



Fall 2023 eNewsletter

UCLA CART

Message from Our Director

Dear Friends:

Once again, our campus is bustling with the energy of students, faculty, and staff coming together to shape their futures. The halls echo with the footsteps of those seeking to expand their horizons, challenge their boundaries, and uncover new truths. It is a reminder that the pursuit of knowledge is not merely a destination but a lifelong journey—one that we at UCLA CART strive for with enthusiasm and determination.

As we approach the end of the year, I reflect on the unwavering dedication of our exceptional team at UCLA CART. I am excited to spotlight recent grants earned by UCLA CART investigators that illustrate the center's contribution toward a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive examination and understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD):

- **Autism Genetics and Human Diversity Project** (PI: Daniel Geschwind, MD, PhD), funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- **EMERGE: Early Markers of Expressive and Receptive (language) Growth in Ethnically diverse autistic toddlers** (PI: Connie Kasari, PhD), funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- **Exploratory Investigation of Bilingualism, Executive Function, and Brain Organization in Children with Autism** (PI: Lucina Uddin, PhD), funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH)

Despite these achievements, many challenges persist as we continue to try to go beyond current boundaries of knowledge, as traditional funding mechanisms often lag behind the pace of our groundbreaking work. The need for philanthropic support also arises when grant funding faces limitations or gaps in meeting the financial requirements of a project. Making progress on the most cutting-edge work requires more nimble mechanisms to test new ideas, provide proof of principle, and take risks. Your [gift](#) will be used as a catalyst for research that transforms theoretical concepts into tangible, real-world applications. For those interested in supporting our clinical work, your [gift](#) will allow us to extend our clinical activities to help underserved populations. Your partnership in supporting UCLA CART is more than a financial contribution; it's a commitment to progress and the pursuit of knowledge.

At this time of year, I hope you consider making a [special contribution](#) to help us continue advancing ASD research, clinical care, and training the future autism investigators and clinicians. The following are a few of our funding priorities:

1. Scholarships for underrepresented students in the UCLA CART Sigman Scholars Research Program (\$2,000 per student)
2. Scholarships for low income families to access the full range of care available at our clinics (\$5,000 per family)
3. Support for early-phase new treatment development to enable an initial study of a promising new behavioral or medical treatment approach (\$50,000 per project/can be renewed annually)
4. Support career development for students and junior faculty (\$55,000 trains one graduate student for one year; \$90,000 trains one post-doctoral fellow for one

year)

I wish to express my sincere gratitude for your continued partnership and commitment to UCLA CART. I am humbled as I reflect back upon the major strides our team of researchers and scientists have made towards a better understanding of ASD. If you would like to discuss other funding opportunities at CART, please contact: Chris Carbado, Sr. Director of Development, at (310) 562-498 or ccarbado@mednet.ucla.edu.

Thank you again for your continued partnership and commitment. I wish you and your loved ones a healthy and happy New Year!

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Daniel H. Geschwind".

Daniel H. Geschwind, M.D., Ph.D.

Gordon and Virginia MacDonald Distinguished Professor of Neurology, Psychiatry, and Human Genetics Director, UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment (CART)
Senior Associate Dean and Associate Vice Chancellor, Precision Health
David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

UCLA CART
HIGHLIGHTS

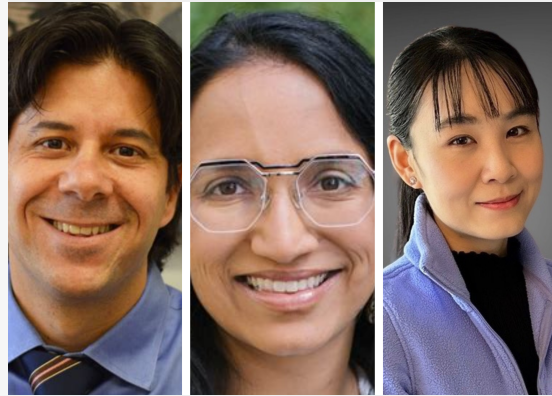


Supporting Autistic Teens and Young Adults in Navigating Dating and Romance

As autistic children transition into adolescence and young adulthood, they may become interested in dating and relationships. The core features of autism can influence a person's understanding of dating, relationships, sexual intimacy, and sexual behaviors (Stokes, Newton, & Kaur, 2007). Challenges with social communication, social awareness, and social cognition (i.e., perspective-taking), can lead to confusion and misinterpretation, particularly when it comes to dating and romance (Sala, Hooley, & Stokes, 2020). In addition, while most teens and young adults learn about dating and receive romantic advice from their peers, autistic individuals may not have a peer group to lean on for this information and may be more likely to obtain their information from external sources such as random websites, television, and movies – sources that typically do not provide a realistic representation of relationships and sexual intimacy (Pecora, Mesibov, & Stokes, 2016). It is therefore important for parents, professionals,

and educators to support autistic teens and young adults in navigating these exciting and often challenging times by providing a safe space to talk about sex and dating.

