



Letter of support on behalf of Dr. Yolanda Suarez Balcazar for the nomination to the Seymour Sarason Award for Research and Action 2025. Society for Research and Action, American Psychology Association

November 27, 2024
SCRA Nominations Committee

Dear SCRA Awards Committee,

I am honored to nominate Dr. Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar for the Seymour Sarason Community Research and Action Award. Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has distinguished herself by making significant contributions and garnering international eminence in the tradition of Seymour Sarason. She has advanced community research and action to better families and children from diverse backgrounds and overall people from marginalized communities in novel, significant, and action-oriented scholarship. She is an accomplished scholar with a robust research funding and publication history. Additionally, she is a highly skilled mentor to several students and junior faculty of color, particularly but not exclusively. Suarez-Balcazar has leveraged her expertise to have a significant impact at the national and international levels in the areas of community-based participatory research, culturally tailored interventions, and the understanding of contextual issues affecting the health and well-being of the Latinx community and individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar is a Fellow of the American Psychological Association, the Midwestern Psychological Association, and the Society for Community Research and Action. The designation of "Fellow" is conferred upon members of the American Psychological Association who have demonstrated exemplary and noteworthy contributions to the field of psychology. Dr. Suarez-Balcazar served as President of the Society for Community Research and Action from 2017 - 2019 (President-elect, President, and Past-President). She was recently honored with the Distinguished Alumna Award from the University of Kansas (KU), Department of Applied Behavioral Sciences. In April 2022, she delivered a keynote address at KU. In 2022, she was named UI Scholar at the University of Illinois Chicago. Recently, she was invited to speak as a distinguished alumna to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Department of Psychology at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia.

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar's work and impact are informed by her passion for research and action and her commitment to social justice. She is dedicated to action-oriented research and developing interventions that enhance health, well-being, and quality of life for individuals from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds and with disabilities. Dr. Suarez-Balcazar's research, mentorship, and service exemplify these values. The following section presents a compelling rationale for why Dr. Suarez-Balcazar is qualified to receive the SCRA Seymour Sarason Award. Moreover, Dr. Suarez-Balcazar's sustained focus on the intersection of disability and cultural diversity has informed academic scholarship and resulted in changes in practices and policies.

A novel and critical rethinking, reframing, and reworking of fundamental assumptions, approaches, and issues in the human services, education, psychology, mental retardation, and other areas of community research and action.



A significant area of focus in Dr. Suarez-Balcazar's research is the promotion of health and well-being among Latinx children and families, with a particular emphasis on those living with intellectual and developmental disabilities. She employs community-based participatory approaches that actively engage community members as co-creators of knowledge, to develop, implement, and sustaining culturally tailored community-based interventions that promote healthy lifestyles and reduce health disparities. She currently serves as the Co-PI on a five-year research study funded by the National Institute of Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR). The study aims to identify social determinants and contextual factors and design community interventions that promote the health and well-being of Latinx families of children with IDD through engaged research. This study is an extension of 15 funded prior health and well-being promotion action-oriented research studies focused on Latinx children, youth, and families, conducted over three decades. This sustained focus on people and communities living at the intersection of disability and ethnic minority status makes a distinctive and invaluable contribution to the health equity research agenda. Dr. Suarez-Balcazar's long-standing commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is evident in her scholarship, which is characterized by a prolific output and international recognition as a leader in these areas. She is the leading author of a widely used conceptual framework on cultural relevance/competence and a series of psychometric studies on developing a cultural competence assessment instrument. Both scholars and practitioners have employed this validated instrument. The widely recognized *Cultural Competence Assessment Instrument*, which has been translated into several languages, continues to serve as a source of guidance for training programs around the globe (see Suarez-Balcazar, et al., 2011; e. g., Holstein, Kjelberg, Liedberg, & Suarez-Balcazar, 2020, Swedish translation).

