

July 07, 2015 | By Laura Margoni

Anthropology Professor Thomas J. Csordas Named to Dr. James Y. Chan Presidential Chair

Thomas J. Csordas, renowned anthropologist and director of the Global Health Program at the University of California, San Diego, has been appointed the inaugural holder of the Dr. James Y. Chan Presidential Chair for Global Health in the Division of Social Sciences.

The endowed faculty chair was established with a \$500,000 pledge from retired physician James Y. Chan, and matched through the University of California's Presidential Match for Endowed Chairs. The endowed chair will provide a dedicated source of funds for the chair holder's scholarly activities as well as support for undergraduate and graduate students with global health interests.



Thomas J. Csordas

“With his generous gift, Dr. Chan has created a lasting legacy that will help us to better understand health, illness and healing issues throughout the world,” said UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “This gift will benefit many generations to come, and we are very grateful for his support.”

A graduate of the National Taiwan University College of Medicine, Chan was for many years a urologist in Texas, where he often worked with underserved populations. When he retired to La Jolla, he became familiar with UC San Diego and its student-centered, research-focused, service-oriented mission. Impressed by what the campus was doing, he made gifts to support various initiatives and areas, including the Hispanic Scholarship Council, the biomedical library and Scripps Institution of Oceanography. When the [Global Health Program](#) – a new interdisciplinary undergraduate degree program – launched last fall, Chan's interest was piqued.

“In a world with constantly shrinking borders, global health is an extremely important issue,” Chan said. “I wanted to help give the study of global health the proper resources and recognition it deserves.”



Thomas J. Csordas (left) with Dr. James Y. Chan and Carol Padden, dean of the Division of Social Sciences. Photo Credit: Mala Poe

Social Sciences Dean Carol Padden explained that the program is one of the division's strategic priorities. "Dr. Chan's creation of this endowed chair is a powerful statement on the value of the program to the campus, to the community and to society. It also helps to bring attention to the excellence of our current faculty."

UC San Diego's Global Health Program is the first of its kind within the University of California system.

According to Csordas, the program is truly interdisciplinary, bringing together coursework and faculty from the UC San Diego divisions of Social

Sciences, Biological Sciences, and Arts and Humanities, the School of Medicine, the Rady School of Management, and Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

"Students gain an in-depth understanding of the complex nature of health problems," said Csordas. "They learn that to solve these problems, they must approach them from a perspective that transcends national borders and regional differences while taking cultural difference and diversity fully into account."

Csordas has long been inspired to understand how healing, transformation and change occur in human existence. As an anthropologist, his principal interests are in medical and psychological anthropology, comparative religion, anthropological theory, cultural phenomenology and embodiment, globalization and social change, language and culture. Throughout his distinguished career, he has conducted ethnographic research with Charismatic Catholics, Navajo Indians and adolescents in the American Southwest on such topics as therapeutic processes in religious healing, ritual language and creativity, sensory imagery, self-transformation, techniques of the body, causal reasoning about illness, and the experience of psychiatric inpatients.

Now, with funds from the endowed chair, Csordas will continue his work on behalf of the Global Health Program, particularly by supporting student research. He also plans to promote the field of global mental health and continue work on the relation of religion and mental health.

"I feel immensely gratified that of all the remarkable activities on our campus Dr. Chan could have chosen to support with his gift, he chose the Global Health Program," he said.

University of California President Janet Napolitano launched the Presidential Match for Endowed Chairs program on July 16, 2014. The program initially allocates \$4 million per UC campus for use as an incentive to encourage donors to establish endowed faculty chairs. The program could potentially add 100 endowed faculty chairs to the UC system over the next five years. It is funded through the

Presidential Endowment Fund, a source of private donations that the president may use at her discretion to support university activities. Each presidential match will be \$500,000 and campuses must raise at least \$500,000 per chair in donor funds to qualify for the match.

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