

UCLA POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARS RECEPTION

THE UCLA POSTDOCTORAL SCHOLARS RECEPTION was established in 1998 to recognize the important contributions that postdoctoral scholars make to the inter-related missions of research, teaching, and public service at UCLA. At this ceremony, the Chancellor's Award for Postdoctoral Research is conferred on particularly accomplished individuals. The nominees come from virtually every discipline at UCLA, from the basic and applied sciences to the professional schools, the social sciences, and the humanities. This year's ceremony, held on March 14, 2007, honored the work of the following five outstanding scholars. →





Naomi I. Eisenberger

Understanding Social Pain

"I am exceedingly impressed by Dr. Eisenberger's intellectual and professional maturity to generate hypotheses of broad conceptual importance and depth and to carry her research efforts forward at all practical levels. She is an emerging star in psychology and in the area of neuroscience—and a major asset for the UCLA community."

Michael Irwin

Cousins Center for Psychoneuroimmunology

Why does rejection hurt? Naomi Eisenberger is using neuroimaging techniques to examine the pain that results when social connection is lost or threatened. Her findings, published in *Science*, show that the social pain resulting from rejection produces a pattern of neural activity that is strikingly similar to the activity occurring during physical pain, a finding with implications for understanding how physical and social perceptions are linked.

"I first became interested in science after learning about the intricate ways in which mind and body are linked," she says, "for example, learning that social support makes people live longer or

that stress can make people sick. This is one of the main reasons that I got interested in psychoneuroimmunology." Dr. Eisenberger came to UCLA as an undergraduate and stayed on to do her doctoral degree and now a postdoctoral fellowship with Dr. Michael Irwin at the Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior.

Today, she is focusing on the relationship between social ties and health. "In other words, why is it that being or feeling socially connected keeps us healthy, whereas being alone or feeling disconnected puts us at a greater risk for all kinds of negative health consequences," she says. "The connection between social support and health is one of the most documented relationships but one of the least well understood." Her research is the first to investigate the neural underpinnings that link physical inflammation and depression. In particular, she is examining whether immune system activation, which increases inflammation, also increases sensitivity to social pain, which might make depression more likely. She is the first UCLA recipient of funding from the Dana Foundation in the program area of neuroimaging and immunology.

In July, she will join the Psychology Department as an assistant professor, and she plans to continue both teaching and research at UCLA.