

2016 Centennial Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching

Dr. Amy Balija

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Dr. Amy Balija obtained her B.S. in Chemistry from Loyola University in Chicago, IL and Ph.D. in Chemistry from University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is presently Assistant Professor of Chemistry at Fordham University, NY. She has been teaching at Fordham University since 2007 and at her present position since 2010.

Upon starting at Fordham, Dr. Balija revitalized a dormant course, *Chemistry of the Environment*, a topical course for non-majors for which she developed a set of meaningful lectures and re-vamped laboratory experiments. She also revitalized the *Research and Seminar* majors course. The hallmark of Dr. Balija's teaching contributions is her effort to continuously improve the undergraduate curriculum with the use of technology such as the iPad. She developed a learning module using the iPad to teach infrared spectroscopy.

Dr. Balija has been highly successful in involving undergraduates in research and publishing their work in prestigious journals such as *Beilstein Journal of Organic Chemistry* and encouraging them to present over 39 contributed presentations at national and local conferences. In 2015, Dr. Balija was awarded the Undergraduate Research Mentor Award at Fordham based on the nominations by her research students. Since the start of her career in Fordham, she has mentored 26 undergraduate research students, and currently has a research group of 6 undergraduates. The students she mentored have been extremely successful, having received NSF Predoctoral Fellowships, Fullbright Scholarships and Claire Booth Luce Scholarships.

Dr. Balija received highly enthusiastic recommendations from the Associate Vice President and Dean of Arts and Sciences Faculty at Fordham University, her Department Chair and past and present students at Fordham. Associate Vice President and Dean, Dr. John Harrington said in his letter of nomination: "During the period that

Dr. Balija has been a member of the faculty, Fordham University experienced a rapid growth in enrollment in STEM undergraduate majors, nearly doubling those numbers compared to the entire student body.” Dr. Robert Beer, Chair of the Department of Chemistry commented that he has not seen a more energetic, inspiring and dedicated faculty member such as Dr. Balija in his over twenty years of being a professor at Fordham. Five of her present and former students wrote letters of support. One of them is now a graduate student in Rutgers University while she is working at ExxonMobil. She wrote that she would not be where she is today without the guidance of Dr. Balija. Another former student commented on her organic chemistry courses as “unique, thought-provoking and engaging”. A current student remarked that Dr. Balija patiently cultivated her research skills and methods, taught her to think critically, analyze problems and find solutions, giving her imperative knowledge to prepare her for success in any field.

Iota Sigma Pi is happy to recognize Dr. Balija’s teaching achievements with the 2016 Centennial Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching.