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Yishi Jin Named to Junior Seau Endowed Faculty Chair in Traumatic Brain Injury

The inaugural chair holder of the Junior Seau Foundation Endowed Chair in Traumatic Brain Injury at the University of California San Diego is Yishi Jin, Professor and Chair of the Section of Neurobiology in the Division of Biological Sciences. Jin's research focuses on molecular genetic mechanisms underlying the development of the nervous system, and regeneration of wounded nervous systems, with the goal of better understanding human neurological disorders and brain injury.

The chair was established by the Junior Seau Foundation in memory of Junior Seau, the beloved NFL Football Hall of Famer and longtime San Diego Charger. Seau passed away in 2012 and was subsequently diagnosed with chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE), a neurodegenerative disease associated with repeated blows to the head. The chair provides a dedicated source of funds, in perpetuity, for the chair holder's scholarly activities as well as support for faculty salaries and graduate fellowships.



Yishi Jin

“We are so grateful to the Junior Seau Foundation for its generous support of brain research at UC San Diego, and are pleased to announce Yishi Jin as the inaugural chair holder,” said Dean of Biological Sciences William McGinnis. “Basic research, such as that taking place in the Jin Lab, is critical to building our understanding of the brain and how to more effectively treat and prevent neurodegenerative diseases triggered by traumatic brain injury.”

Jin has consistently broken new ground in a variety of areas in neurobiology throughout her career. Her research has led to the discovery of evolutionarily conserved and novel molecular pathways that control nerve regeneration after injury. She has won several prestigious awards, including a Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers and a Jacob Javits Neuroscience Investigator Award. For the past 16 years she was an investigator of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, a distinction held by top biomedical scientists. Jin and her colleagues recently discovered a new genetic pathway that carries hope for victims of traumatic injuries spanning stroke to spinal cord damage.

“I am honored by this award and particularly grateful for the recognition of my work on the fundamental understanding of the genetic basis of cellular response to traumatic injury,” said Jin. “Our studies using the model organism *C. elegans* have revealed previously unknown genes and pathways that play critical roles in axon regeneration, all of which are conserved in humans. We have begun to explore opportunities to develop new strategies to help recovery from brain injury. This endowed fund will give us freedom to test high-risk and high-reward ideas.”

The Junior Seau Foundation donated a total of \$250,000, which was matched dollar-for-dollar as part of the UC San Diego Chancellor’s Endowed Chair and Faculty Fellowship Challenge, as well as by the university’s Division of Biological Sciences and the Kavli Institute for Brain and Mind, bringing total funding to \$1 million. The gift also established the Junior Seau Lectureship Series to inform the community and K-12 students about the causes and risks associated with traumatic brain injury.

“I am passionate about engaging K-12 students in understanding scientific research,” said Jin. “I am excited about being in the community to help raise the awareness of safety in youth sports.”

UC San Diego is currently in a \$2 billion fundraising campaign to transform the student experience, the campus and ultimately the way that humanity approaches problems and develops solutions. For more information on the Campaign for UC San Diego, visit campaign.ucsd.edu. To learn more about supporting the Division of Biological Sciences, go [here](#).

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