

Research Week: Faculty Recognized for Mentorship, Grant Proposals

The University of San Diego's Research Week hosted two events Tuesday that speak to one of the most important elements for research to thrive in campus labs, through the student experience and beyond campus and out in the community.

Faculty members, new and veteran professors and educators alike, are a catalyst for research to happen and to facilitate opportunities for students to gain this vital aspect of their educational and critical thinking skill set.

The events celebrating faculty members were the naming of USD's Outstanding Undergraduate Research Mentor Awards for one senior and one junior faculty member; and a faculty recognition ceremony, which included recognition of important successful grants and special emphasis on celebrating 11 new USD faculty for submitting external funding proposals tied to research projects that fund opportunities for students to gain research experience.

The Outstanding Undergraduate Research Mentor awards, as announced by Elisa Maldonado, PhD, Director of USD's Office of Undergraduate Research, were Susannah Stern, PhD, Professor of Communication Studies (Senior Faculty) and Divya Sitaraman, PhD, Assistant Professor of Psychological Sciences (Junior Faculty).

Both Stern and Sitaraman expressed thanks for their awards and each had a student who spoke on their behalf. Monica Cooper, a junior communication studies major and Environmental Studies minor, praised Stern for encouraging her to learn more about and to tackle a research project. Amanda Nguyen, who studied behavioral neuroscience, graduated earlier this year and has been working in Sitaraman's lab as a paid researcher through a grant the professor received, thanked her mentor for her dedication to research and giving her and other students the opportunity to do hands-on research.

Later in the day, Vice President and Provost Gail Baker congratulated several successful major faculty and staff grant proposals, including several with a collaborative emphasis. She also acknowledged the conclusion of a majorly successful funded project, [Climate Education Partners](#), for more than \$7 million since 2010. The project has USD faculty and staff serving in key roles, including Michel Boudrias, PhD, Associate Professor in Environmental and Ocean Sciences., who was the principal investigator for the CEP proposal.

Baker also highlighted one faculty member, Jennifer Prairie, PhD, an assistant professor in Environmental and Ocean Sciences, becoming the fifth USD professor to receive the National Science Foundation's Early Career Development (CAREER) Award. The CAREER Award, which in past years has been awarded to USD professors in chemistry and physics, provides Prairie with funding to pursue outstanding research, excellence in teaching and the integration of education and research. Her research emphasis is for students to learn mathematical models and

computational techniques to address biological questions, preparing the next generation of scientists that are capable of tackling the most challenging and interdisciplinary biological and environmental problems.

The 11 new faculty members recognized by Baker were: Anthony Bell, Assistant Professor, Chemistry and Biochemistry; Kate Boersma, Assistant Professor, Biology; Nicole Danos, Assistant Professor, Biology; Satyan Devadoss, Fletcher Jones Chair and Professor, Mathematics; Arietta Fleming-Davies, Assistant Professor, Biology; Eleanor Gillette, Assistant Professor, Chemistry and Biochemistry; Chad Kishimoto, Assistant Professor, Physics and Biophysics; Alex Mejia, Assistant Professor, General Engineering; Candice Price, Assistant Professor, Mathematics; Gordon Romney, Director of the Center for Cyber Security Engineering and Technology; and Subramanian “Venkat” Shastri, Professor of Practice and Director of Industry Partnership.

"These new members of our community are committed to providing hands-on learning opportunities for our students to explore real-world issues, turning students into scientists and scholars who are dedicated to ethical conduct and compassionate service," said Traci Merrill, director of USD's Office of Sponsored Programs.

—Ryan T. Blystone

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