The Academic Senate Committee on Distinguished Teaching reviewed the Distinguished Teaching nomination files and recommends that Professor Margarita Curras-Collazo (Department of Cell Biology & Neuroscience) be awarded the Distinguished Teaching Award for 2009-2010.

**Margarita Curras-Collazo**

Since coming to UCR in 1993 Professor Curras-Collazo has developed an integrated style of teaching, advising, and mentoring that has inspired hundreds of students. From the high school students brought to UCR to participate in Brain Day, to the more than 80 undergraduate students who have conducted research in her lab, through the many graduate students that she has mentored, all have been touched by her commitment to engaging students at all levels in the excitement of research and learning.

Her nomination for the Distinguished Teaching Award was initiated by students, and included an impressive mountain of letters from current and former students, building to an avalanche of testimonials from many of her colleagues. The student letters often describe her as a teacher with the ability to grab their undivided attention, and leave them with the satisfaction of “having truly learned and understood the material rather than just memorizing it”. She has taught a wide range of classes, from large introductory ones such as Introduction to Neuroscience (CBNS 106), to specialized classes including Introduction to Oral Presentations (BCH 188), a Freshman Advising Seminar (NASC 091), and even outreach classes that sent undergraduates to local elementary classrooms to introduce concepts of neuroscience to K-12 students. High school students visiting UCR have been taught by students trained to teach neuroscience by Dr. Curras-Collazo. How could elementary school students resist learning how the human brain functions when it is acted out by costumed UCR Neuroscience majors using props such as cell phones and jumper cables, pretending to be sections of the brain reacting to the whistle of an approaching train? As one of the participating UCR Neuroscience actors said, “the high school students loved it; one looked at me and said ‘This is great – I thought today was going to be boring!’ ”.

Behind the scenes, Dr. Curras-Collazo has been a strong administrative advocate for undergraduate science programs and research. She was a Founding Member of the Faculty Advisory board for the UCR Undergraduate Research Journal; she has served on the steering committee for the undergraduate Neuroscience major since 1994 (which she has chaired in 2001 and in 2009); and has also served as the Director for the Biological Sciences undergraduate major.

Students trained by Dr. Curras-Collazo in the classroom and laboratory have gone on to impressive and diverse careers, from acupuncturist to patent lawyer, to research scientists, medical doctors, and biotechnologists. So many of these students cite Dr. Curras-Collazo as their inspiration and enabler. One letter from a former student ends by
saying that “My story stands consistent among many of my peers that have also had the opportunity to work with Dr. Collazo. Through her actions in and out of the classroom, Dr. Collazo is already a distinguished teacher in our hearts.”

Christopher Amrhein
Stephen Cullenberg
Yenna Wu
Marylynn Yates
Scott Fedick (Chair)