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Virginia B. Gray, PhD, RDN to Receive 2022 SNEB Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Nutrition in Higher Education Award

INDIANAPOLIS, IN (July 1, 2022) Dr. Virginia Gray will receive the Scholarship of Teaching & Learning Nutrition in Higher Education Award at the 2022 SNEB Annual Conference during the opening session on July 29, 2022, in Atlanta, GA. This award is presented by the SNEB Higher Education Division to recognize an SNEB member for their scholarly contributions to student engagement in higher education.

Dr. Gray has taught for 14 years at California State University, Long Beach utilizing the social ecological model to build perspective around social, community, and policy contexts in which individuals' health behaviors are made. Dr. Gray trains her students to integrate research and theory in designing community programs that meet diverse needs, as well as engendering a passion for questioning the status-quo. She regularly discusses her own reading in class to encourage her students to set aside time to think and be well read.

Dr. Gray co-led a mentoring program for new faculty in the College of Health and Human Services from 2015-2020. In this capacity, she developed and delivered trainings and informal mentoring sessions around teaching, research, service, and faculty life. She currently co-leads the Food Insecurity in Higher Education subcommittee of the Higher Education Division in developing a new research project for the group designed to investigate nutrition students' training to address food insecurity. Dr. Gray has led every element of the project, including developing the research questions, creating and programming the survey, gaining IRB approval, and developing the plan for survey administration.

Service learning is a pivotal part of Dr. Gray's teaching. As one example, in her community nutrition class students partnered for many semesters with a local rescue mission, delivering weekly nutrition lessons. "In this project, "the community became the classroom, and students were able to consider how to evaluate and improve their work for a real audience. This type of service-focused teaching requires time, coordination, and flexibility. It's also the teaching that students remember," said Rachel Blaine, D.Sc., MPH, RD

As a faculty mentor for the NIH-funded Building Infrastructure Leading to Diversity (BUILD) Initiative, she introduced Reah Chiong to the world of nutrition research. For two years, they worked on the implementation and evaluation of SUPERKids, a nutrition education program for parents and children focused on food parenting. Reah said, "In this experience, she taught me research skills such as how to carefully analyze qualitative data and how to develop a compelling academic poster. Beyond teaching me valuable skills that I still use today, she facilitated

intellectually stimulating discussions that were open and respectful of diverse perspectives and encouraged me to pursue avenues through my work that fostered creativity.”

Dr. Gray has served as chair for 40 Master’s theses, a member of 41 Master’s thesis committees, and mentor to 15 undergraduate researchers. As the letters from her former students indicate, she is an engaged, nurturing, creative, and innovative classroom instructor, and mentor.

“She has developed manuscripts for publication with her undergraduate students, giving them unique opportunities that most undergraduates do not get at that level. I have also served on graduate student thesis committees with her and am impressed with how she consistently works with those students to publish their thesis findings, again, something that is not common,” said Selena Nguyen-Rodriguez, PhD, MPH.

Dr. Gray has delivered conference presentations and published research related to integration of service learning and research into nutrition coursework. She has also contributed significantly to the past two editions of a leading text, *Community Nutrition in Action* (Boyle, 2021).

Dr. Gray’s teaching mentors include Dr. Sylvia Byrd, Dr. Charlotte Oakely, Dr. Gail Kauwell, and Dr. Christine Galvan. Collectively, these mentors have modeled the importance of connecting research, teaching, and practice in ways that serve communities. They’ve also convinced her to immerse herself in practical work alongside her students that builds perspective about audience needs. According to Dr. Gray, “service-focused teaching is critical in helping students reflect on their burgeoning professional identities, with a better understanding of how their knowledge and skills connect with their values. Service learning prepares students for entering the nutrition profession with curiosity, openness, and skills to meet evolving needs in the field.”

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