Moreover, due to her expertise in program evaluation, Dr. Suarez-Balcazar is frequently invited to serve as a co-investigator on community-based implementation studies. She recently completed two projects as co-investigator on two federally funded grants from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health's Office of Minority Health. These grants aim to reduce health disparities related to the coronavirus (2019-nCoV) in high-risk and underserved communities, including racial and ethnic minority populations and rural communities. Recently, the National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC) highlighted one of her publications, which examined the impact of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic on Latinx families of children with disabilities (see Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2021).

A third source of federal funding is derived from a series of three Advanced Training in Translational and Transformation Research Grants, funded by the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research (NIDILRR). To enhance the pipeline of community-engaged scholars in disability and rehabilitation research, Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has collaborated with UIC faculty from Disability Studies and Human Development, Kinesiology and Nutrition, and other departments on a series of postdoctoral research training grants. A significant proportion of postdoctoral trainees are from groups that have been historically excluded from higher education, including BICOP and disabled researchers.

Most recently, she was awarded a competitive grant funded by the University of Illinois Chicago, which will advance racial justice. She spearheaded a team of five faculty members and four graduate students in developing a novel proposal titled: "*Advancing*



Racial Equity through Elevating the Voices of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color: ARE Voices." This action-oriented project represents a novel approach to digital library development, focusing on strength-based narratives of individuals from historically marginalized communities living with chronic conditions or disabilities. Through storytelling, the project aims to highlight these individuals' resilience, spirituality, family/kinship support, advocacy, and other strengths. The project is designed to address the shortcomings of traditional pedagogical approaches to teaching about people of color from a strength-based approach, not a deficit approach. The College of Applied Health Sciences and the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) will utilize the digital library for educational purposes, community outreach, and recruitment.

Major scholarship that reflects new approaches, within the context of historical wisdom

Despite assuming a significant administrative role for 15 years (she relinquished her administrative duties in 2022), Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has consistently secured extramural funding (from both foundation and federal sources) since 2003, acting as Principal Investigator (PI), Co-Principal Investigator (Co-PI), or Co-Investigator (Co-I) on numerous research projects. She has been instrumental in securing over \$12 million in research and training grants.

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has published 100 peer-reviewed journal articles, 42 book chapters, co-edited seven books, and 45 numerous other articles, primarily knowledge translation pieces targeting practitioners. She frequently co-authors with her graduate students, mentees, and community partners, thereby facilitating the advancement of the next generation of scholars. Since 2013, she has been invited to co-edit seven special issues in leading journals on health disparities, participatory research methods, and marginalized communities. These include two special issues in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*: one on "CBPR Approaches to Understanding and Addressing Health Disparities" in 2020 (edited by Suarez-Balcazar, Francisco, & Chavez, 2020), and a current one on "Advancing Immigrant and Refugee Rights: Promoting Empowerment, Justice, Equity, and Liberation (Oberoi, Buckingham, & Suarez-Balcazar, in press).

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has an h-index of 41, and her peer-reviewed publications have been cited on over 5,976 occasions. In the early stages of her career, she published an innovative and interactive model for developing university-community partnerships that have since been widely recognized (Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2005). Additionally, she co-authored one of the inaugural books on community-based participatory research in community psychology (Jason, Keys, Suarez-Balcazar, et al., 2005). She is an internationally recognized leader in this methodological approach. She is frequently invited to present her research on community-based studies to students and scholars around the globe. Most recently, she was a visiting scholar at the University of Seville in the spring of 2024. On November 22-25, she was invited to present a four-hour workshop on community-based participatory research to graduate students in the Department of Psychology at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia.

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has engaged in numerous international collaborations and action-oriented projects, including establishing long-standing partnerships with esteemed institutions such as the University of Seville, Spain, and the Center Ann Sullivan of Peru.



