



July 12, 2021

Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education
Rising Star Early Career Faculty Award

Dear Members of the Award Selection Committee,

It is with great pleasure that we write to nominate Dr. Candace Brown for the Academy for Gerontology in Higher Education Rising Star Early Career Faculty Award. Dr. Brown's broad record of achievement is certainly worthy of this Award and we are delighted to tell you how.

Dr. Brown joined the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in the fall of 2019 as an Assistant Professor of Gerontology (tenure track) with a home appointment in the Department of Public Health Sciences. Since joining us, she has hit the ground running making a substantial impact in the areas of gerontological teaching and leadership.

Dr. Brown has taught three different courses (some multiple times): 1) Health and the Aging Process; 2) Minorities and Aging, 3) Critical Thinking and Communication. She will teach a fourth course in the fall of 2021: Women, Middle Age, and Beyond. Dr. Brown had barely unpacked her boxes before noting that our gerontology curriculum had an opportunity to include a course focused on minorities and aging. She immediately set to work creating a new topics course in this area and taught it her second semester on campus. This course has already become an important part of our curriculum, is cross-listed with Sociology, and serves as a primary elective for our gerontology minor. Here is how Dr. Brown describes this course:

"...my minorities and aging course provides a safe space for students of any status to learn about the aging process. This class is quickly becoming a favorite of mine because I am able to talk from the perspective of a Black aging women. Most of the students who take the course consider themselves of minority status whether it is race, ethnicity, sex/gender or socio-economic status. The class often becomes a class of discussion where students learn from one another."

Dr. Brown also joined the UNC Charlotte Center for Teaching and Learning's Active Learning Academy (ALA) during her first semester and was part of a small group of faculty focused on the flipped classroom approach. She applied for one of the few active learning classrooms on campus and moved her Health and the Aging Process class into that room.

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When asked about the impact of the ALA on her teaching, Dr. Brown commented:

“The ALA helped me to better promote a more student-centered learning approach...Meeting with my small team of faculty assisted in understanding the active learning pedagogy...The first thing we did [in class] was poll what students wanted to learn. This really helped to better craft how the remainder of the semester would move and made the learning process more active.”

When asked how utilizing ALA principles made a difference, Dr. Brown said:

“Undergraduate students were more engaged and were not afraid to ask questions. They brought their own personal experiences of being around older adults into the conversations and learned from one another. We had an ethnically diverse group of students in this class which only enriched our understanding of what the aging experience is.”

Dr. Brown said that in her “pandemic pivot” she used ALA principles to transition her face-to-face class to online instruction: “...we used FlipGrid so students could use technology effectively from their homes, and be active in the learning process while remaining comfortable in their learning space.”

Dr. Brown is also resurrecting our Women, Middle-Age and Beyond class which is cross-listed with Women and Gender Studies and Public Health Sciences. This course was last taught in 2013 and is definitely an important, yet recently missing piece in our graduate and undergraduate course offerings. This course combines graduate and undergraduate seats and focuses on the unique life course and life span experiences of women as they age. Dr. Brown is teaching this course online using polls, Breakout Rooms, and Chat sessions as well as Quick Writes and case studies to promote critical thinking during class time.

Further, Dr. Brown incorporates her lived experiences into the classroom. For example, in Health and the Aging Process, she draws on her work with veterans. In Women, Middle-Age and Beyond, she will draw on her experience of being a Black women entering middle-age completing her PhD after surgical menopause, having three small children at home, and having a husband retire from the NFL. Reflecting on these points, Dr. Brown said: “I have a very personal understanding of the facts and fictions of a woman’s body, how we age in contemporary society – especially as a woman of color, and how to resist and accept the changes that occur.”

Dr. Brown’s impact goes beyond her own classroom. Her co-authored 2013 publication in The Gerontologist “A Review of Our Roots: Blacks in Gerontology,” is used in our Program’s capstone undergraduate Senior Seminar and foundational graduate Current Issues classes as a way to center the work of scholars of color in the gerontology field – something that is often missing in gerontological education curricula.

In addition, Dr. Brown is one of the presenters for a 2021 GSA symposium entitled Integrating Humanities and Arts into Gerontology and Geriatrics Curricula. AGHE’s Competencies for Undergraduate and Graduate Education recognize Humanities and Aging as one of the five “foundational competencies to all fields of gerontology.” Dr. Brown incorporates film into her

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classroom teaching because, as she states, “using movies helps students see how those of the arts portray aging individuals. Comparing that to what they learn in class is interesting as they discover that the truth of aging is not always what media outlets demonstrate.”

