

THE *Current*

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[Sonia Fernandez](#)

Mechanical Engineering Professor Chosen as Fulbright Scholar

Mechanical engineering professor Megan Valentine has been chosen to receive a Fulbright Scholar Award. The highly sought award will enable her to conduct engineering research in France, her host country for several months until her return in January 2016.

“I am honored, as a Fulbright awardee, to be among such distinguished colleagues and am very excited about the opportunities the Fulbright Scholar Award affords,” said Valentine, whose research focuses on the mechanical forces generated in living tissue that influence cellular outcomes. She will be conducting research with materials scientist Costantino Creton, who is the research director of the Soft Matter Science and Engineering Laboratory of The City of Paris Industrial Physics and Chemistry Higher Educational Institution (ESPCI ParisTech).

“I will be working with Professor Creton at ESPCI ParisTech to capture the strength, toughness and self-healing properties of living materials in synthetic systems, and will learn new approaches to adhesion mechanics and polymer engineering,” explained Valentine. In addition, she said, the collaboration will not only provide the opportunity for the exchange of ideas and methods for research, it will provide insight into student engagement and education, particularly with regard to recruitment and retention of women into the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) disciplines. ESPCI ParisTech has a 40 percent female demographic in its undergraduate class of 2015.

For Valentine, who received tenure in 2014, this sabbatical will be her first. “I am fortunate that technology has progressed to the point that I anticipate very little disruption to the day-to-day functioning of my lab and experiments,” she said. “My students and I often communicate via email and have already discussed the logistics of moving our weekly group meetings to an online videochat platform.”

It was through an invitation to give research presentations in Paris at Institut Curie and Institut Jacques Monod, in 2013, that Valentine first became interested in the French educational system. She said she looks forward to deepening those scientific relationships, expanding collaborations and facilitating meaningful interactions between UCSB and ESPCI.

“Living in a foreign country, especially having rented an apartment in Paris’ lively 5th arrondissement (also known as the Latin Quarter), is sure to provide constant social and intellectual stimulation,” said Valentine. “Although I know I will love living and working in Paris and traveling throughout Europe to meet students, colleagues and collaborators, I’m sure I will be ready to escape winter and return to sunny Santa Barbara in January 2016. My biggest concern is that the faculty colleagues to whom I sublet my Santa Barbara home will not want to leave upon my return!”

The Fulbright Program, administered by the U.S. Department of State, is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government and is designed to increase cooperation between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. Named for former Arkansas senator J. William Fulbright, the program is based on the principles of international partnership and mutual understanding. The J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, composed of 12 educational and public leaders appointed by the president, formulates policies for the administration of the program, establishes criteria for the selection of candidates and approves candidates nominated for awards.

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