These endeavors have facilitated transformative opportunities for students and significantly expanded the global reach of community-based participatory research. Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has co-authored several influential works, including the 2022 article in the *American Journal of Community Psychology* titled "Promoting Justice Through Community-Based Research." In the International Case Studies volume, she collaborated with scholars from Peru, Italy, and Spain, including CESPYP at the University of Seville. This article illuminates her contributions to the advancement of justice through the implementation of participatory research in many cultural contexts. Her ongoing partnership with CESPYP exemplifies her commitment to advancing reproductive and social justice in Europe, notably through community advocacy action-oriented research projects that empower Roma women and girls in Spain. In this piece, she and her colleagues proposed a novel model of social justice, which, is illustrated with several international case studies (see Suarez-Balcazar et al., 2023).

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar is a co-author of a widely disseminated policy statement for the Society for Community Research and Action (SCRA) about the impact that separating families and deportation has on individuals and communities. This policy statement was subsequently published as a peer-reviewed article in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*. According to the SCRA and AJCP records, this article has been the most frequently downloaded from their respective websites. It is also an often-cited source by lawyers in court hearings where they argue against the separation of Latinx families due to deportation (see Langhout, Buckingham, Oberoi, Chavez, Rusch, Esposito, and Suarez-Balcazar, 2018).

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has facilitated interdisciplinary collaborations within and beyond UIC by adopting a multidisciplinary approach to her work, which aligns with Seymour Sarason's legacy. She has collaborated with scholars in the Office of Health Literacy, Department of Psychology, Department of Occupational Therapy, Department of Disability and Human Development, the School of Social Work at the University of Texas in Austin, the Work Group at the University of Kansas, and CESPYP (Coalition for the Study of Health Power and Diversity, Centro de Investigación y Acción Comunitaria), Universidad de Sevilla, Spain.

Action-research and other action efforts that reflect new approaches.

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has gained international recognition for her expertise in cultural relevance, community-based participatory research, immigrant rights, and health promotion. She has been the recipient of numerous invitations to deliver keynote addresses, presentations, and workshops at national conferences (over 60) and international keynote addresses, presentations, and seminars (over 30). It is noteworthy that she has been invited to serve as a visiting professor at five universities across three continents, including Trinity College in Ireland, the University of Seville in Spain, International Christian University in Japan, the Catholic University of Peru in Peru, and Pacifica University in California, in part because of her action-oriented scholarship. Additionally, she was selected for the Global Bridge Scholars Program at Karolinska Institute in Sweden and the Department of Psychology at the Universidad de Los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia.

Other action-oriented endeavors included the international placement she established in collaboration with the Center Ann Sullivan of Peru. Dr. Suarez-Balcazar established a



collaborative research, service, and academic partnership with the Center Ann Sullivan of Peru (CASP). This nonprofit organization provides services to adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. As a result of this exchange program, nearly two dozen advanced graduate students at UIC have completed international service-learning internships at CASP.

Given her expertise in cultural relevance and knowledge of Latinx issues, Dr. Suarez-Balcazar was invited by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, to produce a piece on enhancing cultural relevance in social service agencies, with a particular focus on serving Latinx families. Additionally, she was invited to present several webinars for practitioners engaged in providing culturally relevant services and outreach to the Latinx community. In 2011, she was invited by the U.S. Administration for Children and Families (ACF) to serve on the Hispanic Workgroup, a role she fulfilled until 2014. In this capacity, she assisted in formulating policies, provided consultation on initiatives, and established the prospective Hispanic research agenda for ACF.

She is frequently invited to chair committees on diversity, partly to contribute her expertise on diversity, equity, and inclusion, as well as Latinx issues. Consequently, in 2012, she was appointed chair of an ad hoc Diversity Committee by the President of the AOTA, responsible for developing recommendations for enhancing diversity and inclusion. For several years, she was an active member of the Council on Ethnic and Racial Affairs (CERA) until her schedule became incompatible with the CERA scheduled meetings. In recent years, she has become a prominent figure within the Immigration Justice Committee of SCRA. During one of the Immigrant Justice Committee meetings, the allegations made by a nurse were brought to public attention. The nurse, who was employed at a southern immigrant border detention health center, claimed that hysterectomies were being performed on migrant women without their consent. Dr. Suarez-Balcazar assumed a leadership role in conducting a historical analysis of reproductive injustices perpetrated against women of color. This action-oriented research resulted in publishing an article in AJCP (Suarez-Balcazar, Buckingham, et al., 2023) and disseminating several brief pieces to various publications, including local newspapers, by the lead author and her co-authors. These articles urged an investigation into the reproductive injustices being perpetrated against women of color.

