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UC San Diego Chemist Wins 2 Prestigious National Awards

A chemistry professor at the University of California San Diego has won two prestigious national prizes awarded by the American Chemical Society.

Neal Devaraj, an associate professor of chemistry and biochemistry, is the recipient of the 2017 ACS Award in Pure Chemistry, which recognizes outstanding fundamental research in pure chemistry carried out in North America by chemists early in their careers, and the 2016 National Fresenius Award, which annually recognizes “an outstanding young scientist who has attained national recognition in the areas of research, teaching and/or administration.”

The American Chemical Society, which announced its award winners earlier this week, will present Devaraj with his two awards at a ceremony next April in conjunction with the 253rd ACS National Meeting in San Francisco.

“These are tremendous honors for Neal, but also for the department and UC San Diego as a whole,” said Partho Ghosh, chair of the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. “Neal is a terrific colleague who engages everyone in our department with his scientific creativity and innovation. These awards are well deserved recognition for the great amount Neal has already accomplished in the few years he has been at UC San Diego. We’re all looking forward to the new directions in which he takes his science next.”



Neal Devaraj, UC San Diego

Devaraj is the first UC San Diego winner of the ACS Award in Pure Chemistry, which is considered one of the most prestigious awards that can be bestowed on a chemist, said long-time chemistry and biochemistry professor Charles Perrin. “The winners include people who went on to great prominence,” he said.

The award was first given in 1931 to Linus Pauling, a co-discoverer of the double helical structure of DNA who later won two Nobel Prizes—in chemistry and peace—and who was a chemistry professor at UC San Diego from 1987 to 1989. It was also awarded to Nobel Prize winning chemists Glenn Seaborg, E.J. Corey, Dudley Herschbach and Roald Hoffmann.

In addition to Pauling, two other former UC San Diego chemistry professors received the prize before coming to the La Jolla campus, Fred Wall who received it in 1945 and Peter Wolynes in 1986, said Perrin. But Devaraj is the first recipient who received the prize while a faculty member at UC San Diego.

Previous UC San Diego winners of the National Fresenius Award, given to chemists under the age of 35, were Peter Wolynes and John Simon, who won the award in 1992 when he was at UC San Diego and is now the president of Lehigh University.

The two ACS awards follow another early career award recently won by Devaraj. Several months ago, Devaraj was named a Camille Dreyfus Teacher-Scholar by the Camille and Henry Dreyfus Foundation, one of 13 faculty members nationwide to receive the honor. That award, which provided him with an unrestricted research grant of \$75,000, is given to faculty members based on an outstanding body of scholarship in their early career and a deep commitment to teaching.

A biochemist, Devaraj joined the chemistry faculty at UC San Diego in 2011 and was appointed an associate professor this year. He received BS degrees in both chemistry and biology at MIT in 2002 and his PhD in chemistry at Stanford University in 2007.

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