RAISING to RISE

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY BAKERSFIELD™

Faculty Feature



Dr. Rhonda Dugan

Professor, Sociology

For Dr. Rhonda Dugan, education has always represented more than a degree. It embodies opportunity, perseverance and something that can never be taken away.

An Illinois native, Dugan arrived at California State University, Bakersfield in 2005 with a deep appreciation for education's transformative power. Moving to Bakersfield was a significant change from what she had known. What began as a new chapter has grown into more than two decades of teaching, research and service. She joined CSUB as an assistant professor of sociology, became an associate professor in 2012 and was promoted to professor in 2024, when she also became department chair.

Dugan has worked alongside talented faculty, including CSUB alumni Dr. Jonathan Basilio, David Arrieta, Dahna Stowe, Lauren Lynch, Amanda Studebaker and Andres Sanchez, and the late James White III.

Three professors shaped her journey. At Illinois State University, Dr. Maura Toro Morn encouraged her to pursue graduate school and modeled mentorship. "I model her actions in terms of what it means to be a mentor and how to actually be one," Dugan said. At the University of Illinois, Chicago, Dr. R. Stephen Warner provided valuable research experience, while dissertation chair Dr. Nilda Flores Gonzalez demonstrated how to be a good professor and mentor.

Those experiences guide Dugan's teaching and research in race and racial identity, the intersection of race and popular culture and qualitative research methodologies.

Paying It Forward Through Student Research

Dugan's appreciation for education extends well beyond the classroom. Each year on August 29, which is her mother's birthday, she makes a gift to support the Student Research Scholars program in her mother's honor and memory, continuing her loyal support of the President's Associates.

"My mom was one of the smartest people I ever knew. She could have easily been a history or English professor. When my dad passed away two weeks before my senior year of my undergraduate degree, my mom pushed me to pull through and finish my degree. Later, as I was in the process of obtaining my Ph.D., I felt like giving up, but my mom told me that I could work anywhere I wanted after I finished my doctorate degree. No one could ever take that degree away from me because I had earned it."

Her mother's words remain with Dugan and help explain her commitment to creating opportunities for students. As an undergraduate she did not have the opportunity that CSUB Student Research Scholars have to conduct research one-on-one with a faculty member. Today, she helps provide that experience to CSUB students.

Through the program, students work closely with faculty mentors, gain hands-on research experience and develop skills for graduate school, professional opportunities and future careers. Dugan encourages faculty and staff to attend CSUB's annual research competition, where students' presentations reveal what they can accomplish when given opportunities to explore and grow academically and personally.

Finding a Cause That Matters

Outside the classroom and department leadership, Dugan enjoys watching the Chicago Bears, running and going to the movies. Investing in the university and its students remains especially meaningful.

She encourages faculty and staff to find a cause at CSUB that resonates with them. Whether supporting the Student Research Scholars program or another campus initiative, employees can make a difference by asking questions, learning about student opportunities and advocating for programs that matter to them.

Her story reminds us that giving's impact does not always end with a single gift. Sometimes, it begins with an opportunity and continues through students, faculty, staff and communities whose lives change because someone invested in their potential.

To learn more about the Faculty & Staff Initiative at CSUB, visit https://www.csub.edu/studentsuccess/.