



American College of Neuropsychopharmacology

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Gregory Quirk receives the ACNP Dolores Shockley Minority Mentoring Award:

The American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) has named Gregory J. Quirk, Ph.D., as the winner of the 2020 Dolores Shockley Minority Mentoring Award. Dr. Quirk is a Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Anatomy & Neurobiology at the University of Puerto Rico School of Medicine.

Dr. Quirk completed his undergraduate training at Northwestern University and his Ph.D. at SUNY Health Science Center at Brooklyn studying place cells with Robert Muller. After starting the first neuroscience laboratory in Honduras at the National Medical School (with a Fulbright grant), he returned to New York to do a post-doc at NYU studying fear learning with Joseph LeDoux. In 1997, he went to Ponce, Puerto Rico to start his own lab on fear extinction. He attests his lab grew quickly due to the excellent students who committed themselves to this work. Dr. Quirk has a strong interest in training first class science in developing countries. Dr. Quirk believes that science must engage more of the world countries and cultures if we are going to solve the big mysteries of the brain.

A lineage of young neuroscientists from diverse backgrounds trace their scientific roots to a 'fear lab' in Puerto Rico that the National Institutes of Health has been supporting for two decades. A crucible for studies of fear extinction, this lab so far has published 100 papers, some the first ever from Puerto Rico for certain journals. Of 130 trainees to date, 90 percent are from Puerto Rico and Latin America and half are women under the leadership of Dr. Quirk. *"Like most labs, the key has been fostering intellectual growth through journal clubs, lab meetings, weekly one-on-ones, and philosophy of science retreats," said the lab's founding director, Gregory Quirk, Ph.D. "Done right, these four activities develop skills of logic, communication, and intellectual inquisitiveness in trainees while also building group cohesiveness."*

An outstanding neuroscientist who is an internationally recognized leader in the field of extinction learning and its relationship to human anxiety, Dr. Quirk has arranged his entire career in order to be able to foster the development of underrepresented minorities in neuroscience. Dr. Quirk purposefully pursued a research career in Puerto Rico with the goal of promoting the development of Latinx neuroscientists. He has succeeded tremendously both in science and mentoring. He has dedicated his career to make a difference in the world not just with his science but socially.

Dr. Anthony Grace had this to say about his commitment to mentoring: *“Greg Quirk is the most generous and selfless scientist I have ever met. He has moved from centers of excellence in the US to work in Honduras and Puerto Rico, and now the Philippines in order to give back to the community, to train individuals who have never had the opportunity to do advanced science, and has promoted those who worked for him to positions of success. I cannot imagine any individual that is more deserving of such an award.”* You can measure this success in metrics – he has trained over 100 students and postdocs in neuroscience, including tens of undergrads, most of whom have continued on to graduate and medical schools. He has seeded an entire generation of Latinx neuroscientists, many now in faculty positions with more on their way. And he has ensured that basic and translational science have become part of the undergraduate and medical curricula at the University of Puerto Rico.

Dr. Scott Rauch underscores this point: *“I cannot imagine a more deserving candidate in our field for the ACNP Shockley Award. While Greg’s contributions to science as a creative and rigorous researcher are profound, they have been eclipsed by his incredible impact in mentoring trainees and faculty, and especially those who are under-represented in medicine. His pioneering efforts in Puerto Rico and beyond, set the standard for generativity. As a trailblazer, his passion, tenacity, humility, commitment, wisdom and generosity have been an inspirational model for the rest of us to follow. We owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude.”*

The Dolores Shockley Minority Mentoring Award presented at the 59th Virtual Annual Meeting of the ACNP is in recognition of an ACNP member who has been particularly successful in mentoring young scientists from underrepresented groups in the field of neuropsychopharmacology and related disciplines. The award was named in honor of Dr. Dolores Shockley, the first Black woman to receive a PhD in Pharmacology in the United States and the first Black woman to chair a Pharmacology department in the United States. Dr. Shockley, who was known for her humble and loving spirit, taught and mentored many students and was role model to many. She passed away at age 90 this year. However, her legacy lives on in the work that those like Dr. Quirk do to mentor and train the next generation of scientists.

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ACNP, founded in 1961, is a professional organization of more than 1000 leading scientists, including four Nobel Laureates. The mission of ACNP is to further research and education in neuropsychopharmacology and related fields in the following ways: promoting the interaction of a broad range of scientific disciplines of brain and behavior in order to advance the understanding of prevention and treatment of disease of the nervous system including psychiatric, neurological, behavioral and addictive disorders; encouraging scientists to enter research careers in fields related to these disorders and their treatment; and ensuring the dissemination of relevant scientific advances.