

KHS Professor Receives Highest Award from Utah Public Health Association

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Dr. Julie Gast was recently honored with the Beatty Award from the Utah Public Health Association.

Dr. Julie Gast, professor of Kinesiology and Health Science (KHS) and director of the Health Education and Promotion Master of Public Health program at Utah State, has been honored with the Beatty Award from the Utah Public Health Association (UPHA) for her long career of distinguished service in the field of health education and promotion. The Beatty Award is the UPHA's most prestigious achievement, given annually to a member of the association who has made a significant contribution to public health in Utah.

"We are lucky to have Dr. Gast in our college and department," said Dr. Eadric Bressel, department head of KHS. "This prestigious honor is well-deserved and reflects her dedication to public health programs at USU and across the state."

Gast began her academic career at USU in 1994 after earning her PhD in Health Education from Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. Since then, Gast has been a major force in developing strong graduate and undergraduate programs in the Kinesiology and Health Science department. Gast was integral in creating the Health Education and Promotion Master of Public Health program, which recently received accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health. The program's affordable, online format allows it to meet the needs of working professionals and non-traditional students, as well as extend opportunities for careers in public health to students in rural areas or on Native American reservations. To ensure that students from marginalized backgrounds

would feel welcome and supported in the program, Gast oversaw the creation of a peer mentoring program and mentored a graduate assistant to improve the diversity and inclusivity of the program.

In her teaching role at USU, Gast has taught courses on qualitative methods in public health, foundations of community health, health and wellness, and drugs and human behavior. She is deeply committed to the success of her students, encouraging them to go beyond the classroom and engage in research, professional associations, and academic groups such as the Pre-Occupational Therapy club, of which Gast previously served as advisor. Her former students work in a wide range of public health careers at all levels of leadership.

"Julie has an obvious love for public health and for her students at Utah State University," said Gast's nomination committee. "She is admired and well respected throughout the public health community in Utah and beyond."

Gast is also a dedicated researcher and is committed to elevating the voices of marginalized individuals and communities in her work. Gast's research interests including topics such as intuitive eating, weight bias and disordered eating, evidence-based sexuality education, and men's health. Most recently, she collaborated with Social Work professor Dr. Cris Meier to conduct the Utah College Sexual Behavior Survey in 2021 and 2022. This survey was the first known effort to collect data from Utah young adults about their sex behavior and perceptions of sex education based on their experiences as youth.

Gast was nominated for the Beatty Award by Sarah Hodson, Deputy Director of the Office of Health Promotion and Prevention at the Utah Department of Health and Human Services, and the nomination was supported by a committee Gast's colleagues, including Cris Meier and KHS professor Steve Hawks.