Dr McKenna received the Palmes Academiques

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Axel Cruau, Consul of France in Los Angeles, bestowed Dr McKenna with the Palmes Academiques on September 26th, 2012.

Dr McKenna graduated from the University of California, San Diego with a PhD in Chemistry in 1971. Then, he received a fellowship from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to do research at Harvard University. After joining the University of Southern California as an Assistant Professor, he became a Full Professor in 1989. From 2008 to 2011, he was Chair of the Department of Chemistry at the USC Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences. He also held a joint appointment at the USC School of Pharmacy. In August 2012, he was appointed Vice-Dean for Natural Sciences, joining the new Dean of USC Dornsife, Steve Kay.

He is a distinguished scholar in the field of organophosphorus and medicinal chemistry. His work has created more efficient inhibitors of viral pathogens that cause diseases such as AIDS, CMV retinitis and other threats to health. He is also interested in the mechanism of DNA repair, developing novel imaging agents and studying biological nitrogen fixation, a phenomenon crucial for world food supplies. He has authored nearly 200 papers in prestigious peer-reviewed journals and he is an inventor on more than 20 patents.

Perfectly fluent in French, he earned a B.A. in French literature at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. He has worked closely with researchers in France. He is indeed at the origin of a collaboration between USC and the Institut Albert Bonniot (IAB) and the Institut de Biologie Structurale Jean-Pierre Ebel (IBS), both located in Grenoble. This collaboration that involved a significant number of students was awarded with a Partner University Fund (PUF) grant in 2010.