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Carnegie Mellon Gives McCandless Professorships to Up-and-Coming Robotics, Psychology Researchers

PITTSBURGH, June 8 (AScribe Newswire) -- Carnegie Mellon University has awarded the Anna Loomis McCandless professorship to Yoky Matsuoka, assistant professor in the Robotics Institute in the School of Computer Science, and the Estella Loomis McCandless professorship to **Jennifer Lerner**, an assistant professor of social and decision sciences and psychology. The professorships are given every three years to two junior faculty members who have shown great promise in their field.

Matsuoka is the head of the Neurobotics Laboratory in the Robotics Institute. The research group in the Neurobotics Laboratory builds a robot-human closed loop system to understand, rehabilitate, assist and enhance the human neural control of movement. For example, the research group constructs an anatomically correct robotic hand as a way to further understand how the human brain controls intricate finger movements. In another example, the group develops wearable assistive devices to restore movements for those without them. Through its research, Matsuoka's group is expected to help individuals with strokes, spinal cord injuries and traumatic brain injuries to move naturally using their own neural signals again.

"Yoky is a brilliant researcher, a pied piper when it comes to advising, and someone who deeply cares about the people who her research helps," said Chuck Thorpe, director of the Robotics Institute. "She embodies 'my heart is in the work' in the best ways."

Lerner is the head of the Emotion and Decision Laboratory at Carnegie Mellon. Drawing primarily on psychology as well as economics and neuroscience, the lab examines the influence of emotion on human thought and action. **Lerner's** recent work revolves around two domains: judgments of risk and choices in economic transactions. **Lerner** is one of several members of the university's Department of Social and Decision Sciences who are nationally recognized experts in how people evaluate and respond to risk. After the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, **Lerner** and her colleagues found that Americans who experience anger over the attacks are more optimistic about the future, less likely to take precautionary actions and more likely to favor aggressive responses than those who experience fear. More recently, **Lerner** authored a ground-breaking study that found that seemingly incidental emotions can influence the prices at which individuals buy and sell goods. **Lerner's** research revealed that people who are sad are willing to accept less money to sell something than they would pay for the same object.

"**Jennifer Lerner** is one of our most dynamic young faculty members. Her research on the role of emotion on judgment and decision-making is highly acclaimed and offers a wonderful example of Carnegie Mellon's interdisciplinary approach. She is also a gifted and devoted educator," said John Lehoczky, dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Carnegie Mellon.

The McCandless professorships were established by the late Anna Loomis McCandless; the Estella Loomis McCandless professorship was named for her mother. Anna Loomis McCandless was a 1919 graduate of Margaret Morrison Carnegie College, which closed in 1973. Margaret Morrison was an all-women's school that was one of the four original colleges in the Carnegie Institute of Technology, a predecessor of Carnegie Mellon. A native of Pittsburgh, McCandless worked for a private investor and then Fidelity Trust Co. after graduating from Carnegie Tech. She became the first female member of the Board of Trustees in 1967 and was named a life trustee in 1973. She was the longest serving female trustee, having served on the board for 29 years. In 1963, McCandless received Carnegie Mellon's Alumni Service Award.

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