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Ben Barres and Thomas Jessell Receive the Ralph W. Gerard Prize in Neuroscience

WASHINGTON, DC — The Society for Neuroscience (SfN) will present its highest award, the Ralph W. Gerard Prize in Neuroscience, to Ben Barres, PhD, of Stanford University, and Thomas Jessell, PhD, of Columbia University. Barres and Jessell will share the \$25,000 prize which will be awarded during Neuroscience 2016, SfN's annual meeting and the world's largest source of emerging news about brain science and health.

The prize honors outstanding scientists who have made significant contributions to neuroscience throughout their careers. The highest honor conferred by SfN, the Gerard Prize was established in the name of Ralph W. Gerard, who was instrumental in establishing SfN and served as honorary president from 1970 until his death in 1974.

"It is a pleasure to honor Drs. Barres and Jessell with the 2016 Gerard Prize," SfN President Hollis Cline said. "Both have contributed invaluable research insights to their fields and have demonstrated strong commitments to furthering the knowledge and personal growth of other scientists through mentorship, training, and support."

Barres has made seminal contributions to our understanding of the mechanisms that control the formation of neural connections within the developing brain. He has elucidated fundamental molecular mechanisms by which glial cells control the formation and elimination of CNS synapses. His findings revealing that astrocytes and microglia normally prune synapses in the developing brain have also provided evidence that aberrant synapse pruning drives neurodegenerative processes in the adult brain with important implications for new treatments for Alzheimer's and other neurological diseases.

Even while making such important discoveries, Barres devoted time to mentor others and advocate for women in science. As an openly transgender man, he has a unique perspective on gender issues in academia and has become a visible figure in the national dialogue about the barriers facing women in scientific careers.

Jessell's research has provided critical insight into how groups of interconnected neurons, or circuits, arise within the spinal cord. The complexity of circuits in the mammalian brain greatly challenges researchers seeking to understand how circuits control behaviors. Jessell resolved the identities of the cells in spinal cord circuits that instruct movement. He also determined the molecular cues that dictate the development of spinal circuits and their function, offering new targets for therapies addressing spinal cord birth defects and cancer.

In his role as the director of the Zuckerman Mind Brain Behavior Initiative at Columbia University, Jessell has assembled a powerful team of researchers and continues to foster creative collaboration across scientific disciplines.

The [Society for Neuroscience](#) (SfN) is an organization of nearly 38,000 basic scientists and clinicians who study the brain and nervous system.