

Posner Receives National Medal of Science

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Michael Posner receives the National Medal of Science from President Obama.

Michael Posner received the United States' highest scientific honor when he was awarded the National Medal of Science in an October 2009 White House ceremony. Posner, an APS Fellow, Charter Member, and William James Fellow Award recipient, was recognized for his “innovative application of technology to the understanding of brain function, his incisive and accurate modeling of functional tasks, and his development of methodological and conceptual tools to help understand the mind and the development of brain networks of attention.”

A Professor Emeritus of the University of Oregon, Posner is a pioneer of cognitive neuroscience, being one of the first researchers to use then-emerging brain-imaging techniques to understand brain processes underlying complex tasks. Even after decades of influential research, his ground-breaking work continues — he is currently collaborating with visiting Chinese scientist Yi-Yuan Tang on exploring the benefits of integrative mind-body training and with long-time colleague Mary K. Rothbart on applying his seminal work on attention to understand the development of attentional capacity in infants and children.

Posner felt that it was a distinct honor to receive the Medal from President Barack Obama. At the medal ceremony, President Obama spoke about the importance of science to society, saying, “There are those who say we can’t afford to invest in science, that it’s a luxury at a moment defined by necessities. I could not disagree more. Science is more essential for our prosperity, our security, and our health, and our way of life than it has ever been. And the winners we are recognizing only underscore that point.”

Posner was pleased about the recognition of his work and the field more generally. “Sometimes this recognition involves those whose formal training is not in psychology (e.g., Herbert Simon) and sometime people who are psychologists win awards in other disciplines (e.g., economics or neuroscience),” said Posner. But, in spite of this cross-disciplinary nature of psychology, and hence, its recognition, “the appropriate focus is on contributions to answering important questions concerning mind, brain, and behavior.”

More information about the medals and this year’s winners is available at <http://www.nationalmedals.org>.