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Kum-Kum Bhavnani awarded ‘for distinguished leadership’

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For sustained leadership on campus at UC Santa Barbara, in its surrounding community and UC systemwide, sociology professor Kum-Kum Bhavnani has received the Oliver Johnson Award for Distinguished Leadership in the Academic Senate.

“I am honored and thrilled,” said Bhavnani, who started teaching at UCSB in 1991. “I follow in the footsteps of many committed people, including UCSB’s own Duncan Mellichamp. During my three-plus decades at UCSB, my service has significantly enhanced my working life. It is also invigorating to see more faculty of color involved with the senate on campus and systemwide.”

“It is not I who has done so much for the campus; rather it has been the campus community that has supported me unconditionally in all my work,” she added.

“Bhavnani has an extraordinary record of Academic Senate service at UCSB, as well as the UC system more broadly,” said Bradley Chmelka, a professor of chemical engineering and chair of the UC Santa Barbara Committee on Committees. “Beyond

having served on a great number of committees, she has also regularly taken on leadership roles and been exceptionally involved in ways that far exceed the norm for senate faculty members. She has the tremendous respect of her colleagues for her judgment, skill and effectiveness in carrying out leadership responsibilities."

Bhavnani's service on the senate dates back to the mid-1990s and includes educational policy and planning, councilships on budgeting, legislative policies, and multiple chairships. She was a two-term divisional chair from 2012–2016, and was vice chair and chair of the UC Systemwide Senate from 2018–2020.

Notably, Bhavnani served as senate chair during the 2014 shootings in Isla Vista, UCSB's neighboring campus community. During that extremely difficult time, Chmelka noted, Bhavnani took on wide-ranging activities to improve safety and to help heal the campus and local community, including setting up an ad hoc committee on Isla Vista and coordinating various memorial art projects and events.

As UCSB's associate vice chancellor for global engagement, Bhavnani has also worked closely with the Institute of International Education's Scholar Rescue Fund and Scholars at Risk, international networks of higher-learning institutions that provide temporary positions and housing for teachers and researchers facing grave threats to their academic freedom and livelihood.

A distinguished professor in the Department of Sociology, Bhavnani formally retired from teaching on July 1. She remains on the systemwide Fossil Free UC Task Force and, at UCSB, on the Chancellor's Advisory Task Force on Childcare. She is planning to start as a research professor at UCSB in August.

Bhavnani will receive the award July 24 at the annual Systemwide Academic Council dinner in Oakland; it will be awarded jointly to UC Irvine professor emerita of marketing Mary C. Gilly.

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