

## **COMMITTEE ON DISTINGUISHED TEACHING**

### **NOMINATION FOR THE 2020-2021 DISTINGUISHED TEACHING AWARD**

The Committee on Distinguished Teaching is pleased to nominate an outstanding educator as recipient of the 2020-2021 Distinguished Teaching Award.

#### **Professor Erin Rankin**

Professor Erin Rankin joined the Department of Entomology in 2013. Her research focusses on insect pollinators, from wild honeybees to damaging invasive wasps, in landscapes and bio-diversities such as coastal sage scrub areas to horticultural centers, plant nurseries, and strawberry farms in agricultural acreage. Her passion for teaching, research, and community service is impressive in breadth, allowing her to bring ideas about pollinators, ecology, and environment to students and the general public. Her dedication to new pedagogies is also impressive, as she has developed new courses and brought fresh critical thinking to her field.

Dr. Rankin became a National Academies Education Fellow in the Life Sciences, which required extracurricular training, and in 2016, she was a facilitator instructor for the HHMI/National Academies Summer Institute for college and university instruction in the life sciences. Subsequently, she participated in the Purdue University IMPACT pedagogical training for university faculty. She has put this training to use in assisting other faculty in developing improved pedagogy, improving her current courses, and developing desperately needed new undergraduate courses and graduate programs. With her colleague Dr. Kerry Mauck, Dr. Rankin developed ENTM 060W (Communication in Life Sciences) which was first offered in Fall, 2019. The course is a “writing across the curriculum” class and may substitute for ENGL 1C for a multitude of life sciences majors, offering them development in writing and critical thinking skills. Dr. Mauck wrote: “Because I have Dr. Rankin as a role model and mentor, I have felt comfortable, even as a pre-tenure faculty member, in seeking out opportunities for extra pedagogy training and new mentoring and curriculum-building efforts. We had often discussed the grand challenge of helping undergraduates grow as effective writers, especially regarding writing about science. Most students in the life sciences do not even attempt science communication, and especially writing about science, until they are nearing graduation. Dr. Rankin correctly surmised that this puts students at a disadvantage. To address this, we came up with the idea to design and co-teach a new course on communication in the life sciences that was open to freshman and sophomores. Since the course ran, we have kept in touch with some of the students. They all report continued use of the writing tools we used in the class for fellowship and grant applications, other courses, writing manuscripts, and even just finding effective ways to talk to friends in other disciplines about their work.”

Another new course developed by Dr. Rankin, ENTM 130 (Invasion Ecology), she taught first in Winter of 2020, and the class was valuable in filling a gap in student training for current ecological theory and approaches.

Dr. Rankin has consistently taught very large lecture service courses for the department, such as ENTM 010, Natural History of Insects, with enrollments averaging 300 students, as well as BIOL 005C, Introduction to Ecology and Evolution, with enrollments averaging 200 students. Her course evaluations emphasize her passion for teaching and engagement with students often taking courses they might find intimidating. “Professor Rankin exudes great enthusiasm for the course and material,” writes one student of BIOL 005C, and “exciting and engaging course” was the standard for many student evaluations. For ENT 010, “Engaging and informative,” “Enthusiasm and passion” are repeated many times in student remarks, as well as the singular comment, “Dr. Rankin is an infective and patient instructor.”

Dr. Rankin’s mentorship of undergraduate and graduate students is remarkable in scope, as befits a Distinguished Professor ranking. In 2016, Dr. Rankin served on eleven graduate committees, two post-doctoral committees, and mentored eight undergraduate students. In 2018, she served on an astonishing twenty graduate committees, eleven dissertation committees, and mentored fifteen undergraduate students. During that year, she also received a prestigious National Science Foundation grant. In 2020, Dr. Rankin served on nine PhD advisory committees, oversaw nine PhD dissertations, and one thesis.

