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THE *Current*

April 23, 2007

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UCSB Neurobiologist Receives Faculty's Highest Honor

University of California, Santa Barbara neurobiologist Steven K. Fisher has received the highest honor the UCSB Academic Senate can bestow on its members -- he has been named 2007 Faculty Research Lecturer. Fisher, a professor of molecular, cellular, and developmental biology, is an internationally acknowledged expert in diseases of the retina, the light-sensitive tissue inside the eye that interfaces with the brain via the optic nerve.

Last year's recipient, Howard Giles, professor of communication, presented the award to Fisher at the Faculty Legislature. Fisher has been a UCSB faculty member since 1971. He and colleagues at a recent meeting of the Neuroscience Research Institute (NRI) have pioneered the use of oxygen therapy to slow or reverse the negative effects of retinal detachment.

Giles cited a number of scholars and distinguished scientists who praised Fisher for, among other things, his laboratory, which "has almost single-handedly laid the basis for our current understanding of the condition now known as retinopathy of detachment." Another said, "He is, simply, the best."

When Fisher, who founded and ran the NRI for 16 years, was awarded the Von Sallmann Prize for vision research and ophthalmology in 2002, his comments shed light on what drives him: "My career has been built around a desire to contribute to our understanding of the organization and function of the vertebrate retina," he said.

"Although this has taken me along various satisfying paths, my most current and perhaps most satisfying emphasis is on the biology of induced retinal detachment."

The award committee, Giles noted, was impressed by Fisher's contributions to the campus beyond his research prowess. Besides his service to his department and to UCSB, he has devoted time to the Chancellor's Isla Vista Commission. Giles said Fisher has also "been an outstanding teacher and mentor," teaching a lower division class of more than 600 students for many years and mentoring some 25 graduate students.

Fisher will present the 2007 Faculty Research Lecture on June 4.

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