

UCSD professor Patricia S. Churchland wins \$290,000 MacArthur Fellowship

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UCSD PROFESSOR WINS \$290,000 MACARTHUR FELLOWSHIP

Patricia Smith Churchland, a professor of philosophy at the University of California, San Diego, has been named a winner of a MacArthur Fellowship from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

Churchland is the eighth UCSD faculty member to win a MacArthur Fellowship, a \$290,000 tax-free award spread over a five-year period. The terms of the award allow recipients to use the funds in any way they wish, "no strings attached."

According to the MacArthur Fellowship, the goal of the program is "to provide unique, unrestricted fellowships to exceptionally talented and promising individuals who have given evidence of originality, dedication to creative pursuits, and capacity for self-direction."

Churchland, who has received numerous awards and honors throughout her academic career, is a leading authority in computational neuroscience -- a relatively new field in which researchers attempt to construct brain-based computer models of the way the brain processes thought.

"This award will provide me with time to pursue several projects," she said.

"The main project I want to work on is time and how the brain deals with temporal properties -- in perception and attention, in movement, in short- and long-term memory, in making plans and decisions and so on," Churchland said. "These questions are closely related to awareness and the brain's mechanism for awareness.

"I also want to continue to work on the implications of neural scientific discoveries for how we think of ourselves," she added, "what it is to be aware, to be a responsible agent, to be a person."

The Oxford-trained philosopher, who studied neuroscience at the University of Manitoba Medical School, has spent much of her career attempting to link recent discoveries in neuroscience to philosophy, a field she has called "neurophilosophy."

In 1986, she wrote "Neurophilosophy: Toward a Unified Science of Mind-Brain" (MIT Press), describing the foundations for her outlook.

"The book came about because a number of years ago I became very disillusioned with what passed for mainstream philosophy," Churchland said. "And I decided that one had to do something more interesting than just speculate in an armchair and think that you were finding out something about the nature of consciousness."

Recently, she coauthored another book called "The Net Effect: Models and Methods on the Frontiers of Computational Science" with Terrence J. Sejnowski, professor of biology and physics at UCSD and director of the Laboratory of Computational Neurobiology at the Salk Institute. The book, also to be published by MIT Press, is expected to be released later this year.

Among her other collaborators is her husband, Paul M. Churchland, also a professor of philosophy at UCSD. For more than two decades, the husband-and-wife team have written and studied on the nature of the mind and knowledge. Last year, they wrote in "Scientific American" that thinking machines could one day be built, based somewhat on the architecture of a biological brain.

Churchland, 47, has taught at UCSD since 1984. She is one of 31 winners nationally of the MacArthur Fellowship, and the only person within the University of California system.

The \$2 billion foundation was established by the late John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, sole owners of Bankers Life and Casualty Co., the nation's largest privately held insurance company.

Current UCSD faculty members who have won MacArthur Fellowships include Michael S. Schudson, communication and sociology; Michael Freedman, mathematics department; Ramon Gutierrez, history department; and Edwin Hutchins, department of cognitive science.

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