


June 26, 2024

TO: Members of the Board of Trustees

FROM: Dr. Radenka Maric 

RE: Recommendations for Designation as Board of Trustees Distinguished Professors,
Academic Year 2023-2024

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Board of Trustees accept the recommendation of the Distinguished Professor Review Committee and designate the following faculty members as University of Connecticut Board of Trustees Distinguished Professors: Dr. Nora Berrah (Department of Physics), Dr. Ki H. Chon (Department of Biomedical Engineering), and Dr. Crystal L. Park (Department of Psychological Sciences).

BACKGROUND:

On November 10, 1998, the Board of Trustees voted to establish the title of Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor. This designation is the University's highest academic honor.

Pursuant to the By-Laws of the University of Connecticut, the Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor award is reserved exclusively to recognize faculty who have achieved exceptional distinction in scholarship, teaching, and service while at the University of Connecticut. Faculty chosen must have distinguished themselves in all three of these categories. The designation process occurs annually, as a result of a peer review process.

After careful deliberations, the Review Committee recommended the three individuals named above. I am recommending that the Board of Trustees designate these faculty as its Distinguished Professors.

Dr. Nora Berrah

Dr. Nora Berrah is a renowned experimental physicist specializing in investigating Quantum Systems and currently serves as a faculty member in the Department of Physics at the University of Connecticut. She joined UConn in 2014 as the Department Head of Physics and has significantly transformed both the administrative and academic landscapes of the department. Prior to her tenure at UConn, she held the title of University Distinguished Faculty Scholar at Western Michigan University and progressed through various academic ranks from Assistant to Full Professor.

Dr. Berrah earned her Ph.D. in Physics in 1987 from the University of Virginia. Throughout her illustrious career, she has held numerous prestigious positions across the United States and Europe, including the Blaise Pascal Chair d'Excellence at the Commissariat à l'énergie Atomique in Saclay, France.

Her research focuses on investigating ultrafast quantum phenomena through the interaction of molecules with high-intensity laser pulses that cover a broad energy range from infra-red to X-ray wavelengths. Her pioneering cutting-edge research has led to groundbreaking insights in Quantum Dynamics and Non-Linear Physics, supported by funding from the NSF and the Department of Energy, Basic Energy Sciences, amounting to \$1.33 million over three years. Dr. Berrah's career research funding totals approximately \$10 million.

Dr. Berrah's academic contributions include over 284 peer-reviewed publications in top-tier journals such as Nature, Science, and Physical Review Letters, among others. She has delivered 275 invited presentations at national and international levels. Her work has earned her numerous accolades, including a Humboldt award from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Germany, an Honorary Doctoral Degree in Physics from the University of Turku, Finland, the 2014 Davisson-Germer Prize from the American Physical Society. She was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Physical Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the National Academy of Sciences.

Beyond her research, Dr. Berrah is deeply committed to educational innovation and public engagement. She introduced Studio Physics at UConn, a research-based approach enhancing student comprehension in introductory physics courses. She also leads efforts in organizing significant scientific conferences and actively contributes to promoting diversity and inclusion within the scientific community.

In recognition of her outstanding scientific achievements and leadership in academia, Dr. Nora Berrah is nominated for the Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor award, reflecting her exceptional contributions to the University of Connecticut and the broader field of physics.

Dr. Ki H. Chon

Dr. Ki H. Chon, the Krenicki Professor of Biomedical Engineering at the University of Connecticut, is a pioneer in the field of biosignal processing and wearable devices. As the inaugural head of the Biomedical Engineering department from 2014 to 2022, Dr. Chon's leadership was instrumental in driving substantial growth in both faculty recruitment and research funding, securing a more than \$17 million increase in annual research allocations.

Having earned his engineering degree from UConn, Dr. Chon has remained dedicated to advancing his alma mater's stature in the global academic community. His research has led to the development of a life-saving wearable device capable of predicting seizures in divers—a breakthrough that underscores his commitment to translating academic research into practical, real-world applications. This innovation has not only secured the backing of the U.S. Navy but also holds the potential to transform safety protocols in diving operations worldwide.

Dr. Chon's scholarly contributions are extensive, with an impressive tally of over 214 refereed journal articles and 13 U.S. patents granted, alongside substantial federal research funding totaling more than \$29 million. His work on real-time detection of atrial fibrillation and other physiological anomalies via mobile and wearable technology platforms has positioned him at the forefront of biomedical engineering.

Dr. Chon has demonstrated a profound commitment to educational innovation. He has developed three new courses, including Junior Design and Biomedical Signal Processing, which have significantly enhanced the biomedical engineering curriculum at UConn. These courses not only prepare students for real-world engineering challenges but also ensure that they are well-versed in the latest technological advancements and methodologies.

Beyond his technical and academic achievements, Dr. Chon has played a pivotal role in enhancing the department's diversity and inclusion efforts. His recruitment strategy led to the appointment of UConn's first female African American Professor in the College of Engineering, marking a significant step forward in fostering an inclusive academic environment.

As a fellow of five major societies and a distinguished member of the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering, Dr. Chon's contributions to the field of biomedical engineering are widely recognized. His leadership and vision have not only elevated the Department of Biomedical Engineering at UConn but have also had a profound impact on the broader scientific and engineering communities.

In recognition of his outstanding contributions to research, teaching, and service, Dr. Ki H. Chon is an exemplary candidate for the Board of Trustees Distinguished Dr. award. His ongoing dedication to the field and his alma mater makes him a deserving recipient of this prestigious honor.

Dr. Crystal L. Park

Dr. Crystal Park is a distinguished member of the faculty at the University of Connecticut, where she has served since 1999. As a clinical psychologist, her work in health psychology, particularly in the domains of holistic health, well-being, and spirituality, has set a new standard in the field. She is recognized for her superior trajectory of scholarly contributions, as evidenced by her impressive h-index of 101, highlighting her status as a top-tier researcher globally.

Dr. Park obtained her doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology and has since directed her research efforts towards understanding the human capacity to thrive in adversity. Her work integrates meaning making, integrative medicine, and spirituality/religion, contributing significantly to the fields of psychological resilience and flourishing. To date, her research has garnered over \$17 million in direct costs through federal and foundational support, and her scholarly output includes 376 peer-reviewed articles and 70 book chapters.

Her development of the Meaning Making Model is particularly noteworthy, offering a robust framework for understanding how individuals navigate stressful and traumatic experiences. This model has become foundational in studies across a variety of contexts including serious illness and trauma. Dr. Park is also at the forefront of advancing the scientific rigor of yoga research, enhancing methodological approaches and contributing to its integration into mainstream medical practices.

As a mentor, Dr. Park is deeply committed to fostering the academic and professional growth of her students. She has successfully guided 17 doctoral students to completion, with several more currently underway, and has supervised over 800 undergraduate research assistants. Her mentorship has consistently enabled her students to achieve remarkable success in clinical and research careers.

In addition to her research and mentoring roles, Dr. Park's service contributions are substantial. She has played a critical role in integrating health psychology into UConn's curriculum and has been instrumental in developing interventions that improve student well-being. Nationally and internationally, she disseminates her Meaning Making Model widely, impacting diverse applied settings and advancing understanding of spirituality's role in mental and physical health.

Dr. Crystal Park's unparalleled expertise, her innovative contributions to psychological science, and her dedicated mentorship and service make her an exemplary candidate for the Board of Trustees Distinguished Dr. award at the University of Connecticut. Her work not only elevates the university's standing but also significantly advances the broader field of psychology.