Dr. Brown has made extensive service contributions to the Gerontology Program in her first two years on campus. She regularly promotes our gerontology minor and graduate certificate giving space for the director to visit and share information in her classes. She assisted in writing a grant proposal for UNC Charlotte to become an Age Friendly University. She had a direct impact on the revision of our foundational graduate certificate class from a general Current Issues class to a course focused on the Diverse Experiences of Aging. She created a two-week voluntary non-credit “Introduction to Gerontology” course to help students without a foundation in gerontology and those who had not had a college course in a one or more semesters prepare for online Zoom classes during the pandemic. She serves on the UNC Charlotte Gerontology Program Executive committee. Through this service she helped us to craft our statement on racial justice and also helped to lead the director’s review process this past year. Dr. Brown commented:

“...to ensure that the Gerontology Program will continue to be led by a competent leader who will want the best for our students, I served on the Gerontology Search Committee for a Director and then the Gerontology Steering Committee by creating and disseminating a survey that went to Gerontology affiliates, faculty and students to provide feedback on the director in their role.”

Overall, Dr. Brown approaches her work with the program with enthusiasm, honesty, creativity, inquisitiveness, and a no-nonsense effort to make us the best gerontology program around. No-nonsense is the way she describes her own teaching as well. Dr. Brown states

“I have a no-nonsense way of teaching that students either love or learn to tolerate. I have high expectations of them because I know what they are capable of when they put the work into the learning process. I’m not afraid to ask them questions when I don’t understand something. I appreciate a good argument when they come with facts. I own up to my mistakes when they’re made.”

Her teaching evaluations are evidence of her pedagogical strengths. In their comments students have said:

“Dr. Brown was one of the best professors I have ever had. She is so nice, but she will challenge you. I thoroughly enjoyed her class.”

“Dr. Brown was an amazing professor this semester. She was truly a breath of fresh air during this semester and was very understanding of everyone’s personal challenges...Discussions were always really refreshing and the whole class has given me a different outlook on the field of gerontology.”

“IF I COULD TAKE THIS CLASS AGAIN I WOULD.”

“I appreciate how available you were outside of class!”

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“At the beginning of the semester, I was not sure about how I felt about the class because I was slightly concerned about the professor’s view on things. I quickly learned that I really liked her. She is funny, understanding, bold, and gets straight to the point. I respect her teachings.”

“My experience in this course has been wonderful. Dr. Brown made me more interested with this course so much so that I added a Gerontology minor to my experience. Her personality, genuine interest, and yet professionalism with the course was great.”

“Overall I learned a lot in this class. This was one of the few classes where I was successfully encouraged to read from my textbooks every week, on time. Dr. Brown encourages interesting conversations and knows how to keep everybody's attention. Would love to see her offer more classes.”

“I very much enjoyed this class and the way the course was executed. This was absolutely one of my favorite classes and it made me glad to take a chance on the topic of gerontology [sic].”

“Absolutely my favorite professor since transferring to UNCC.”

In addition to this qualitative feedback, Dr. Brown regularly receives student ratings of more than 4.0 out of 5. Dr. Brown was also nominated for the Faculty Excellence Award in Graduate Teaching from the College of Health and Human Services.

Importantly, Dr. Brown has a strong and productive history with the Academy/Association for Gerontology in Higher Education. She has served as an institutional representative, K12 committee member, Associate Editor of the AGHExchange, and as Student Chair. She has presented numerous times at the conference over the years and twice published in the Academy’s journal, *Gerontology and Geriatrics Education*. All of these contributions are highlighted on her CV.

Dr. Brown’s passion for all things gerontology comes shining through in all that she does. She is a strong advocate for gerontological education at UNC Charlotte, a visible presence in the College of Health and Human Services where smaller interdisciplinary programs like gerontology can become invisible, and is a team player – she has sought and gained affiliate status with the Department of Sociology. Dr. Brown is a strong mentor as well serving in an elected Member-at-Large position in Sigma Phi Omega, the International Academic Honor and Professional Society in Gerontology that promotes excellence in gerontology students and professionals. Dr. Brown has also mentored our own graduate students in the art of teaching, written several letters of recommendation for undergraduate students to continue into the UNC Charlotte Graduate Certificate in Gerontology, served on MA committees, and personally paid for four undergraduates to attend their first conference on aging.

In short, we are incredibly fortunate to have Dr. Brown on our gerontology faculty team. She is nothing short of a visionary and advocate for the students, the program, and discipline both on campus and off. Dr. Brown has even expressed an interest in directing the program one day!

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We hope that the Awards Committee recognizes her teaching and leadership as highly impactful and therefore worthy of this Award. We are so very pleased to recommend her!

Sincerely,

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