

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Regents Communication

ACTION REQUEST

Subject: Report of Faculty Retirement

Action Requested: Adoption of Retirement Memoir

James L. Abelson, M.D., Ph.D., professor of psychiatry in the Medical School, retired from active faculty status on December 31, 2025.

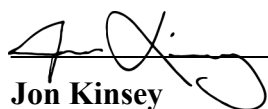
Dr. Abelson received his B.A. from Oberlin College (1974), Ph.D. from Michigan State University in clinical psychology (1980), and M.D. from the University of Michigan (1984). He completed his psychiatry residency and a fellowship in anxiety disorders at Michigan Medicine (1989), joining the Department of Psychiatry faculty as an instructor (1988). He was promoted to assistant professor in 1991, associate professor in 1996, and professor in 2006.

Dr. Abelson was an outstanding clinician, educator, scientist, leader, and developer of young talent, using his multi-dimensional perspectives as a psychiatrist, psychologist, and neuroscientist. His research focused on the body's central neuroendocrine stress response system, using experimental approaches to understand the psychology of cortisol release. He demonstrated, for example, that adopting a compassionate "helping others" perspective can reduce one's own biological stress response to a highly activating laboratory challenge. He also studied biological and psychological mechanisms of anxiety and stress disorders, eventually combining his neuroendocrine and "neural mechanisms of illness" work to contribute to new, ongoing R01 studies of PTSD pathophysiology. He sustained continuous NIH funding for 30 years. He also, simultaneously, made major contributions to patient care, clinical leadership, and mentoring, directing Psychiatry's Anxiety Disorders Program from 1996-2023; co-directing a Trauma, Stress and Anxiety Research Group from 2002 to 2020; and serving as academic director for Ambulatory Psychiatry from 2012 to 2025. Under his leadership, the Anxiety Program trained over 250 trainees from all mental health disciplines. He helped develop and lead mentoring programs nationally. He was Adult Psychiatry Teacher of the Year four times, the second recipient of Psychiatry's Kenneth R. Silk, M.D., Education Award, and an ADAA honoree for leadership and mentoring at the national level. He is perhaps most proud of the young people whose lives he touched with a growth-focused approach to mentoring, and his ability to leave his beloved clinic in good hands, with resources to support its leaders in perpetuity.

Dr. Abelson often led from behind-the-scenes, with special contributions to his department's chair selections, its Silverman Conference, the success of numerous colleagues' NIH grants, and the training, recruitment, mentoring, and promotion of many current colleagues. He also quietly helped thousands of patients, including many UM faculty dealing with anxiety and/or stress.

The Regents now salute this distinguished faculty member by naming **James L. Abelson, professor emeritus of psychiatry**.

Requested by:



Jon Kinsey
Vice President and Secretary of the University

November 2025