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Vice Chancellor for Research Sandra A. Brown Receives Two Prestigious Research Awards

Brown receives recognition from NIAAA and American Psychological Association

UC San Diego Vice Chancellor for Research Sandra A. Brown has received two national recognitions for her pioneering research in the field of psychology. In August she received the Distinguished Scientific Contributions to the Application of Psychology Award from the American Psychological Association (APA). Last month she delivered the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)'s prestigious Mendelson Lecture.



Vice Chancellor for Research Sandra A. Brown

“Dr. Brown embodies the entrepreneurial, dedicated ethos that makes UC San Diego unique,” said Executive Vice Chancellor Elizabeth H. Simmons. “Whether in her role as vice chancellor, in which she has shepherded a strong trajectory of innovation and commercialization or as a researcher where she has led pathbreaking studies on youth addiction, she is deeply committed to her work and our university. I’m delighted to congratulate her on these well-deserved awards.”

The APA award for distinguished scientific contributions is given by the Division 50 Awards Committee. Division 50 is the Society of Addiction Psychology section of the APA and promotes advances in research and clinical practice related to addictive behaviors. The award is conferred on the member who has made distinguished contributions to the application of psychology through the discovery and development of new information or through the development of new modes of clinical practice for addictive behaviors.

University of Florida Professor of Psychiatry Sara Jo Nixon sits on the Division 50 awards committee and stated that “Dr. Brown was recognized for her distinguished contributions to the discovery and development of new information in the addictions field. The depth and breadth of her body of work reflects that of an exceptional scholar, mentor and clinician.”

The NIAAA’s Jack Mendelson Honorary Lecture Series was created to celebrate Mendelson’s contributions to the field of clinical alcohol research. The lecture is given by a researcher whose work has contributed to better understanding of susceptibility to alcohol addiction, alcohol’s effects on the brain, or prevention and treatment of alcohol addiction.

NIAAA Director Dr. George F. Koob stated, “We are pleased to honor Dr. Brown for her pioneering, innovative research which is providing important information on the etiology of vulnerability for substance use disorders and on prevention and treatment of adolescent alcohol and other substance misuse.”

Brown’s lecture, titled “Discerning Risks and Effects of Alcohol in the Midst of Adolescent Development,” will discuss the prevalence of adolescent alcohol use and the brain development and function that make it a prime time of concern. The lecture will also discuss the longitudinal approach to studies which allows for comprehensive assessment over many years, and the merits of the open-science model, where research data is made widely available to the research community.

Brown, who became vice chancellor for research in 2010, is also a Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry and has spent decades conducting pioneering studies of youth addiction and adolescent development. She has received 28 federally funded grants including the current National Consortium on Alcohol and Neurodevelopment in Adolescence (NCANDA) study and Adolescent Brain Cognitive Development (ABCD) study.

Supported by the NIAAA, NCANDA studies youth from across the country to determine the effects of alcohol use on the developing adolescent brain. The focus of the study is to comprehensively assess youth before and after the onset of substance use and to evaluate the impact of these substances on the trajectories of brain maturation, cognitive functioning and other developmental milestones. The study is currently in its eighth year.

The nationwide ABCD study is the largest longitudinal study of youth development ever funded by National Institutes of Health. The goal of the study is to track youth development from late childhood for ten years using behavioral assessments, genetic and biological information and neuroimaging technologies. Following an open science model, the data collected is available through a national data archive. This study is in its third year.

In addition to having over 300 peer-reviewed publications, Brown has received numerous awards and recognitions for her research. She has received the NIAAA New Investigator Research award and two MERIT Investigator Awards. Additionally, she has received multiple awards for her service and mentoring, including the Research Society on Alcoholism's Alan G. Marlatt Young Investigator Mentorship Award.

She is involved in addiction prevention and intervention at the regional and national levels and helped lead NIAAA's effort to establish national screening and early intervention guidelines for youth. Prior to becoming vice chancellor for research, Brown directed the development of clinical, education and research activities as the chief of psychology at the Veterans Affairs Health Services System in San Diego.

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