

UC Regents approve endowed chair in Biology at UCSD honoring the late Stephen W. Kuffler

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REGENTS APPROVE ENDOWED CHAIR IN BIOLOGY AT UCSD HONORING NEUROBIOLOGY PIONEER STEPHEN W. KUFFLER

SAN FRANCISCO -- The University of California Board of Regents today approved establishment of an endowed chair in the Department of Biology at the University of California, San Diego to honor the late Stephen W. Kuffler, a pioneer in studying the fundamental mechanisms of the nervous system.

The action came at the Board's May meeting, held in San Francisco.

The endowment of the Stephen W. Kuffler Chair in Biology was made possible by an anonymous gift of \$500,000 from an East Coast-based foundation. The gift was given in honor of Kuffler, who served as the John Franklin Enders University Professor at Harvard until his death in 1980. The chair holder is to be a faculty member "whose research concerns significant issues of neurobiology or cell biology," and income from the endowment will go to support his or her research and scholarly activities.

The Hungarian-born Kuffler graduated from medical school at the University of Vienna and joined the faculty of Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in 1947. In 1959, he moved to the medical school at Harvard where he helped to establish the Department of Neurobiology in 1966. Among his many honors, Kuffler was elected a member of the National Academy of Sciences in the United States and a foreign member of the Royal Society of Great Britain.

During his 40-year career, Kuffler contributed to the understanding of the process by which nerve endings signal the contraction of skeletal muscle; he pioneered studies of the activation and nervous control of sense organs; and he identified for the first time important functions of neuroglia cells, which outnumber neurons in the brain.

"In books on neurobiology, Kuffler's papers form a sizeable fraction of the reading list, and one is struck by the clear-cut answers that were provided to well-defined problems that continue to be important," commented UCSD Biology Chairman Nicholas C. Spitzer. "Time after time, Stephen Kuffler carried out experiments on fresh topics, hitherto confused or ignored, in which he revealed fundamental mechanisms and laid paths for future research to follow. In each instance, a striking feature of his work was the way in which the right problem was tackled at the right time, using the right preparation."

Spitzer noted that he himself is one of four neurobiologists on the UCSD faculty who studied at Harvard in the department Kuffler created.

"It is particularly fitting that an endowed chair in our multidisciplinary department bear Stephen Kuffler's name," Spitzer said. "He, more than anyone else, gave meaning to the idea of 'neurobiology' -- a discipline in which the nervous system is studied in terms of cell biology, using physiological, immunological, anatomical, biochemical and molecular genetic approaches."

The anonymous donor is establishing the chair in recognition of UCSD's "efforts and achievements in education and research" in neurobiology and cell biology.

The UCSD Biology Department, established in 1960, now ranks sixth in the nation in undergraduate biology programs, according to the 1987 Gourman Report on National Education Standards. In both cell biology and biophysics, the UCSD undergraduate programs rank fourth.

Other published studies show that UCSD ranks first among public universities in the U.S. both in the percentage of its undergraduates who go on to medical school and the percentage of undergraduates who pursue advanced science degrees.

The biology department currently enrolls 154 doctoral and eight master's candidates in its graduate program.

The 65 faculty members in biology represent a wide range of disciplines, including biochemistry, biophysics, cell biology, conservation science, developmental biology, genetics, immunology, molecular biology, neurobiology, plant molecular biology, population biology, evolutionary biology and virology. Eight members of the biology faculty are members of the National Academy of Sciences.

The Kuffler Chair brings the number of endowed chairs at UCSD to 34, all of them established since 1981.

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