

University of Wisconsin – Madison News

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Stem cell pioneer Thomson elected to National Academy of Sciences

BY MADELINE FISHER

Pioneering University of Wisconsin-Madison stem cell scientist [James Thomson](#) was elected today (April 29) to the [National Academy of Sciences](#).

He is among 72 new fellows admitted to the 145-year old academy this year in recognition of their distinguished achievements and ongoing contributions to original research. Election to the National Academy of Sciences is considered one of the most prestigious honors that can be bestowed upon an American scientist.

Thomson, John D. MacArthur Professor of Anatomy, became in 1998 the first scientist to isolate and culture human embryonic stem (ES) cells. He now studies the basic biology underlying the ability of ES cells to become any cell type in the body, and how the cells choose to leave their blank-slate state and differentiate into specialized cell types.

Last year, he and UW-Madison scientist Junying Yu reported another landmark discovery: the genetic reprogramming of human skin cells to create cells indistinguishable from ES cells.

Thomson joined UW-Madison in 1994 and was appointed director of regenerative biology at the UW-Madison-based [Morgridge Institute for Research](#) earlier this year.