[> Read more](#)



Celebrating 20 Years of Innovation: UCLA CART Announces Pilot Grant Program Awardees

Exciting developments are on the horizon at the UCLA Center for Autism Research and Treatment (CART) as we announce recipients of the 20th UCLA CART Pilot Grant Program: Dr. Carlos Portera-Cailliau, Dr. Aparna Bhaduri, and Dr. Emily Wu. This program funds one-year pilot and/or feasibility studies for biomedical, epidemiological, or behavioral research. The purpose of these awards is to foster interactions and interdisciplinary research projects in the basic and clinical areas of autism.

[> Read more](#)



UCLA CART Honors Chloe Ritika as the 2023 UCLA CART Sigman Scholar in Its 6th Consecutive Year

In its 6th consecutive year, UCLA CART has named Chloe Ritika the 2023 UCLA CART Sigman Scholar. The UCLA CART Sigman Scholars Research Program recognizes highly promising UCLA undergraduate students interested in completing a short-term, in-depth research project under the mentorship of a UCLA CART faculty member. This program continues to be a central component of UCLA CART's mission, exposing students to scientific research. It encourages and engages students considering careers in science, medicine, and public health focused on autism spectrum disorder.

[> Read more](#)

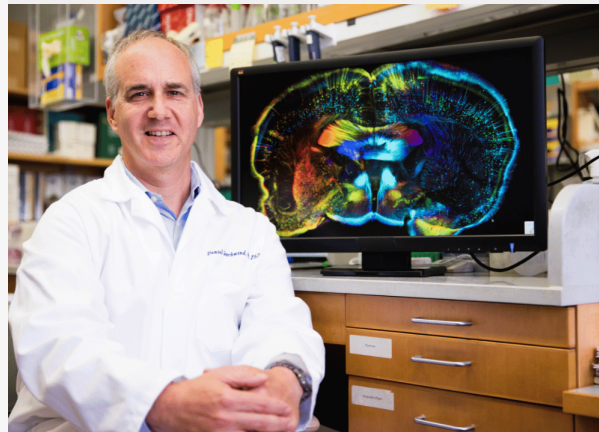
UCLA CART
RESEARCH UPDATES



Continuing the Journey to Explore Autism Genetics in African American Families

We are excited to announce that Dr. Daniel Geschwind's Autism Center of Excellence (ACE) Network focused on the genetics of African Americans receives its fourth consecutive five-year award from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). The NIH's ACE Network grants are designed to support large, collaborative research projects that aim to advance our understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and improve the lives of autistic individuals and their families. The ongoing Autism Genetics and Human Diversity Project will continue UCLA CART's partnership with the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Emory University, Johns Hopkins University, Washington University in St. Louis (WUSTL), and Yale University.

[> Read more](#)



New Genetic Insights: UCLA's Geschwind Lab Unravels the Complex Role of Inherited Variants in Autism Among Multiplex Families

A new autism genetic study from the Geschwind Lab at UCLA, recently published on PNAS, describes the role played by rare and common inherited variants, transmitted from parents to their children, in families with two or more autistic children. The authors hypothesized that in these “multiplex” families the genetic variants determining an autism diagnosis would be different from those identified in “simplex” families with only one autistic child. Most autism genetic studies to date have largely focused on simplex families in which the autism diagnosis represents a very rare event controlled by genetic

variants called de novo that appear in an individual despite not being present in their parents. On the other end, in multiplex families' autism diagnoses are more frequent and likely determined by rare and common inherited genetic variants, transmitted from parents to their children.

[> Read more](#)

Advancing Autism Research: The Latest Updates from the Lord Lab



Under the leadership of Dr. Catherine Lord, the investigative team from the Lord Lab is actively advancing our understanding of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Their research spans a diverse range of topics, including anxiety, depression, and well-being in autistic adults and adults with other developmental disabilities. They also explore the perceived negative impact of caregiving demands in parents of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders. Additionally, the team is undertaking a new project that examines whether the Spanish and English versions of the ADOS-2 detect autism symptoms differently in bilingual individuals.

[> Read more](#)



New Lord Lab Study to Explore Social Connectedness and Well-being Among Caregivers of Adults with Autism and Developmental Disorders

We are excited to announce a five-year study focused on the family caregivers of individuals with autism and developmental disorders. Funded by the National Institute on Aging and led by Dr. Catherine Lord, this initiative builds upon Dr. Lord's ongoing study tracking individuals initially identified based on developmental concerns during their toddler years. Now in their mid-30s, these adults continue contributing important insights as one of the longest-running longitudinal studies of individuals with ASD. However, this new study will shift the focus toward their families, aiming to identify specific factors that influence the well-being of lifetime family caregivers.

[> Read more](#)

UCLA CART
UPCOMING EVENTS

January 19

9 - 10 AM PT

UCLA CART DISTINGUISHED LECTURE SERIES

**Dr. Michael Talkowski in
conversation with Dr. Daniel
Geschwind**

[Register](#)



**UCLA
CART**



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