In light of her research interests in racial and ethnic diversity in higher education and society, Dr. Suarez-Balcazar is often invited to present at events to support, guide, and inspire DEI initiatives. For example, she has been frequently invited to present lectures on the promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in health professions. Another significant action-oriented research is the innovative initiative created under her current grant. She collaborated with her colleagues and developed a health and well-being promotion program for Latinx caregivers of children with disabilities titled PODER Familiar. The innovative program, PODER Familiar, is based on a previous one she created and was funded by the Chicago Community Trust called Familias Saludables. PODER Familiar is delivered by trained promotoras (community health workers), who are also mothers of children with IDD. Two agencies in the Chicago area and one in Austin, TX, have committed to sustaining the PODER Familiar intervention at the community level. This action-oriented research resulted in the formulation of a model for developing culturally tailored interventions—the LARREDS Model (see Suarez-Balcazar et al., in



press, AJCP). The LARREDS model was developed in collaboration with a promotora, also a co-author of the AJCP article.

In another highly innovative and groundbreaking action-oriented piece, she made a compelling argument for community psychologists to engage in knowledge co-creation with the community and for scholars and practitioners to engage in meaningful conversations with communities of interest, based on her research with people with IDD (see Suarez-Balcazar, 2020). Ultimately, in accordance with Sarason's tradition of fostering caring communities, she spearheaded a paper entitled "Promoting Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) through Caring Communities" (Suarez-Balcazar, Arias & Muñoz, 2023).

Additionally, Seymour Sarason was renowned for his exemplary warm mentorship of his students. Dr. Suarez-Balcazar is a dedicated teacher and mentor. In 2016, Dr. Suarez-Balcazar was invited by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to serve as a mentor in their Leaders in Equity Evaluation and Diversity (LEEAD) program, which aims to foster the development of evaluation scholars from diverse backgrounds. Since 2017, she has provided intensive mentorship to two junior faculty members through this program. In 2018, she and Dr. Noe Chavez, one of her mentees, were honored with the Change Matrix Best Mentor-Mentee Award. Additionally, Dr. Suarez-Balcazar was invited by the SCRA Research Council and other professional associations to serve as a mentor to junior faculty from several universities (see resume for list of mentees). Her exceptional mentorship is evidenced by her role as co-director of the doctoral dissertation of Daniela E. Miranda, titled "Developing a Multi-Level Advocacy Framework for Roma Health at the Local Level," which was recognized with the award for the best dissertation by SCRA in 2023. This accolade underscores her capacity to steer pioneering action-oriented research that not only meets but exceeds the pinnacle of academic rigor.

Dr. Suarez-Balcazar has served as the primary advisor and mentor to 25 graduate students, 16 from historically underrepresented higher education and research groups, including Latinx and Black students. A significant number of her doctoral students have contributed as co-authors to her published works. At the international level, she has been invited to serve as a mentor to three students. She has served as the co-director of a PhD dissertation for a student at the University of Seville, as a committee member for doctoral students in Canada (Queens University), and as an external judge on a graduate student's dissertation at Malmö University in Sweden. Her mentorship has been particularly impactful for students from historically excluded groups, with many mentees continuing to lead community-engaged projects and advocate for equity in their respective fields.

In conclusion, Dr. Suarez-Balcazar is a distinguished scholar. She is widely recognized at the local, national, and international levels. Her methodological expertise in CBPR and program evaluation is highly esteemed and sought after by students and scholars alike, making her an exemplary mentor and collaborator with scholars and practitioners from diverse disciplines. Her commitment to novel, action-oriented research, social justice and equity is evident in her research, service, mentoring and teaching.

I am pleased to nominate Dr. Yolanda Suarez-Balcazar for the Seymour Sarason SCRA Award.



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