

Epel selected as Vice Chair for Adult Psychology

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By Nicholas Roznovsky [1]



Elissa S. Epel, PhD [2]

Health psychologist Elissa S. Epel, PhD [2], has been tapped to join the Department of Psychiatry's leadership team as its vice chair for adult psychology. Her appointment in the new role will begin October 1.

Epel studied psychology and psychobiology at Stanford University and received her PhD in clinical and health psychology at Yale University. After completing an NIMH-funded postdoctoral fellowship at UCSF, she joined the Department of Psychiatry as a faculty member in 2002.

Now a professor in residence, Epel is a renowned researcher who has conducted extensive work on the psychological, social, and behavioral underpinnings of chronic psychological stress that accelerates biological aging, with a particular focus on the telomere/telomerase maintenance system. She also studies the interconnections between emotional processes, eating, and metabolism.

The American Psychological Association has recognized her research work on four separate

occasions, including in 2008 when she received the group's Distinguished Scientific Award for Early Career Contributions to Psychology. Epel has also been honored with the Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research's Neal Miller New Investigator Award, the International Society for Psychoneuroendocrinology's Curt Richer Young Investigator Award, and the Alliance for Aging Research Bipartisan Congressional Award. She was elected to the National Academy of Medicine, one of the highest honors in the fields of health and medicine, in 2016, and is the current president of the Academy of Behavioral Medicine Research.

Epel was a founder and is now director of the UCSF Center for Obesity Assessment, Study, and Treatment (COAST) [3], an umbrella organization for clinical/translational research at UCSF focusing on the role that socio-economic status and stress pathways play in the obesity epidemic, and led a ten year multicampus research program in obesity. She is also the associate director of the UCSF Center for Health and Community [4] and UCSF Nutrition Obesity Research Center [5], as well as a core faculty member in the NIMH-funded UCSF Psychology and Medicine Postdoctoral Fellowship [6] and the UCSF Osher Center Training in Research in Integrative Medicine (TRIM) Fellowship [7]. She has mentored over 20 postdocs and graduate students.

As director of the UCSF Aging, Metabolism, and Emotions Center [8], Epel studies how people can thrive in both mind and body under severe adversity, such as poverty, caregiving responsibilities, work-related stress, and depression. Her work with the UCSF Osher Center for Integrative Medicine has included clinical trials examining how mindfulness can affect stress pathways, compulsive eating, and cell aging.

As the vice chair for adult psychology, Epel will work closely with other leadership group members – particularly the vice chair for child and adolescent psychology, Stephen Hinshaw, PhD [9] – to provide strategic guidance on the practice of psychology within the department and other critical issues.

"I am looking forward to having the majority of our department together in the new UCSF Child, Teen and Family Center and Department of Psychiatry Building," said Epel, who is based at the Center for Health and Community (CHC) alongside colleagues such as Nancy Adler, PhD [10]; Nicole Bush, PhD [11]; Alexandra Crosswell, PhD [12]; Wendy Mendes, PhD [13]; Aric Prather, PhD [14]; and Danielle Roubinov, PhD [15].

"At the CHC, we are excited that we will be able to share our fantastic talks and peer grant review program with the rest of the department once we are all in the new building. I am particularly eager to talk with my colleagues about ways we can create an even more cohesive and supportive culture for psychologists and all department members," she added.

"Elissa is a world-class investigator who has a strong commitment to advancing the field of psychology broadly and a particular interest in promoting diversity and inclusion," said Oberndorf Family Distinguished Professor and department chair Matthew W. State, MD, PhD [16]. "She is an ideal person to help us move forward on these critical departmental priorities, and I could not be more thrilled to have her join our leadership team."

About UCSF Psychiatry

The UCSF Department of Psychiatry [17], UCSF Langley Porter Psychiatric Hospital and Clinics

, and the Langley Porter Psychiatric Institute are among the nation's foremost resources in the fields of child, adolescent, adult, and geriatric mental health. Together they constitute one of the largest departments in the UCSF School of Medicine and the UCSF Weill Institute for Neurosciences, with a mission focused on research (basic, translational, clinical), teaching, patient care, and public service.

UCSF Psychiatry conducts its clinical, educational and research efforts at a variety of locations in Northern California, including UCSF campuses at Parnassus Heights, Mission Bay and Laurel Heights, UCSF Medical Center, UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals in San Francisco and Oakland, Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center, the San Francisco VA Health Care System, and UCSF Fresno.

About the UCSF Weill Institute for Neurosciences

The UCSF Weill Institute for Neurosciences ^[19], established by the extraordinary generosity of Joan and Sanford I. "Sandy" Weill, brings together world-class researchers with top-ranked physicians to solve some of the most complex challenges in the human brain.

The UCSF Weill Institute leverages UCSF's unrivaled bench-to-bedside excellence in the neurosciences. It unites three UCSF departments—Neurology, Psychiatry, and Neurological Surgery—that are highly esteemed for both patient care and research, as well as the Neuroscience Graduate Program, a cross-disciplinary alliance of nearly 100 UCSF faculty members from 15 basic-science departments, as well as the UCSF Institute for Neurodegenerative Diseases, a multidisciplinary research center focused on finding effective treatments for Alzheimer's disease, frontotemporal dementia, Parkinson's disease, and other neurodegenerative disorders.

About UCSF

UC San Francisco (UCSF) ^[20] is a leading university dedicated to promoting health worldwide through advanced biomedical research, graduate-level education in the life sciences and health professions, and excellence in patient care. It includes top-ranked graduate schools of dentistry, medicine, nursing and pharmacy; a graduate division with nationally renowned programs in basic, biomedical, translational and population sciences; and a preeminent biomedical research enterprise.

It also includes UCSF Health ^[21], which comprises three top-ranked hospitals — UCSF Medical Center and UCSF Benioff Children's Hospitals in San Francisco ^[22] and Oakland ^[23] — as well as Langley Porter Psychiatric Hospital and Clinics, UCSF Benioff Children's Physicians, and the UCSF Faculty Practice. UCSF Health has affiliations with hospitals and health organizations throughout the Bay Area. UCSF faculty also provide all physician care at the public Zuckerberg San Francisco General Hospital and Trauma Center, and the San Francisco VA Medical Center.

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