Santamaría Graff honored with prestigious Lynton award

“Campus Compact” and the Brown University Swearer Center for Public Service have awarded Cristina Santamaria Graff of the Indiana University School of Education at IUPUI the 2019 Ernest A. Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty. The award recognizes her work in bilingual/multilingual special education and with Latinx immigrant families of children with disabilities through community-engaged and family-centered projects.

Santamaria Graff is formally honored during the Campus Compact “Compact20” national conference in Seattle in late March. Campus Compact is a national coalition of more than a thousand colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher education. Brown’s Swearer Center is one of the first public service centers in the country, focused on community action and scholarship.

The Lynton Award recognizes full-time, pre-tenure faculty who connect their teaching, research, and service to community engagement. Recipients are faculty members whose work is tied to their academic expertise, is of benefit to the external community, is visible and shared with community stakeholders, and reflects the mission of the institution. The award is an annual recognition presented since 1997. Academic colleagues, administrators, students, and community partners can nominate candidates.

Santamaria Graff studies the ways community-engaged partnerships can transform inequitable practices impacting youth with disabilities, particularly as race, class, and other markers of difference between youth come into play. She is working on “Family as Faculty” approaches in special education, an approach that positions community stakeholders’ knowledge and knowledge-making as a central part of the process to change the ways systems work.

“Community-based and engaged work requires a philosophical shift in how we, as university faculty and scholars, conceive of our roles within and alongside the communities we serve,” Santamaria Graff wrote to the award committee. “We enter not as the experts, but rather as collaborators who are eager and ready to listen to community stakeholders’ input, critiques, and suggestions for how we can assist in addressing issues or challenges identified by the community stakeholders, themselves. Rather than entering with ready-made solutions, the work I do is centered in ways to disrupt power hierarchies that, in practice, do not serve communities but, instead, may harm or oppress.”

Among Santamaria Graff’s work is serving as an editor for the journal Multiple Voices for Ethnically Diverse Exceptional Learners and as an associate editor for the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education. She has earned honors including two others this year: the American Educational Research Association’s award for Exemplary Contributions to Practice-Engaged Research and the Brian Douglas Hiltunen Award for Community-Engaged Research from Campus Compact Indiana. In 2018, IUPUI awarded her the Charles R. Bantz Chancellor’s Community Scholar Award.

In summing her work, Santamaria Graff wrote of the things to bear in mind. “The true purpose of community-engaged work is to (re)member our shared humanity, to be intentional in our words and actions, to embody humility courageously, and to ensure equitable processes and outcomes for everyone involved,” she concluded.