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‘For Indelible Contributions’

Tania Israel, a professor and chair of counseling, clinical and school psychology, is among six individuals named 2019 Congressional Women of the Year. The award, presented by U.S. Rep. Salud Carbajal, honors exceptional women across the 24th Congressional District who have had a positive impact on their communities.

“The recipients of this year’s Congressional Women of the Year award are all doing incredible work to improve the quality of life on the Central Coast, often without the recognition or compensation they deserve,” Carbajal said in a statement. “From creating spaces for compassion and understanding in our communities, to improving health care for our underserved populations, it is a privilege to recognize these trailblazers for their indelible contributions to our community.”

Carbajal will recognize the award recipients by entering a special written tribute for each woman into the official Congressional Record, preserving their stories and their impact on the community. In addition to Israel, the 2019 Congressional Women of the Year include Jill Anderson of Lompoc; Leola Dublin Macmillian, of Morro Bay; Yessenia Marroquin of Santa Barbara; Anahi Mendoza of Santa Maria; and Sandi Sigurdson of San Luis Obispo.

According to Carbajal, Israel has provided leadership in the Santa Barbara community, collaborating with several local non-profit organizations to lead a community-based participatory research project that surveyed the LGBTQ community about their perceptions and concerns, which led to a mandatory five-hour workshop on LGBTQ issues for all sworn police officers in the City of Santa

Barbara.

Most recently, Israel has designed and presented “Beyond the Bubble,” a two-hour interactive workshop aimed at helping participants engage in productive dialogues across political lines by building their skills in active listening, managing emotions, and perspective taking. Hundreds of people in Santa Barbara County have taken advantage of “Beyond the Bubble” in workshops delivered to the Santa Maria-Lompoc NAACP, the Santa Barbara Progressive Coalition, Congregation B’nai B’rith and a League of Women Voters community forum, among others.

“All of us who work with Tania at the Gevirtz School are honored that she has been selected by Congressman Carbajal, but frankly we are not surprised for we daily get to see her commitment to vulnerable communities,” said Jeffrey Milem, dean of the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education. “Her research informs action, and makes many lives better in the process. That beyond her work at UCSB she’s willing to use her prodigious psychological knowledge and skills to bring the ever-widening political sides together in productive dialogues further attests to her magnanimity.”

Israel acknowledges the significance of the award. “Despite the considerable advances women have made in my lifetime, we remain underrepresented and sometimes unrecognized,” she said. “I so appreciate Representative Carbajal highlighting Women’s History Month by selecting six of us as 2019 Congressional Women of the Year from our district. Our community benefits from the engagement of local residents, and there are so many who deserve recognition. I hope to prove myself worthy of this honor by shining a light on the experiences and needs of sexual and gender minorities, encouraging more UCSB faculty to engage with our local community, and inspiring others to bring their full potential to addressing the challenges we face as a society.”

As a scholar, Israel develops and studies psychological interventions to support sexual and gender minorities. “My work focuses not simply on understanding LGBTQ people, but rather on how to improve their lives by alleviating the psychological consequences of oppression and cultivating more affirming environments.”

Israel’s research team has developed brief online interventions (interactive resources) that reduce LGBTQ internalized stigma. The efficacy of these resources, she said, is especially significant given the association of internalized stigma with negative mental health outcomes, such as depression, anxiety, substance use and

suicide.

“We are now refining these tools and adapting them for particularly vulnerable populations, including youth and people who are feeling distressed about their same-gender attractions,” she noted, adding that she hopes to make these online resources widely available free of charge.

About UC Santa Barbara

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