



**For Immediate Release**

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***Kathleen Cruz Gutierrez, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of History, University of California, Santa Cruz Named LEAD California's 2024 Richard E. Cone Award for Emerging Leaders Recipient***

*University of California Santa Cruz's Dr. Kathleen Cruz Gutierrez, Assistant Professor of History, recognized for her impact on community-campus partnerships throughout the Santa Cruz County area.*

February 13, 2024

**Fresno, CA** – LEAD California has selected Dr. Kathleen (Kat) Cruz Gutierrez as the recipient of the LEAD California 2024 Richard E. Cone Award for Emerging Leaders in Community Engagement.

In 1999, LEAD California (formerly California Campus Compact) developed the Richard E. Cone Award for Excellence & Leadership in Cultivating Community Partnerships in Higher Education. Since then, the award has been bestowed bi-annually upon an individual who has made significant contributions to the development of partnerships between institutions of higher education and communities – partnerships through which student learning and the quality of life in communities are simultaneously improved. Since 2017, the Richard E. Cone Award recognizes an exemplary early-career individual who is an emerging leader in the field of community engagement, whose work has had a positive impact on campus and in the community, and who is guided by the best practices of community-campus partnerships. It is the hope of LEAD California that this award will inspire all higher education institutions to consider ways to deepen their efforts to institutionalize and sustain authentic community-campus partnerships.

“Kat is extremely deserving of this award. In addition to the meaningful work that she is doing with *Watsonville Is In the Heart (WIITH)*, a community driven public history initiative, Kat’s commitment to building authentic relationships with community and campus partners is a quality that this award celebrates,” said Dr. Elaine Ikeda, Executive Director of LEAD California. “She is the kind of professional and person that Richard “Dick” Cone (who passed away in 2020) would have wanted recognized and honored.”

Dr. Gutierrez holds a Bachelor of Arts in Public Health and South and Southeast Asian Studies with a minor in Public Policy (2010), a Master of Arts in South & Southeast Asian Studies (2016), and a Ph.D. in South & Southeast Asian Studies (2020) from U.C. Berkeley. She has been prolific in her publications and has received extensive honors/awards in her career.

“As a community-engaged public historian myself, I understand the deep commitment to knowledge co-creation, the time needed to build relationships of trust, and the ethical compass necessary to develop honest partnerships, and I have been nothing but impressed by Kat’s demonstrated leadership. Given that she has already established herself as a driving force of community-engaged work in California at this early stage in her career, I am confident that Kat will continue to be a leader in this field. Her dedicated mentorship has furthermore cultivated a new cohort of scholars working on public history scholarship and community-engaged work,” stated UC Santa Cruz Dean of Humanities Jasmine Alinder.

“As a founder of the Tobera Project, it has been a magical ride to bring the stories and memories of our parents and grandparents to life over the last few years with the nurturing assistance of our UCSC scholars. Leading the way and helping to chart this course of action is Dr. Kathleen Cruz Gutierrez. She has been a staunch leader in presenting our stories in an honorable and dignified manner, such stories that have previously deemed unimportant or non-relevant in local and national history. Her work, along with others has helped our community establish a voice and presence to propagate a sense of belonging and pride which has long been overdue,” stated Dioscoro R. Recio, Founder of The Tobera Project.

Ms. Christina Ayson Plank and Ms. Meleia Simon-Reynolds, UC Santa Cruz doctoral candidates shared, “Dr. Gutierrez forges strong partnerships between the campus and community, especially groups in underserved areas like Watsonville and the greater Pajaro Valley area. These include WIITH’s partner organization, [The Tobera Project](#) as well as Cabrillo Community College, the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, and Pajaro Valley Unified School District. Her work increases a sense of belonging and representation among Filipino Americans and other communities in Santa Cruz County. To support WIITH’s community-engagement, she pioneers interdisciplinary collaboration across the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Arts divisions at UCSC. This cross-divisional initiative ensures that departments across campus carry different responsibilities thereby increasing capacity for community-engaged research.

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#### **ABOUT THE RICHARD E. CONE AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE AND LEADERSHIP IN CULTIVATING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Dr. Richard E. Cone was a voice in the national dialogue on experiential education, civic engagement and service-learning since the 1970s, and was a guiding spirit and mentor in the development and evolution of LEAD California (formerly California Campus Compact) since its beginnings more than 30 years ago. For 25 years, he directed the much-lauded Joint Educational Project (JEP) at the University of Southern California from which he retired in 2002. In 1999, LEAD California presented Dr. Cone with the first Richard E. Cone Award for Excellence & Leadership in Cultivating Community Partnerships in Higher Education. Since then, the award was bestowed annually upon an individual who has made significant contributions to the development of partnerships between institutions of higher education and communities – partnerships through which student learning and the quality of life in communities are simultaneously improved.

In 2017, LEAD California renamed the award the Richard E. Cone Award for Emerging Leaders for Community Engagement. This biannual award recognizes an exemplary early-career individual who is an emerging leader in the field of community engagement, whose work has had a positive impact on campus and in the community, and who is guided by the best practices of community-campus partnerships. For more information on the Richard E. Cone Award and to see a list of past honorees, please visit [www.leadcalifornia.org/](http://www.leadcalifornia.org/)

#### **ABOUT LEAD CALIFORNIA**

LEAD California is a statewide nonprofit membership organization supporting half a million university and college students, administrators, faculty, staff, and community members who, with our resources, expertise, training, and connections, are creating innovative ways to ensure a healthy, just, and democratic society. [www.leadcalifornia.org](http://www.leadcalifornia.org)