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4th Annual UCI Innovator Awards Ceremony Recognizes Distinguished Researchers and Inventors

Irvine, Calif., October 28, 2021 – Top researchers and faculty members from UC Irvine (UCI) gathered virtually for the 4th annual UCI Innovator Awards ceremony.

UCI Beall Applied Innovation, with generous support from Don and Ken Beall, created these awards to recognize UCI researchers working actively to promote commercialization of university intellectual property, which supports industry growth and moves inventions from the lab to the market to benefit humankind. This can be done through invention disclosures filed, patents applied for and/or received, technologies licensed or startup companies formed.

“Beall Applied Innovation plays several key roles for UCI: they lead our technology transfer efforts, develop industry sponsored research and, of course, encourage entrepreneurship. This event is special because it recognizes those among our faculty whose research is generating novel ideas with practical implications,” said Hal Stern, provost and executive vice chancellor and chancellor's professor, Department of Statistics, UC Irvine.

There are three award categories and nominations were submitted by deans and leaders of special research programs and were then reviewed by an external selection committee.

Here are the nominees and winners for each category:

The Emerging Innovation/Early Career Innovator of the Year Award - Recognizes distinguished innovators who have demonstrated excellence in the early stage of their careers, or in the early stages of an innovation breakthrough, through a combined effort in outstanding research and innovation.
Anand Ganesan, M.D., Ph.D., Professor, School of Medicine
Han Li, Ph.D., Associate Professor, Henry Samueli School of Engineering
Iryna Zenyuk, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Henry Samueli School of Engineering
And the winner is ... Iryna Zenyuk, Ph. D., Associate Professor, Henry Samueli School of Engineering.
Professor Zenyuk has established herself as a leader in electrochemical engineering by pioneering novel approaches to electrochemical energy conversion and storage, which are expected to play a critical role in reducing the world’s carbon footprint and achieving a sustainable energy future.

The Entrepreneurial Leader of the Year Award - Recognizes distinguished innovators who have demonstrated an enterprising spirit and drive by taking one or more significant innovations developed in the university to market-readiness and also provided inspiration and empowerment to others to adopt entrepreneurship.
Daniele Piomelli, Ph.D., Professor, School of Medicine
Joseph Rinehart, M.D., Associate Professor, School of Medicine
Michelle Khine, Ph.D., Professor, Henry Samueli School of Engineering
Tibor Juhasz, Ph.D., Professor, School of Medicine.

And the winner is ... Daniele Piomelli, Ph.D., Professor, School of Medicine.
Professor Piomelli’s research has focused on molecules involved in the control of pain and appetite. He’s been particularly interested in molecules related to the cannabinoids, think marijuana, that occur naturally in vivo.

The Innovator of the Year Award - Recognizes distinguished innovators who have demonstrated excellence by developing a breakthrough idea, process or technology and shown its transformational potential to improve lives and create economic value.
Albert Yee, Ph.D., Professor, Henry Samueli School of Engineering
Joyce Keyak, Ph.D., Professor, School of Medicine
Sunny Jiang, Ph.D., Professor, Henry Samueli School of Engineering

And the winner is ... Sunny Jiang, Ph.D., Professor, Henry Samueli School of Engineering.

The World Health Organization estimates nearly 4 million deaths result from waterborne diseases each year. The rapid detection of microbial pathogens in water is critical for public health worldwide. Dr. Jiang has invented a portable pathogen analysis system (PPAS) that can be operated by anyone, with minimal training. Her system was the basis for a National Science Foundation’s Rapid Response Research program to investigate the risk of aerosol transmission of SARS-CoV-2 from human wastewater and she is currently optimizing the system for testing of SARS-CoV-2 in wastewater to track the spread of disease among communities.

“We are so proud all of all the nominees and, of course, our winners. These awards truly highlight the brilliance of our innovators and the diversity of innovation across UCI,” noted David Tiemeier, managing director of Research Translation, Beall Applied Innovation.
The Innovator Awards are an annual celebration of UCI’s innovators and entrepreneurial leaders. For more information about Beall Applied Innovation, please go to www.innovation.uci.edu.

About UCI Beall Applied Innovation
As a dynamic platform that supports and provides resources to faculty, innovators and entrepreneurs, UCI Beall Applied Innovation plays a critical role in building the modern and inclusive American Dream where UCI innovation meets industry to accelerate discoveries that matter, provide entrepreneurs what they need to succeed and help build a powerful and potent economy.

About the University of California, Irvine: Founded in 1965, UCI is the youngest member of the prestigious Association of American Universities and is ranked among the nation’s top 10 public universities by U.S. News & World Report. The campus has produced three Nobel laureates and is known for its academic achievement, premier research, innovation and anteater mascot. Led by Chancellor Howard Gillman, UCI has more than 36,000 students and offers 224 degree programs. It’s located in one of the world’s safest and most economically vibrant communities and is Orange County’s second-largest employer, contributing $7 billion annually to the local economy and $8 billion statewide. For more on UCI, visit www.uci.edu.