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Caltech professor earns Vilcek Prize for research

Posted: 03/04/2010 11:40:40 AM PST

Alexander Varshavsky, Caltech's Howard and Gwen Laurie Smits Professor of Cell Biology, has been named a recipient of the 2010 Vilcek Prize in Biomedical Science, Caltech officials announced Wednesday.

The prize epitomizes the mission of the Vilcek Foundation, which was established to honor the contributions of foreign-born individuals in the United States.

Varshavsky, who emigrated to the United States in the 1970s from the Soviet Union, was recognized for his research "into the process of protein degradation, presenting the potential for cancer treatments with reduced side effects."

In honoring Varshavsky, the Vilcek Foundation notes that his "accomplishments reverberate beyond national and cultural boundaries. Dr. Varshavsky's research on the ubiquitin system led to the discovery of its fundamentally important biological functions in living cells, demonstrating that the regulated protein degradation underlies major physiological processes. Dr. Varshavsky's ground-breaking work has wide implications for research on the causes of birth defects, cancer, neurodegenerative syndromes, and immune disorders."

Each recipient of this year's Vilcek Prize will receive \$50,000 and a unique award sculpture created by noted designer Stefan Sagmeister to reflect the winner's personal journey as an immigrant. The prizes will be presented in April in New York City.