Subject: Ernest and Leslie Zomalt Outstanding Service Award
Date: Wednesday, December 17, 2025 at 11:45:37 AM Pacific Standard Time
From: Office of the President
To: Christine Paik

(View this email in a browser)



Dear campus community,

I am pleased to announce that Susan O'Connor, director of the CSUSM Staff Center, is the recipient of the 2025-26 Ernest and Leslie Zomalt Outstanding Service Award.

Susan has built a nearly 20-year career at CSUSM, beginning in 2006 as an administrative assistant in the Provost's Office and later serving in various roles within the Office of the President before her current position as director of the Staff Center. Across these multiple roles, she has made an impact—from coordinating the WASC accreditation process and supporting the Program Assessment Committee, to helping cultivate meaningful partnerships through University Council. Her professional journey, spanning from an entry-level position to MPP, has given her a deep understanding of the university and perspective on staff growth, development and belonging. Susan has often shared that her greatest reward is knowing that the people she works with "leave better than when they arrive," a principle that has guided her leadership and service throughout her career.

Throughout her tenure and no matter her role, Susan has consistently demonstrated not only dedication where she worked, but also a deep spirit of service, giving back to the university in ways both visible and behind the scenes. From supporting fellow colleagues through one-on-one strengths coaching, to lending her time and energy at campus events such as food drives and commencement, Susan embodies the spirit of genuine commitment and willingness to contribute to CSUSM and strengthen our entire community.

Most recently, Susan was appointed as the inaugural director of the Staff Center in 2020 – amid the pandemic. Tasked with building a brand-new center entirely virtually, she rose to the challenge. Together, Susan and the Staff Center Steering Committee created opportunities for building community when staff needed it most – virtual synergy groups in which staff shared common hobbies and interests, mindfulness sessions, virtual "our space" for connecting, and take-home craft kits from The Makery. The Staff Center has grown from concept to a cornerstone in its 5 years on our campus.

The center has implemented programs including staff buddies and meet-and-greet sessions for new hires. Susan also has established rotating staff art exhibits that highlight the creative talents of CSUSM employees and celebrate the rich identities within our campus community. Initiatives such as the biweekly newsletter and the Staff Kudos program have elevated the visibility and value of staff contributions campuswide.

Colleagues who have worked closely with Susan describe her as compassionate, professional and dedicated to CSUSM. She consistently takes on the often unseen and critical work required to bring ideas to life.

The Zomalt Award, named for early CSUSM leaders Drs. Ernest and Leslie Zomalt, honors the significant achievements of an individual who exemplifies our university's mission through service to the campus community.

Dr. Ernest Zomalt began his service at CSUSM as the Dean of Students in 1990, later becoming vice president for Student Affairs and executive vice president until his retirement in 2000. Dr. Leslie Zomalt created the advising services area for the College of Arts and Sciences and served in a leadership capacity from 1990 until her retirement in 1999. Upon their retirement, the Zomaltsestablished an endowment to recognize outstanding staff and administrators whose contributions have strengthened the success of CSUSM.

Please join me in congratulating Susan O'Connor and all our 2025-26 faculty and staff award recipients at the CSUSM Awards and Service Celebration on Jan. 15, 2026. Their contributions reflect the very best of Cal State San Marcos.

An email announcing all our awardees with an RSVP link to the celebration will follow.

Sincerely,
Ellen J. Neufeldt
President