

Endowing Inspiration

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S Supporting Information

ABSTRACT: The precollege section of *JCE* videorecorded an interview with 2015 ACS James Bryant Conant Awardee Jenelle L. Ball of California. This award will be sponsored permanently by the *Journal of Chemical Education* and ChemEd X beginning in 2017 with an endowment approved in 2015.



KEYWORDS: General Public, High School/Introductory Chemistry, Public Understanding/Outreach, Professional Development

FEATURE: Award Address

■ ENDOWING AN AWARD TO RECOGNIZE EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING HIGH SCHOOL CHEMISTRY

The national ACS James Bryant Conant Award in Teaching High School Chemistry was established in 1965 to encourage and recognize outstanding high school chemistry teachers.¹ Awardees challenge and inspire their students by using high-quality teaching strategies, promoting extracurricular activities, and continuing to improve their own skills. The award has been sponsored by an assortment of entities since its inception. An exciting announcement was made in 2015 confirming that, as of 2017, the *Journal of Chemical Education* and Chemical Education Xchange (ChemEd X)² will sponsor the award permanently with an endowment.³ The *Journal of Chemical Education* has provided high school teachers with high-quality materials for decades, thus guiding the direction of the discipline—ChemEd X strives to support that work by engaging the community in a continuous interactive platform.

■ THE 2015 AWARDEE

Jenelle L. Ball is a quiet force inspiring the teachers and students she works with. I met her at the 2015 Spring American Chemical Society (ACS) meeting in Denver, Colorado. She presented at High School Day and was honored later in the week with the 2015 Conant Award. During the conference, I had a chance to sit down to interview her with an ACS video crew (see the [Supporting Information](#)). Her warm and calm demeanor made me feel at ease immediately. When asked how she feels about winning the award, she humbly responded that “it is a smile” for her. Clearly uncomfortable with the attention,

she quickly defers to all of the other great chemistry teachers whom she is honored to represent: her fellow teachers in her district (Chico Unified School District, Chico, CA), her current and past students, and her own teacher mentors who have supported her. She emphasizes that she is surrounded by brilliant people who continue to inspire her. She also credits her school administrators for supporting her and allowing her to explore many different opportunities, such as taking a sabbatical to perform some research in the field.

As a high school student, Jenelle had considered a variety of academic majors, but after only one semester of college chemistry, she was confident that she had found her niche. She earned her Master’s degree in the subject and was encouraged to teach at the college level, but decided to earn her credentials to teach high school. Many of her students have pursued careers in science and medicine, with some going into chemistry, yet Jenelle is quick to point out that chemistry is valuable for any student. She feels that chemistry teachers have a responsibility to develop students as citizens who can appreciate chemistry and understand it in societal terms. She strives to incorporate practical and current topics into her curriculum.

Jenelle explains that winning the award has been rejuvenating, and even though she has already completed 30 years in the discipline, she would like to continue at least another 10. Most of those years have been spent at Chico High

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School in California. She continues to tweak old laboratories⁴ while continually looking for new ideas.⁵ She helps her students find opportunities for research and gently pushes them to challenge themselves. Jenelle believes that the next challenge for chemistry education is to address the need for chemistry teachers to think in more modern terms. But, she explains that this is more than just using up-to-date teaching methods. “Do students really need to know what Boyle’s law is? What Charles’s law is? Or is it more important that they just understand the concepts so we can move them on into more modern topics?” Even those students who will not pursue science as a career can relate to medicine, sustainability, and the environment and understand the importance of chemistry in terms of society. After 30 years in the classroom, Jenelle still has “ah-ha” moments and realizes that she can still improve her own understanding. Thus, one of her most important pieces of advice for the new and veteran teacher alike is to continue to find opportunities for growth in the content as well as pedagogy. This devotion and excitement for her career and her students have helped to create Jenelle’s legacy in her local community. Amplifying her inspirational force through the Conant Award will be a service to the larger community.

■ ASSOCIATED CONTENT

● Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available on the ACS Publications website at DOI: [10.1021/acs.jchemed.6b00020](https://doi.org/10.1021/acs.jchemed.6b00020).

Short video in which *JCE* Associate Editor Deanna Cullen interviews the 2015 Conant Award winner, Jenelle L. Ball (MP4)

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

■ REFERENCES

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