



SIUE's O'Brien Receives 2021 American Chemical Society St. Louis Award

by Doug McIlhagga
July 16 2021 2:23 PM



EDWARDSVILLE – Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Professor of Chemistry Leah O’Brien, PhD, has won the American Chemical Society’s (ACS) St. Louis Section 2021 Saint Louis Award. She will accept the award Friday, October 1 at a banquet following a spectroscopy-focused research symposium to be held on the SIUE campus.

The Saint Louis Award, originally sponsored by Monsanto Co., now Bayer, is presented to an individual who has made outstanding contributions to the profession of chemistry and demonstrated the potential to further advance the profession. The award consists of a \$1,500 honorarium and a plaque.

An SIUE chemistry faculty member within the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) since August 1990, O’Brien has been making important contributions to determine and understand the molecular electronic structure of diatomic transition metal ligand molecules and their excited states. These studies guide the development of high-level computational methods to predict the properties of new molecules and materials. Her work has provided fundamental insights into the nature of metal bonding involved in chemical synthesis and catalysis, as well as the structure and properties of the nucleus important in nuclear physics known as electronic field shift effects.

“Dr. O’Brien’s selection for the St. Louis Section ACS Award confirms what SIUE students and faculty have known for many years—that she is an outstanding teacher and scholar who has made valuable contributions to the discipline of chemistry,” said CAS Dean Kevin Leonard, PhD. “I had the good fortune to work with Dr. O’Brien when she was the chair of SIUE’s Department of Chemistry, and I quickly came to appreciate her careful attention to detail, her dedication to students and faculty colleagues in the department, and her commitment to the advancement of women and members of underrepresented communities in STEM fields.

“This recognition reminds us that the Department of Chemistry and the College of Arts and Sciences offer SIUE students the opportunity to learn alongside excellent researchers. Our students emerge from the labs of Dr. O’Brien and her colleagues with the knowledge and skills necessary to move directly into positions in industry or into graduate programs.”

O’Brien is an active member of the St. Louis ACS section where she has served in various governance positions including section chair and founded the Women Chemists Committee. She has also been an advocate for women and underrepresented minorities in STEM within the St. Louis ACS section, at SIUE and in the local community.

Previously, O'Brien received the St. Louis Section's 2013 Distinguished Service Award and the 2014 E. Ann Nalley ACS Award for Volunteer Service from the Midwest Region.

Central to SIUE's exceptional and comprehensive education, the [College of Arts and Sciences](#) offers degree programs in the natural sciences, humanities, arts, social sciences, and communications. The College touches the lives of all SIUE students helping them explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces, but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.