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Colón-Ramos Named Director of Wu Tsai Institute's Center for Neurodevelopment and Plasticity [1]

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Daniel Colón-Ramos has been named the inaugural director of the new Center for Neurodevelopment and Plasticity in the Wu Tsai Institute [3] at Yale University.

One of three cutting-edge, interdisciplinary centers at the Institute (alongside the Center for Neurocognition and Behavior and the Center for Neurocomputation and Machine Intelligence), Colón-Ramos will guide the Center for Neurodevelopment and Plasticity in understanding and mapping how brains form new connections and modify existing ones through development and

experience. Discoveries in the Center will advance common understanding of where human cognition comes from, why children are such prodigious learners, and how plasticity might be restored later in life. This work will have exciting implications for accelerating the acquisition of skills and knowledge, improving and personalizing education, and treating neurodevelopmental and neurodegenerative disorders.

“In science, every answer ends with a question,” Colón-Ramos said. “The most exciting part of our work as scientists is that quest of constant learning. The Wu Tsai Institute is bringing together disciplines that should be more frequently linked—neuroscience, behavior, and computation—to move us to the next level of knowledge.”

The Wu Tsai Institute was established through a generous gift by Joseph C. Tsai ’86, ’90 J.D. and his wife, Clara Wu Tsai, to form a dynamic, multifaceted organization bridging the psychological, biological, and computational sciences [4]. Led by Institute Director and Professor of Psychology Nicholas Turk-Browne, the Institute will join hundreds of researchers in understanding the brain and mind at all levels, leveraging the expertise of Yale faculty in an interdisciplinary, university-wide effort.

Colón-Ramos, the Dorys McConnell Duberg Professor of Neuroscience and Cell Biology at Yale School of Medicine [5], studies brain synapses and how they are assembled to build the neuronal architecture that underlies behavior. Born and raised in Puerto Rico, Colón-Ramos completed his B.A. at Harvard University, his Ph.D. at Duke University, and was a postdoctoral fellow at Stanford University. A member of the National Academy of Medicine, he is widely published and cited in medical literature, won a 2018 grant from the National Institutes of Health for high-risk, high-reward research, and was awarded a Landis Mentoring Award for Outstanding Mentorship in 2018.

“From the time Professor Colón-Ramos and I first met four years ago, we have been excited by the possibilities of integrating different approaches to studying human cognition,” Turk-Browne said. “He is the best kind of colleague—a brilliant scientist with remarkable expertise in his specialty, but also open-minded and broadly curious about the work of others, game for fun and stimulating conversations, and eager to pursue visionary ideas that push the boundaries of science, art, and community. This ability to inspire and bring people together around a common goal will be essential to the success of the Wu Tsai Institute.”

As Center director, and with a joint role as an Associate Director of the Institute, Colón-Ramos will oversee operating facilities and advanced equipment and technical staff at the Institute’s 100 College Street location (scheduled to open in fall 2022), as well as planning seminars and events, managing lab space for newly-recruited faculty, and interfacing with departments across Yale’s campus.

“Research at Yale is about so much more than pursuing a single discipline or subject in isolation,” said Michael Crair, Vice Provost for Research and Ziegler III Professor of Neuroscience and Ophthalmology and Visual Science. “We have a community of scholars and researchers here with a great depth of knowledge, certainly, but also a desire to share ideas and learn from each other. Professor Colón-Ramos exemplifies that spirit.”

“If you want to push yourself beyond what you know, you need to put yourself in environments with people from different disciplines and backgrounds,” Colón-Ramos, who has published on the importance of diversity in the scientific workforce [6], said. “The context for the Wu Tsai Institute and this Center is to catalyze those kinds of interactions. There are limitations in the way one person and a single discipline can think about things. The way we move beyond these limitations is to create the kind of inclusive, equitable environment where scholars with different viewpoints thinking about similar problems can come together, challenge their frameworks and bring their knowledge and questions together in the process of discovery.”

Tags:

- #DanielColon [7]
- #Yale [8]
- #WuTsai [9]

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