

Richard Atkinson appointed chancellor

April 4, 1980

Dr. Richard C. Atkinson was appointed as the fifth chancellor of the University of California, San Diego by the UC Board of Regents on March 21, 1980. The appointment will be effective July 1.

Atkinson, 51, has served as director of the National Science Foundation since June 1, 1977 and served first as its deputy director and then as its acting director for nearly two years before that. He went to the NSF from Stanford University where he was a professor in the Department of Psychology and associate dean of the School of Humanities and Sciences.

At UC San Diego Atkinson will succeed Dr. William D. McElroy who has served as chancellor for eight years and who will return to the faculty as a professor of biology.

Atkinson is an experimental psychologist and applied mathematician whose research has been concerned primarily with problems of memory and cognition. He was one of the first to transform intuitive ideas about the nature of memory into an explicit theory that could be formulated in mathematical terms.

His research on memory has led him to be concerned with problems of classroom learning. He was among the first to develop a computer-controlled system for instruction, whose basic features have had wide influence on the computer field and have been used in the design of commercial computer-assisted instruction programs. An important application of the computer system developed by Atkinson has been for teaching reading to elementary school children.

Atkinson was born March 19, 1929, in Oak Park, Illinois. He earned a B.S. degree at the University of Chicago in 1948 and a Ph.D. at Indiana University in 1955. He joined the Stanford University faculty in 1956 after military service in the U.S. Army. At Stanford, in addition to being a professor of psychology, he held appointments in the School of Engineering, the School of Education and the Institute for Mathematical Studies in the Social Sciences.

He has been elected to membership in the National Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Medicine, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Education. He has been a Fellow of the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences, and a Guggenheim Fellow and has received the Distinguished Research Award from the Social Sciences Research Council and the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association.

Atkinson is the author or co-author of 141 articles in scientific and professional journals and author, co-author or editor of 10 books. He and his wife, Rita, a clinical psychologist, have one daughter, Lynn, who is currently in medical school at Brown University.

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