

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 Erith Jaffe-Berg

Professor Erith Jaffe-Berg joined the Department of Theatre, Film, and Digital Production in 2005. Since then, her research has been international and yet particularly focused on subjects very pertinent to the UCR and southern California community: the culturally-diverse forms of theatre and performance through multilingualism and *commedia dell'Arte*, and the ways student-written and student-led performances allow education to broaden linguistic and narrative horizons. Her passion for teaching, research, and community service is impressive and long-standing, during which time she's brought new ideas about performance and language to students and the general public. Her dedication to fellow professors, lecturers, former students and the performance community at large has been critical to their career success.

An expert in Italian Renaissance performance, Dr. Jaffe-Berg teaches not only her specialty in the elective course Renaissance Theatre but also survey courses including Theatre History I, Theatre History II, and Play Analysis. She has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, has served as Department Chair, has served on many graduate student committees and exams for both MFA and PhD programs. Dr. Jaffe-Berg has published two books, *Commedia dell'Arte and the Mediterranean: Charting Journeys and Mapping "Others"* (Ashgate Publishing, 2015) and *The Multilingual Art of Commedia dell'Arte* (Legas, 2009.) Since 2008, Dr. Jaffe-Berg has also directed and managed Playworks, an annual festival of short plays written and acted by students that serves as a classroom for theatrical production. Her pedagogy centers students' interests, provides opportunities for creative assignments, and always centers otherwise marginalized voices.

Associate Professor Donatella Galella worked with Professor Jaffe-Berg on improving the required Theatre History sequence for undergraduate students. She wrote, "Dr. Jaffe-Berg encourages her students to express their creativity as they process historical information and develop interpretations of plays. For Theatre History I, students could channel a character in a play that they had read and write a diary entry in their voice. In Play Analysis last year, she assigned *She Kills Monsters* by Qui Nguyen because the Department will produce the play next winter, illustrating how she plans ahead to prepare students from the classroom to the stage. One student created a musical adaptation of *She Kills Monsters* for their final project, and they might end up helping with sound design for the actual production of the play. Dr. Jaffe-Berg's syllabi also deliberately include artists who are not just white European men. Too often, these kinds of courses over-represent Shakespeare and Ibsen. For the Theatre History sequence, she teaches performance traditions from India, Japan, and the Middle East."

One of the most notable contributions to both the university community and the southern California area at large is Dr. Jaffe-Berg's direction and production of theatre performances not only on campus but also in the Culver Center for the Arts as well as the Black Box Theater at the Fox Performing Arts Center in downtown Riverside. From 2005, when Dr. Jaffe-Berg directed the play "Orange Grove," by Kate Anger, which limned the history of a Riverside citrus family, to current student productions, Dr. Jaffe-Berg has brought plays to life for large audiences. Anger, now a Continuing Lecturer in the department, wrote, "I have worked with Erith since 2005... I have witnessed her patient mentoring, deep listening, guided encouragement, and gentle correction ... from the most newbie stagehands to the most seasoned graduate students, Erith brings her best, most professional self, and makes each part of a production team feel valued. Since 2008, Erith has produced our annual playwriting festival, Playworks. I have worked alongside her, putting together the undergraduate portion of the evening. It's been amazing to see how, under her strong leadership, we've turned the festival into a highly organized, professionally run event... The best part of her management style is that she empowers the students to run the show."

Her mentorship of undergraduate, graduate students, and alumni, sometimes over a decade of assistance and encouragement, has transformed lives, as evidenced by seventeen letters of support for her nomination, written by former students who are now professional actors, directors, and faculty in other universities. Monique Mansour, Professor of Rhetoric at Loyola Marymount University, wrote: "...what I am doing now can be directly traced to Dr. Jaffe-Berg's teaching and mentoring efforts. I had told Dr. Jaffe-Berg that I was an American of Iraqi-Chaldean lineage. Being part of a small indigenous minority, I usually don't come across many people who have heard of or know of my background, but Dr. Jaffe-Berg did. As a millennial who came of age in a post 9/11 world, I held a lot of wounds and discomfort over sharing my heritage with others because of the ignorance and painful words that I had so often had to endure afterwards, but Dr. Jaffe-Berg made me feel so welcome and so comfortable not only identifying my background – but celebrating it. In her Play Analysis course that I took later that first year, Dr. Jaffe-Berg curated an illuminating list of plays for her students to analyze. I had never experienced such a course before where such a conscious effort was made on the part of the professor to not only make sure that there was a diversity in playwrights and ideas presented, but that the playwrights also helped to represent the students that made up her classroom. One such play was *Nine Parts of Desire* by Heather Raffo, a Chaldean-American like me. This was my very first time reading any sort of creative work by a Chaldean-American, and the experience was nothing short of transformative." Mansour received a Fulbright Fellowship to teach in Malta. "Without a doubt, I would not have been prepared for that experience had it not been for Dr. Jaffe-Berg. My American Iraqi-Chaldean community has a publication titled *The Chaldean News*. The editor-in-chief did a feature on me after I received my Fulbright, as I'm believed to be the first Chaldean-American Fulbright Scholar. Heather Raffo, playwright, saw the article and reached out to me. How serendipitous! I had studied Raffo's play in Dr. Jaffe-Berg's class and now here she was reaching out to me... To be honest with you, not a week goes by where I don't think about the imprints Dr. Jaffe-Berg has made on my life. She has been the most transformative educator I've ever had."

Chelsea Patricia Ramirez, an MFA Candidate in Film and TV Production at the USC School of Cinematic Arts, wrote, "I was extremely lucky to go through my university education having

Professor Jaffe-Berg at the helm of the program. She has encouraged me without hesitation to commit to my creative journey as she mentored me through my term as the LeMond Filmmaking Fellow in 2020. She supported and encouraged new work through every season of performance for the department and even amongst the smaller organizations such as the Latino Play Project and the Gluck Artistic Outreach program. Her door (both virtually and in-person) stays open to anyone who has questions, curiosities, or simply wishes to discuss their art in a constructive and rich conversation with her. I would not be who or where I am today without the kindness she has shown students like me, who perhaps did not know what we could amount to, but simply needed someone to believe in them and shine a light for them along the way.”

Aaron Higareda, Class of 2017, wrote, “I just transferred from community college and I enrolled in her seminar class Staging the Middle East. I vividly remember speaking with Dr. Jaffe-Berg after class one day as we walked past the University Theater. I explained to her how the play we analyzed that day reminded me a lot of agitprop Chicano theater, and I was surprised with her familiarity of El Teatro Campesino because she not only knew what I was talking about, but she also expanded my notion of the genre and form by recommending me to research Bertolt Brecht. And it was during those office hours where she not only encouraged me to pursue a creative final project for her Staging the Middle East course, but also encouraged me to pursue graduate studies...However, her kindest gift was her leap of faith to allow me the opportunity to pilot a social media internship for the Theater, Film, and Digital Production Department. Because of Dr. Jaffe-Berg and the experience I gained from that internship, I became the 2018-2019 Marketing Fellow for the American Conservatory Theater, a major nonprofit theater company in San Francisco. That fellowship exposed me to a world of theater I never would have had access to otherwise.”

In summary, Professor Jaffe-Berg has demonstrated exceptional teaching, dedicated and long-lasting university and community service, and quite remarkable mentoring of both undergraduate and graduate students at UC Riverside. It is obvious from the letters 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, Professor Jaffe-Berg is fully deserving of the Academic Senate’s Distinguished Teaching Award.