What do you like best about working at ECU?

My favorite thing about working at ECU is the focus on teaching/education inside and outside of the classroom. I have received outstanding support from multiple outlets including the Office of Faculty Development and Writing Across the Curriculum. These opportunities have encouraged and supported me in the development and implementation of innovative ideas in my teaching and research activities.

What do you find most exciting about your teaching and your research?

The aspect I find most exciting about my research is its potential to positively impact the health outcomes of children, teachers, and families in our surrounding community. Much of my work focuses on establishing healthy behaviors among young children through educational interventions and teacher professional development. North Carolina continues to face unsettling high rates of childhood overweight/obesity, with close to 30% of preschool children considered overweight or obese. Intervening in school-based environments, such as Head Start, can help young children establish positive eating and physical activity behaviors that can be practiced throughout the lifecycle; a much easier task than trying to change unhealthy behaviors in adolescence or adulthood.

What excites you about teaching?

The most exciting aspect of teaching for me is watching students grow personally and professionally. I view myself as their teacher and mentor. I believe learning is an interaction between faculty and students that involves change in knowledge, but also has a lasting impact on how students' think and behave as professionals. Higher education doesn't stop as the classroom door; it extends far beyond content we provide in the courses we teach.

What do you hope students take away from their experiences from working with you on your research?

Put simply, I hope my students gain "grit" from working with me on research inside and outside of the classroom. I always tell my students, "Get comfortable with being un-comfortable." I seek to challenge my students in new and
exiting ways that produces innovative work and helps them grow personally and professionally. I find that integrating students into my research encourages them to think critically and develop creative solutions to challenges in community-based nutrition education.

**What is your favorite teaching or research moment?**

My favorite moment combines teaching and research. I recruited an eager and very inexperienced undergraduate student to work on a new research project. Over the course of the academic year the student was challenged to learn about a topic in which little prior research existed. As with real research, many barriers and setbacks occurred, but with support and encouragement, the student preserved in their work. The end result was outstanding. In the spring, the student was awarded first place in both college and university research forums for their work. Watching the sense of accomplishment on my student’s face as they accepted honors and congratulations are "moments" I will never forget. Over the course of that year, the student changed into a completely different person, both personally and professionally. The student gained an improved sense of confidence in academic abilities, and a whole new set of skills that she is now actively applying in her graduate studies.