

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Outstanding UMB Faculty Award



Danya Qato, PhD, PharmD, MPH, is the University of Maryland, Baltimore's (UMB) 2024 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Recognition Award winner for outstanding faculty member. It's a fitting honor for the University of Maryland School of Pharmacy (UMSOP) associate professor, who says Dr. King's words and deeds have inspired her commitment to promoting health equity and justice.

"In his remarks to the Medical Committee for Human Rights in 1966, Dr. King said: 'Of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and inhuman,' " said Qato, who is faculty in UMSOP's Department of Practice, Sciences, and Health Outcomes Research (P-SHOR). "This sentiment has helped animate my commitment both as a scholar and as an advocate to doing whatever I can to make sure everyone — everywhere — has access to quality health care as a human right."

She also mentions King's commitment to justice as a driving force during her 20-year career as a pharmacist, epidemiologist, and health services researcher.

"Dr. King spoke very passionately about the need to center justice when trying to force social change — that is, without creating the conditions that make justice possible, approaches to address equity are just 'band-aids' that do little to address unjust imbalances in power and resources that lead to inequities," Qato said. "Dr. King affirmed that it is our moral responsibility to help create more just systems and to dismantle unjust ones. This is true when it comes to health care and other areas of our lives."

Qato, who holds a secondary appointment in the School of Medicine's (UMSOM) Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, has been involved in numerous efforts to advance health equity and justice since she arrived at UMB in 2016 after serving one year as a Fulbright Scholar at the Institute for Community and Public Health at Birzeit University in her native Palestine.

She is faculty advisor to UMB's student chapter of the Maryland Public Health Association, regularly lecturing on topics related to health equity. She served on the Graduate School's Strategic Plan Committee, whose objective was to "cultivate a culture of equity, diversity, inclusion, and social justice." She embedded modules on structural racism and health equity into foundational classes such

as Health Policy at UMSOP and Epidemiology at UMSOM. And, as director of the Pharmaceutical Health Services Research (PHSR) Graduate Program from 2018 to 2023, Qato founded and led a book club for students focused on equity in health services research and public health more broadly.

“The book club, which ran for four years, fostered healthy discussions within the department about the role of racism, ableism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination in shaping our research and in shaping health outcomes,” said Jill Morgan, PharmD, BCPS, BCPPS, FNAP, professor and chair, P-SHOR, who nominated Qato for the Diversity Recognition Award. “It has also helped elucidate the active role we can play as researchers and advocates in improving health equity.

“By amplifying discussions around the impact of racism and other forms of discrimination on health equity, Dr. Qato has fostered an environment of openness, curiosity, and compassion in the department among students, faculty, and staff,” Morgan added. “She has created a safe space for difficult conversations and provided a foundation and model for further conversations in the department. She is a powerful advocate for improving equity in student, faculty, and staff experiences at UMB.”

Qato has been a frequent speaker across UMB at events highlighting equity and justice, including an Intercultural Center panel in honor of World Hijab Day, the School of Dentistry’s Women’s Health Equity panel, and an episode of “Virtual Face to Face with President Bruce Jarrell” about the Supreme Court’s decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. She also served as a guest speaker for the Social Justice in Medicine program at UMSOM, where she discussed the topic of “Access to Essential Medicines.”

As a testament to her commitment to equity, she was awarded a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Culture of Health Leader Award in 2020. In 2023, she won a Faculty Teaching Award from UMSOM for her course Principles of Epidemiology. And Morgan noted that under Qato’s leadership, the number of applications for the UMSOP PhD program rose from an average of 40 per year to over 100 while attracting a more diverse cohort of students.

“All of her efforts collectively speak to the critical work Dr. Qato has done on campus and off campus to build sustainable programs that are focused on diversity and inclusiveness, improve the experience of all, and help attract and retain a diversity of people who feel welcome into the University community,” said Morgan, who also praised Qato’s commitment and compassion during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Dr. Qato led the Graduate Program during the very difficult COVID-19 years and was instrumental in ensuring that students’ well-being was addressed during the pandemic,” Morgan said. “She singlehandedly organized a care package to be sent to the home of every student, a gesture that was most welcome as students felt the weight of social isolation during the pandemic.”

Asked to name her greatest accomplishments, Qato said, “I am proud of the work I have done at the School of Pharmacy and School of Medicine in developing, introducing, and integrating new modules on health equity and structural determinants of health into my courses and into guest lectures across campus.

“As director of the graduate program, I was proud to advocate for student well-being, increase graduate student stipend levels, and found the student-led PHSR Health Equity Book Club, which created a forum for students, faculty, and staff alike to have thoughtful and rigorous conversations around issues of racism and other forms of discrimination that find their way into our own research.”

Regarding the Diversity Recognition Award, Qato said she was heartened to see that her commitment to equity and justice was being honored.

“Truthfully, I would still be doing this work — collectively with others — even without the recognition because I am passionate about using my time on Earth to make it a more just place,” she said. “This award helps me and the community around me see the value that UMB has placed on centering equity and justice.”

— Lou Cortina