki was awarded the title of George Lynn Cross Professor in 1974 as recognition of being an outstanding research professor. He was one of the first recipients of this title at the University. For his research contributions, Dr. Sasaki also received the Fujiwara Award from the Meteorological Society of Japan, one of its highest honors, and was named a Fellow of the American Meteorological Society (AMS), and in 2014, received its highest award, that of Honorary Member for preeminence in the field. In addition, the Asia Oceania Geosciences Society has held a series of international meetings called the “Sasaki Symposium in Data Assimilation for Atmospheric, Oceanographic and Hydrological Applications.” This symposium was especially organized in honor of Dr. Sasaki for his pioneering efforts in applying the variational technique to data assimilation of geosciences problems. These meetings have been held in Thailand, Korea, India, Taipei, Singapore, Australia and Japan.

As an educator, Dr. Sasaki mentored numerous graduate students to Masters and Doctoral degrees. During his career, he shepherded fifty-three students for their Masters Degree and nineteen for their Ph.D. Many of his students went on to their own remarkable careers. His first PhD student, Dr. Joe Friday went on to become the Director of the National Weather Service. Another of Dr. Sasaki’s doctoral students, Dr. Robert Sheets went on to become the Director of National Hurricane Center. Other graduate students of Dr. Sasaki went on to become leaders in weather research and scientific management. One significant aspect of his role as an educator was his willingness to support his students in their efforts to succeed in their own terms. Not all of his doctoral students wrote dissertations in the same specialties that Dr. Sasaki excelled in, but he gave all his students unwavering academic and personal support. In recognition of his educational achievements, Dr. Sasaki was inducted into the Oklahoma Higher Education Hall of Fame in 2004. Even after retirement, Dr. Sasaki remained active as an educator, often attending faculty meetings and seminars. He
continued his research well into retirement, even up to his passing, that led to published articles in the scientific literature as late as 2014.

Ceremonies, honoring Dr. Sasaki, will be held at his memorial service on May 9, 2015, at 10am, at the National Weather Center, 120 David L. Boren Blvd., Norman, Oklahoma 73072.

Flowers, honoring Dr. Sasaki, will be displayed at the memorial service. Please send flowers to the National Weather Center, 120 David L. Boren Blvd., Norman, Oklahoma 73072.

Donations, in lieu of flowers, may be made to the Yoshi and Koko Sasaki-Meteorology Enrichment Fund, University of Oklahoma Foundation, 100 Timberdell Road, Norman, Oklahoma 73019.