THE ZELMAN COWEN ACADEMIC INITIATIVES PRIZE

For Discovery In Medical Research

June 2023
THE INTIATIVES

The Zelman Cowen Academic Initiatives was established in 2021, to continue the work of the Sir Zelman Cowen Universities Fund. Working with the Sydney-based group Education Heritage Foundation, it advises on academic initiatives to support Australian universities and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Since 1978 the SZCUF donated millions of dollars for the support of medical research, and the ZCAI will work to continue that tradition. The SZCUF also established a tradition of support for academic and students exchanges between Australia and the HUJI, and the ZCAI will work to continue this tradition, as well. Exchanges will be supported in any discipline, not just medical research. The ZCAI will also continue the Prize for Discovery in Medical Research established by the SZCUF; indeed, the value of the Prize has been recently increased.
THE PRIZE

The Zelman Cowen Academic Initiatives Prize for Discovery for Medical Research

Awarded in alternate years at the Hebrew University and at an Australian institution. It comprises an award of AUD$25,000. It is awarded for a discovery which has made a major contribution to the understanding or treatment of disease and has achieved or has potential to achieve therapeutic outcomes.

The prize was established in November 2004 in honor of the Fund’s patron, Sir Zelman Cowen who served as Governor General of Australia from 1977-1982. It was established by a special donation from the Hammond Trust.
Mr. Michael Dunkel

Mr. Dunkel is a Sydney solicitor. He holds a law degree from Sydney University and until 2013 was the managing partner of a law firm that he founded. He has had a long relationship with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Mr. Dunkel currently serves as President of the Australian Friends of the Hebrew University, having previously held the role for the New South Wales branch. Mr. Dunkel is also a member of the University’s Board of Governors and its Executive Committee. He is also a Governor of the Orion Foundation, which he helped establish to fund projects including the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Mr. Dunkel is an Honorary Fellow of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was also awarded an Honorary Doctorate in recognition of his services.

Mr. Robert Simons OAM

Mr. Simons has acted a Trustee of the SZCUF for over 20 years. He has had a significant and long-term association with the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was the first Australian associate to be invited to join the Hebrew University’s Executive Committee. Over a period of 26 years, Mr. Simons has held multiple roles for the Hebrew University, including President of both the Australian and NSW Friends of the Hebrew University, and as a member of the Board of Governors and its Executive Committee. He was granted a degree of Doctor Philosophiae Honoris Causa PhD by the University in recognition of his enormous contribution. Mr. Simons was also awarded an OAM for his contribution to education and his work with the Jewish community.

Professor Jonathan Stone

Professor Stone, now Emeritus with the University of Sydney, served as Managing Trustee of the Sir Zelman Cowen Universities Fund for 25 years. He is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Sciences.

Professor David Celermajer AO

Professor Celermajer is the Scandrett Professor of Cardiology at The University of Sydney and Director of Echocardiography at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. He is also the Clinical Director of the Heart Research Institute, sits on the National Heart Foundation of Australia’s Cardiovascular Health Advisory Committee, and serves as a Board Member of the Menzies School of Health Research. Professor Celermajer was appointed as an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for his services as a researcher and clinician in the field of cardiovascular disease.
The production of eggs, called oogenesis, is a fascinating and dynamic process, essential for embryonic development, fertility, reproduction, and women’s health. In humans, early oogenesis in the developing fetus determines by birth the number and quality of eggs for a person’s entire lifespan. Moreover, defects in early oocyte (early developing egg cell) and ovarian development are a leading cause for miscarriages and infertility, as well as reproductive syndromes and malignancies. The mechanistic defects, however, are unknown because we lack a fundamental understanding of these early processes. The overarching question studied in the Elkouby lab is how eggs are produced—focusing on open questions in early oogenesis, from the germline stem cell to the cellular mechanisms of ovary development and early egg production. His research employs a multidisciplinary approach to the developing ovary, and he pioneered the view of egg production by advanced quantitative and live microscopy of whole ovaries. His research resulted in several breakthroughs that contribute to our understanding of the earliest stages of egg production, generating knowledge that is directly relevant to human reproduction. He has won numerous grants and awards, including prizes for excellence in research, HUJI President and Rector Awards for Outstanding Publications, an ERC Consolidator grant, and the EMBO Young Investigator Award. Dr. Elkouby has four children; he enjoys travelling and scuba diving.

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

Newly identified structure in developing egg and sperm cells leads to better understanding of human infertility

The discovery of the zygotene cilium in eggs and sperm establishes a new subfield of research, and novel platforms for identifying entirely overlooked mechanisms toward transformative medicine.
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FOR DISCOVERY IN MEDICAL RESEARCH
At The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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