



James C. Smith, Ph.D.

After earning his Ph.D. in psychology from Florida State University in 1959, James Smith joined the faculty in the Department of Psychology. Since that time, he has received every award the university has to offer.

In 1992, Smith was named a

Robert O. Lawton Distinguished Professor, the highest honor faculty members can bestow upon a colleague. The following year, Smith received the University Distinguished Teacher Award honoring his lifetime of teaching excellence. In 2005, the College of Arts and Sciences honored Smith as its Graduate of Distinction.

Smith has also received international recognition for his scientific achievements including the Distinguished Career Award from the Society for the Study of Ingestive Behavior, a National Sigma Xi Lectureship, and the Mozell Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Chemical Senses from the Association for Chemoreception Sciences. In 2011, following 52 years on the Department of Psychology faculty, Smith retired. He is currently a professor emeritus at Florida State University.



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The 13th Annual JAMES C. SMITH LECTURESHIP SERIES

Presented by the Department of Psychology,
the Program in Neuroscience,
and the College of Arts and Sciences

Friday March 3, 2023
FSU Psychology Building Auditorium



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Welcome and
Introductory Remarks Sam Huckaba, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Florida State University

Introduction of Speaker Alan C. Spector, Ph.D.
Distinguished Research Professor
of Psychology and Neuroscience
Florida State University



“Putting the Brakes on Taste: GABA Inhibition in the Nucleus of the Solitary Tract”

Susan P. Travers, Ph.D.
Professor, Division of Biosciences,
College of Dentistry, Ohio State University

Susan Travers received her Ph.D. in 1980 in the laboratory of the late David V. Smith, Ph.D., a fondly remembered mentor who provided guidance while encouraging independence. In his lab, Travers acquired a career-long interest in the gustatory system, especially the question of taste quality coding. Here also she met her long-time collaborator, Joe Travers, Ph.D. As a postdoctoral researcher, she was fortunate to continue her studies of the taste system with Ralph Norgren, Ph.D., who remains a role model for how to approach research rigorously and creatively. Norgren is a pioneer in gustatory neuroanatomy who put taste in the broad context of feeding behavior and neural circuitry. Through Norgren’s scientific network, Travers became acquainted with the widely respected taste group at FSU, including the work of James Smith, Ph.D., professor of psychology.

For over three decades, Travers’ National Institutes of Health (NIH) funded research has been centered on brainstem taste processing in the nucleus of the solitary tract (NST) and parabrachial nucleus (PBN). Her research addresses questions of how taste quality is represented by neural activity, and she studies the neural substrates that allow for modulation of these signals in the context of the neural circuits underlying

perception and taste-guided behavior. An impressive characteristic revealed by these studies is its high degree of organization at the level of single cells and circuits.

Travers’ current studies have two main foci. A collaboration with Alan Spector’s lab uses mice lacking the canonical type 1 receptor dimers for “sweet” (T1R1+T1R2) and “umami” (T1R1+T1R3) taste. These studies are pinpointing the characteristics and origin of the remaining responses to these stimulus classes, whose incidence is considerable. A second line of investigation is clarifying the functions of a neglected population of neurons in the nucleus of the solitary tract, GABAergic inhibitory cells. These experiments are defining the characteristics of GABA cells and exploring their impact on responses to different taste qualities.

Travers is a long-time member of the Association for Chemoreception Sciences (AChemS) and has served in several of the organization’s leadership roles including as president. She is a prior recipient of the AChemS Ajinomoto Award and served as co-chair of a Gordon Conference on the Chemical Senses. Travers has served on numerous NIH grant review panels throughout her distinguished career and is a current member of the Neuroscience of Interoception and Chemosensation Study Section and an executive editor for Chemical Senses.

Travers’ research program has been continuously funded by NIH for 35 years, and the progress in her lab has relied on a long succession of undergraduate and graduate students, postdocs, and research assistants to whom she is most grateful.

The James C. Smith Lectureship Series

Established by a generous gift from Mr. Stan and Mrs. Paula Warmath, long-time friends and associates of James C. Smith, Ph.D., this annual lecture features an invited internationally renowned speaker who is conducting behaviorally oriented research on scientific problems in neuroscience. The Warmaths’ gift, combined with continuing donations from other friends, former students, and colleagues, as well as support from the Department of Psychology, the Program in Neuroscience, and the College of Arts and Sciences, provides the opportunity for FSU faculty and students to interact with these distinguished scholars during their visits to campus.

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