

Alumna an Internationally Recognized Researcher

Road to UT Austin Deanship Started at Creighton

By Emily Rust

Early in her career, **Alexa Kramer Stuijbergen, PhD, BSN'77**, had a 500-mile round-trip commute to her classes at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Making the long drive from her home in a small New Mexico town to El Paso — where she worked on her master's degree, while teaching undergraduate nursing students in New Mexico — exemplified Stuijbergen's commitment and determination. She recognized it was part of a longer professional journey.

In 1982, she lessened her commute, but not her drive.

She moved to Austin, Texas, and started working on her PhD in nursing at the University of Texas at Austin.

Shortly after she began, Stuijbergen was joined by a familiar face. Barbara Braden, PhD, SJN'66, BSN'72 — one of Stuijbergen's former Creighton professors — was also beginning the nursing doctoral program at UT Austin.

Braden, who has since retired, was a prominent administrator at Creighton and renowned faculty member and researcher in the College of Nursing.

Stuijbergen has followed a similar road.

Since 2010, Stuijbergen has served as the dean of the UT Austin School of Nursing, where she is the James R. Dougherty, Jr. Centennial Professor in Nursing and holds the Laura Lee Blanton Chair in Nursing. She is also internationally recognized for her research in multiple sclerosis, post-polio syndrome and fibromyalgia. In July, Stuijbergen will be one of 23 individuals from six countries inducted into the International Nurse

Researcher Hall of Fame at Sigma Theta Tau's International Nursing Research Congress in Dublin, Ireland.

She credits the beginning of her research journey to her time at Creighton and the University's teaching hospital.

"Every good researcher at their core is someone who's curious and asks questions," Stuijbergen says.

Stuijbergen has received more than \$11.8 million from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for her research in health promotion in adults with chronic disabling conditions.



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As an undergraduate at Creighton, Stuijbergen says she not only benefited from the University's solid nursing education, but from the entire Jesuit curriculum, including courses in philosophy and theology.

"It helped my abilities to think logically and write well," Stuijbergen says. "It's central to the career path I've chosen."

At UT Austin, Stuijbergen leads with the values of her Jesuit education in mind. She strives for her students to be leaders in practice, research and education.

"As a large public research university, we exist and are funded by the public to serve the greater good, for society," Stuijbergen says.

The nursing program in the University of Texas system began at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston. The Austin campus started its nursing program in the 1970s, with an emphasis on research, scholarship and leadership. Though its program is relatively new, UT Austin has one of the oldest PhD programs in nursing.

Stuijbergen's personal mission meshes with the mission of her school, which focuses on the importance of education and on creating accessible health care for all. For 11 years, she served as director

of the NIH-funded Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Research in Underserved Populations.

"Through our research we strive to identify what people need to maximize their quality of life," Stuijbergen says.

That mission also speaks to Stuijbergen's Jesuit education, one that her family marks as important — her husband Robert Stuijbergen, BSPha'77, is also a Creighton graduate and both of her daughters are graduates of Jesuit institutions.

"Jesuit ideals are very much a part of my character," Stuijbergen says. "I am continually grateful for the great education I received at Creighton."