Her individual dedication to students at all levels is impressively outlined in the many testimonial letters submitted on her behalf. Dr. Rankin served as faculty mentor to Nohely Hernandez Pineda, Class of 2020, who wrote, “I already faced imposter syndrome from being a Latina in STEM and for some unshakable reason I couldn't imagine professors as regular people who also had to wait in line for their drink at Coffee Bean... I felt a mountain of anxiety... Over the course of the summer, Dr. Rankin demonstrated what a leader in her field looks and acts like. She never made me feel less than for asking questions, if anything she encouraged me to ask more, and allowed me to experience a level of independence as a researcher that I had not yet felt. I felt welcomed in her lab and encouraged to network with other faculty members and graduate students. I was able to present our research at the 2018 RISE Symposium and this year we were able to publish a separate project in the Journal of Insect Behavior, all feats that I did not dream of when I first started my UCR journey.”

Danelle Angeline Baronia, MS candidate in Biology at UC San Diego, wrote that Dr. Rankin, “encouraged me to create and present a poster for the 26th Annual Entomology Student Seminar Day. While the prospect of presenting my research to a wealth of faculty well established in entomology was daunting, Dr. Rankin prepared me completely for the presentation. She oversaw my poster and helped me practice my presentation, offering both positive reinforcement and constructive criticism. When the time came for me to present, she was there to reassure me and help me feel at ease. Because of her preparation, I felt confident talking to others and I learned so much more about the entomology field. In the end, my poster had won 1st place out of the undergraduates who had presented that day. Even more rewarding than the poster presentation, at the project’s completion, Dr. Rankin informed both me and the Ph.D student I was working with that we could co-author a paper for publication. The prospect of this shocked me, as very few undergraduate students ever get such a big opportunity. Because she knew that I would be applying to graduate school within the next year, she helped us prepare a paper to submit by that December. This helped me immensely in my interviews with potential thesis advisors. Now that I’m in my program and the paper is published, I have presented the paper in current lab

meetings, where colleagues were impressed with this accomplishment so early in my career. When I first joined the Rankin lab, I was unaware of the wealth of opportunities that lay before me. It was Dr. Rankin that saw my potential and advocated for my growth. Apart from boosting my career in research, Dr. Rankin also created a community that showed that I belong in STEM. As an underrepresented minority in the ecological field, I have often felt a barrier between me and my peers. I certainly do not share a similar background, feeling out of place among mostly white colleagues and within my ability to work in the field. When I joined the Rankin lab, Dr. Rankin introduced me to everyone immediately. Having been in several labs before where lab members don't think it important enough to know undergraduate students' names, this was a first. Throughout my time in the lab, everyone was pleasant and it was the first time I felt a sense of community and belonging. I firmly believe that this is a positive reflection of Dr. Rankin's management."

Dr. Rankin's community service is also highlighted in this statement from Jacob Cecala, sixth-year PhD candidate in her lab: "Beyond her teaching, Erin has made other tangible contributions to our Department... Erin is also involved in educational outreach activities outside of the classroom and laboratory. Her lab has had an educational booth on pollinators at the annual Riverside Insect Fair for the past several years. She is also currently collaborating with an artist to create a children's activity book focused on bees. She has always made an active effort to involve her graduate and undergraduate students in these activities."

Finally, Dr. Rankin's dossier was extremely impressive, as it was outstanding in all aspects: teaching, research and service. From Dr. Richard Redak, Department Chair, "Dr. Rankin has been invaluable to our teaching mission. She served as Vice Chair of our Instruction and Student Affairs Committee, with the responsibility of overseeing graduate recruitment and assembling recruitment packages. The latter involves the detailed negotiations between Graduate Division, the Department, and individual faculty to piece together competitive five-year funding packages. Dr. Rankin also was the lead "driver" on the creation and successful implementation of our new 4+1 BS/MS degree program. Upon its approval, she served as faculty director/advisor for the first year of the program. Finally, Dr. Rankin is co-PI on an ILTI grant (with Dr. Redak) with the objective of restructuring ENTM 010 (Natural History of Insects) to be offered fully online at the UC systemwide level. We anticipate that there will be major uptake of this already very popular course."

In summary, Dr. Rankin has demonstrated exceptional teaching and mentoring of both undergraduate and graduate students at UC Riverside. It is obvious from the letters and comments on evaluations that her guidance and teaching have greatly impacted the careers and lives of numerous current and former students. For her sustained achievement in teaching excellence and educational innovation, Prof. Erin Rankin is fully deserving of the Academic Senate's Distinguished Teaching Award.