Subject: 2025-26 Harry E. Brakebill Distinguished Professor Award: Dr. Alison Scheer-Cohen
Date: Thursday, November 6, 2025 at 1:01:58 PM Pacific Standard Time
From: Office of the President
To: Christine Paik

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California State University SAN MARCOS | OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

Dear CSUSM staff and faculty,

Upon the recommendation of the Faculty Awards Selection Committee, I am pleased to announce that the recipient of this year's Harry E. Brakebill Distinguished Professor Award is Dr. Alison Scheer-Cohen, professor of speech-language pathology in the College of Education Health and Human Services (CEHHS).

Throughout her 13 years at CSUSM, Dr. Scheer-Cohen has embodied a singular purpose: advancing the holistic success of students. Guided by what she describes as her "why" – to create an academic environment where every student feels a sense of belonging and possibility – she has built an extraordinary record of achievement that integrates innovative teaching, groundbreaking research and transformative service to our university and beyond. As one nominator wrote, Dr. Scheer-Cohen "has not compartmentalized her work into three separate silos, but created a coherent, integrated vision of faculty excellence."

A dedicated and innovative educator, Dr. Scheer-Cohen has transformed the teaching of low-incidence speech-language disorders – a field where expertise is rare nationally and where students often feel least prepared. She has reimagined her courses from lecture-based to experiential, bringing clients into the classroom, using simulations and creating hands-on, collaborative learning experiences that bridge theory and practice. Students consistently praise her "ability to explain complex ideas with clarity and compassion," her thoughtful feedback, and her unwavering support. Beyond the classroom, she co-founded the Teaching, Advising, Leadership and Counseling (TALC) peer mentoring program, which now supports 50–70 mentees each year, strengthening belonging and retention within the department.

Dr. Scheer-Cohen's research is equally impactful. A nationally recognized expert in cleft palate and craniofacial anomalies, she has contributed to groundbreaking genetic research and advanced clinical understanding in areas that are often underrepresented in the field. Her scholarly work also extends to the science of teaching and learning, where she has led initiatives that make graduate education more equitable and accessible. She co-authored a nationally recognized model for

holistic graduate admissions, developed Avenues for Multicultural Professionals (AMP) to support underrepresented students pursuing speech-language pathology and co-led a $1.25 million federal training grant that removed financial barriers for future clinicians.

Dr. Scheer-Cohen's service to CSUSM and the broader California State University system reflects leadership of remarkable breadth. She currently serves as chair of the department of speech-language pathology. At the university level, she has served as Academic Senate secretary, vice chair and interim chair – roles in which she demonstrated steady leadership during times of institutional transition and helped expand shared governance. Her influence now extends to the CSU system, where she serves on the Academic Senate and as vice chair of the Academic Affairs Committee. Nationally, she represents CSUSM through her leadership with the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and the American Cleft Palate Craniofacial Association, shaping accreditation standards and professional training for the next generation of clinicians.

Through her teaching, scholarship and service, Dr. Scheer-Cohen exemplifies the highest ideals of the Harry E. Brakebill Distinguished Professor Award. Her work reflects both intellectual rigor and a genuine human touch – qualities that have transformed her students' lives, strengthened our university and elevated her profession. As one colleague noted, she embodies the words of Mahatma Gandhi: "In a gentle way, you can shake the world."

Established in 1998, the Brakebill Award is presented to a CSUSM faculty member for exceptional accomplishments in teaching, research, creative scholarship and service to our university and region. Harry E. Brakebill, for whom the award is named, is a former executive vice chancellor of the CSU system and a valued adviser in the early years of CSUSM. The award was established by his daughter, Dr. Ann Bersi.

Warmly,
Ellen