

June 18, 2014 | By Inga Kiderra

UC San Diego Names New Dean of Social Sciences

 Carol Padden

Photo by Erik Jepsen/UC San Diego Publications

Carol Padden, an award-winning scholar of sign languages and a longtime member of the University of California, San Diego community, has been appointed dean of the Division of Social Sciences at UC San Diego, effective Oct. 1, 2014. The appointment follows an extensive national search.

A recipient of the MacArthur Fellowship, popularly known as the “genius grant,” Padden has been on the faculty of the UC San Diego Department of Communication since 1983, when she earned her Ph.D. from the university’s Department of Linguistics. An affiliate member of the Center for Research in Language, the Human Development Program and the Department of Education Studies, Padden served as associate dean and faculty equity advisor in the Division of Social Sciences from 2008 to 2013. She currently serves as UC San Diego’s interim vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion.

Padden’s main areas of research are language emergence, sign language structure, and cultural life in deaf communities. She plays a central role in promoting research on sign languages around the world and in shaping policy and practices that promote the full participation of deaf people in society.

“I can think of no better collaborator than Carol Padden to help advance UC San Diego’s vision of being a student-centered, research-focused, service-oriented public university,” said UC San Diego Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “Carol’s distinguished record of achievement – beginning as a student at our campus and continuing to this day as a researcher and as an administrative leader – will serve our university, and also our region and nation, advancing the important work of the social sciences.”

As dean, Padden will lead a dynamic and highly ranked academic division with more than 9,000 undergraduates, 600 graduate students, and faculty spanning 10 academic departments and 16 interdisciplinary programs and research centers that focus on some of the most pressing and important social issues of our time.

“Carol is a respected and admired scholar who has proven to be an effective leader and consensus builder in her administrative service to the campus,” said Suresh Subramani, executive vice chancellor for academic affairs at UC San Diego. “Her passion for and historical knowledge of UC San Diego will be invaluable as she works with the social sciences faculty and students to further the interdisciplinary and cross-divisional research collaborations envisioned in our strategic plan. She is a great listener, but above all she is very analytic and solution oriented. I am delighted that she has agreed to join the Academic Affairs leadership team as dean of the Division of Social Sciences.”

“I’ve been associated with the division of social sciences at UC San Diego for a long time,” said Padden, “first as a graduate student starting in the late 1970s and then as a faculty member to the present time. I’ve seen many changes over the years, and tremendous growth. I’m honored and pleased to be asked to be a part of its future. The division is made up of exciting, highly original and innovative departments, each by itself. Collectively, they comprise among the best of social-science departments in the country. My role is to create opportunities for even more growth and accomplishment in each department and the division as unit.”

Holder of the Sanford I. Berman Chair in Language and Human Communication in the Division of Social Sciences, Padden was named a MacArthur Fellow by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation in 2010. She was cited for “illuminating the unique structure and evolution of sign languages and the specific social implications of signed communication.” Other distinctions include being elected a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Linguistic Society of America. She is also a recipient of the John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship, a UC San Diego Faculty Research Lecture award, a UC San Diego Chancellor’s Associates Outstanding Faculty award and a Laurent Clerc Cultural Award for distinguished contributions to the field of deafness.

Her research is funded by the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation. She has also received research support from the U.S. Department of Education and the Spencer Foundation.

Padden has published widely in areas relating to language evolution, culture and genes, comparative sign language structure, reading in deaf children and deaf community history.

Together with her husband Tom Humphries, who is also a member of the UC San Diego faculty, Padden has published two textbooks on American Sign Language and two ground-breaking books about the history of the deaf community in the U.S.

In 2005, Padden, with colleagues from the University of Haifa and Stony Brook University, published an analysis of the [Al-Sayyid Bedouin Sign Language](#), a language created in a small village in Israel's Negev Desert. The PNAS paper was the first linguistic analysis of a language arising naturally with no outside influence, and the findings made headlines in national and international press. In 2008, *New York Times* reporter Margalit Fox chronicled her travels with the research team in a book titled "Talking Hands: What Sign Language Reveals About the Mind."

Padden was born in Washington, D.C., the second deaf child of deaf parents who were both on the faculty at Gallaudet University. She first attended a school for deaf children but transferred to the public school system in third grade. It was a long adjustment for her and one she describes as being "akin to being educated abroad." Her interest in linguistics and culture, she writes, "is strongly rooted" in those formative experiences of "moving between different worlds and languages," between the hearing world and the familiarity of signed language at home. She and Humphries have a hearing daughter who is bilingual in ASL and spoken English, and currently a doctoral student in biology at UC San Diego.

Padden earned a B.S. from Georgetown University in 1978, at which point she joined UC San Diego as a graduate student.

Padden will serve as the fourth dean of the Division of Social Sciences. She follows Jeff Elman, distinguished professor in the UC San Diego Department of Cognitive Science, who is returning to his work on campus as an internationally recognized scholar of psycholinguistics and artificial neural networks. Elman has agreed to continue his service as dean through the end of September.

At the UC San Diego Convocation in fall 2013, Padden said to incoming students: "A university education is not just about courses you will take and the friends you make here, but it's about becoming a person ... Learn your value system and your own truth, and how to apply this insight in any area of study. Acquire flexibility in your point of view."

In her new role as dean, she intends to follow her own advice and plans to work closely with the students, faculty and staff in the Division of Social Sciences, helping the division continue doing its ground-breaking work on the science of society, pursuing research, teaching and service in the public interest.

MEDIA CONTACT

Inga Kiderra, 858-822-0661, ikiderra@ucsd.edu

UC San Diego's [Studio Ten 300](#) offers radio and television connections for media interviews with our faculty, which can be coordinated via studio@ucsd.edu. To connect with a UC San Diego faculty expert on relevant issues and trending news stories, visit <https://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/media-resources/faculty-experts>.