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### UC Santa Barbara Scholar is Among 13 Winners Nationwide of \$2.5-M. 'Pioneer' Awards from National Institutes of Health

September 29, 2005

(Santa Barbara, Calif.) – A psychology professor at the University of California, Santa Barbara is one of 13 innovative researchers from across the country who were named today by the National Institutes of Health as recipients of the NIH Director's Pioneer Award for 2005.

As a recipient of the prestigious award, Leda Cosmides, a professor of psychology and co-director of the Center for Evolutionary Psychology at UC Santa Barbara, will receive up to \$500,000 per year in direct research costs for the next five years. Cosmides and her husband and collaborator, John Tooby, a professor of anthropology at UCSB, have developed evolutionary and computational approaches to human motivation and neural development, which they will test with the research funds provided by the Pioneer Award.



Click for downloadable image  
**Leda Cosmides**  
Credit: Miranda Savani

The awards were announced today in a ceremony at the NIH campus in Bethesda, Maryland, by Elias A. Zerhouni, M.D., director of the National Institutes of Health.

The Pioneer Award is a key component of the NIH "Roadmap for Medical Research," a program of far-reaching initiatives designed to transform the nation's medical research capabilities and speed the movement of discoveries from laboratory to bedside. The Pioneer Award supports exceptionally creative scientists who take innovative approaches to major challenges in biomedical research. It gives recipients the intellectual freedom to pursue groundbreaking new research directions that could have significant impact if successful but that, due to their novelty or other factors, also have inherently high risks of failure. This year's recipients were selected by the NIH director from among 840 nominated scientists, based on recommendations made by panels of outside experts and an advisory committee.

"The scientists we recognize with Pioneer Awards have far-ranging ideas that hold the potential to make truly extraordinary contributions to many fields of medical research," said Dr. Zerhouni, the NIH director. "The recipients reflect the talent and diversity of the impressive group of scientists who competed for the award. The strength of this group, and the willingness of a number of NIH institutes to contribute funds to the program, led us to make nearly twice as many awards as we originally planned. This speaks volumes about the exciting opportunities that lie ahead, and we look forward to seeing where the visionary concepts of our Pioneer Awardees lead."

A member of the UC Santa Barbara faculty since 1990, Cosmides earned her Ph.D. in psychology at Harvard University in 1985. She was a postdoctoral scholar in the Department of Psychology at Stanford University for four years before coming to UC Santa Barbara. With Tooby, she founded the Center for Evolutionary Psychology, of which the two are co-directors. They have collaborated on research for 26 years and are widely known for their work in pioneering the new field of evolutionary psychology, a multidisciplinary approach that weaves together many fields—evolutionary biology, cognitive science, human evolution, neuroscience, and psychology among them—into a new approach to discovering the mechanisms of the human mind and brain. Among their many publications is a 1992 volume they co-edited, "The Adapted Mind: Evolutionary Psychology and the Generation of Culture," and a forthcoming book they co-authored, "Universal Minds: Explaining the New Science of Evolutionary Psychology."

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Cosmides has been recognized with many awards and distinctions for her work. She won the American Association for the Advancement of Science Prize for Behavioral Science Research, and the American Psychological Association Distinguished Scientific Award for an Early Career Contribution to Psychology. She has also been a Guggenheim Fellow.

She says the NIH Director's Pioneer Award is one that will have a major impact on her research. "Tooby and I have been doing research on a shoestring for many years," she explained. "Because our work crosses so many disciplinary boundaries, the normal funding mechanisms just can't handle it. We are so grateful that the NIH recognized the problem that people like us face and created this amazing award. It is going to unleash so much creative talent in our lab—we are thrilled at the possibilities this Pioneer Award will open."

Her selection for the NIH award was greeted with great enthusiasm by her colleagues at UC Santa Barbara. "This is wonderful, exciting news," said Chancellor Henry Yang. "This prestigious award brings well-deserved recognition to an outstanding scholar and tremendous honor to both her and our campus."

Said Martin Moskowitz, dean of the Division of Mathematical, Life and Physical Sciences: "Leda Cosmides, in collaboration with John Tooby, has been a pioneer in demonstrating the role of evolution and evolutionary forces in determining human behavior. Among their path-breaking discoveries, one that has totally transformed genetics globally, is the fact that genes contained in mitochondria, genetic material inherited solely from the mother and not localized in the chromosomes, are powerful drivers in evolution. This has totally revised the way we view evolutionary forces, enlarging the battle of the sexes to encompass cellular processes."

James Blascovich, professor and chair of the Department of Psychology, said Cosmides "epitomizes this award. She (and her colleague, John Tooby) truly pioneered the field of evolutionary psychology. They changed the role of evolutionary theory in psychology from an assumption to a major focus of empirical research. This award confers prestige on Professor Cosmides, and reinforces UCSB investments and Psychology Department efforts to recruit stellar faculty and to build innovative research and training programs benefiting the whole university."

The announcement of the 2005 Pioneer Awards was made at the first annual NIH Director's Pioneer Award Symposium. This event featured individual talks and a roundtable discussion by the inaugural group of awardees, who were selected in September 2004.

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