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Breakthrough Clinical Psychology Program Funded by UC San Diego Alumnus

Joseph Edelman's \$470,000 gift will support novel pilot program offering UC San Diego psychology undergraduates the opportunity to gain clinical experience in psychiatry

Joseph Edelman, founder and CEO of life science-focused hedge fund Perceptive Advisors, feels that poor mental health affects not only one's personal well-being, but that of those around them and the entire economy "because people are more productive when they're happier." Two years ago, this belief led him to donate \$400,000 to increase mental health services to students at the University of California San Diego.



Joseph Edelman. Photo by Sasha Maslov / sashamaslov.com

Today, the 1978 UC San Diego alumnus has committed an additional \$470,000 to fund a two-year pilot program on campus called Advancing College Mental Health (ACMH). The program seeks to increase the depth of experience for undergraduates interested in mental health professions through a groundbreaking interdepartmental collaboration that will enhance clinical psychology education — the first of its kind within the University of California system.

Dean of Social Sciences Carol Padden stated, "We are always grateful whenever alumni give back to UC San Diego. Joe's continued generosity has led to a unique partnership between social sciences and health sciences in the area of mental health training. This program is designed to provide psychology undergraduates with a rare opportunity for practical experience before they graduate."

According to the [U.S. Health Resources & Services Administration](#), our country needs to add 10,000 mental health professionals to the workforce by 2025 to meet increased demand. When designing the pilot program, Nancy Downs, M.D., professor of psychiatry at UC San Diego School of Medicine, sought to address this urgent need: "How do you encourage more people to go into psychology? How do you increase learning?"

The answer required the help of two psychiatry professors — Neal Swerdlow, M.D., Ph.D., and department chair Igor Grant, M.D. — as well as psychology professor and department chair Victor Ferreira. Together they came up with the ACMH pilot program. This cross-department collaboration between psychiatry and psychology allows psychology students a remarkable chance to work in a clinical environment.

Building on a pre-existing psychology lab class, Edelman's gift will help expand not only the number of students enrolled, but also the scope. Currently the course is capped at around 25 students, but the hope is to double that number in the next academic year by hiring additional instructor support and teaching assistants. The course has two components: 1) classroom instruction covering theory, research design and methods for clinical research; and 2) lab-based research.

The pilot program also creates a new clinical rotation where psychology undergraduates will have the opportunity to gain clinical experience through the UC San Diego School of Medicine. Under the guidance of a clinical practice coordinator, undergraduates will earn course credit by interacting with patients in a pre-appointment capacity. Tasks may include greeting patients; gathering basic information, including symptom severity scales; conducting studies; and assisting with paperwork. The coordinator will ensure all interactions abide by ethical requirements and comply with medical and privacy regulations.

For psychology chair Ferreira, this approach has two main benefits. One, it allows university students pursuing careers in clinical psychology to gain a foothold in the clinical world while still undergraduates. Two, it marks the start of an innovative collaboration between the psychology and psychiatry departments. For the lab class and the clinical rotations, the Department of Psychiatry will oversee all clinical components while the Department of Psychology will handle the instructional elements.

Psychiatry chair Grant believes that Edelman's foresight will enrich undergraduate education by initiating students into clinical realities and encourage them to consider careers in mental health. He believes that ACMH can be a model for future programs aimed at bridging social sciences and medicine.

It is Edelman's hope that "by bringing together psychology and psychiatry in a groundbreaking program that provides a critical clinical component to undergraduates, there will be not only more psychologists, but ones who are better trained too." Thanks to his generosity, UC San Diego psychology undergraduates are on an exciting new path to future success.

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