

## Awards to Recognize Leaders in Mentoring, Diversity and Inclusion

University Communications  
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The UA community is invited to attend the Visionary Leadership Award Ceremony to honor students, employees and programs that have shown leadership in mentoring, diversity and inclusion.

"Transforming the UA into an inclusive excellence university is our diversity strategic goal, and it requires that everyone takes responsibility for and contributes to the effort," said **Jesús Treviño**, vice provost for inclusive excellence and senior diversity officer. "These awards are important because they recognize and honor UA community members who are playing vital roles in advancing diversity and inclusiveness on our campus."

The awards, presented by the Office for Diversity and Inclusive Excellence and the Commission on the Status of Women, will be given Thursday during a ceremony at the Student Union Memorial Center BookStore. If you plan to attend, please **[RSVP](#)** <sup>[1]</sup>.

Read about the 2017 honorees below.

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*The Emerging Vision Award and the Established Vision Award were renamed this year in honor of Edith Sayre Auslander, a consultant to Arizona Assurance at the UA Foundation. She raises money for low-income Arizona high school students who have the ability but not the means to attend the UA. She was previously vice president and senior associate to the UA president and served on the Arizona Board of Regents.*

### **Edith Sayre Auslander Emerging Vision Award**

**Ashlee Linares-Gaffer**, Assistant Professor of Practice, Department of Nutritional Sciences

Linares-Gaffer, a member of the Diversity Task Force, is being recognized for her record of speaking up for and supporting diverse student populations. With her guidance and input, the advisers in the Student Nutrition Advising Center have become more diverse. She has also advocated for the use of diverse subjects in photos that are used in the classroom, online and in distributed materials to create a more inclusive environment.

### **Edith Sayre Auslander Established Vision Award**

**Dorothy Briggs**, Director of the THINK TANK

Briggs was recognized for her work at the THINK TANK and the inclusive attitude that she brings to her job.

"Dorothy is warm, objective, and has an open-door policy that extends to students, faculty, staff and parents alike," according to information provided in her nomination.

Briggs has collaborated with departments across campus to ensure that the THINK TANK is a safe space that values diversity, civility and the respect of all individuals.

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*The Outstanding Mentor Awards were renamed this year in honor of Maria Teresa Velez, associate dean of the Graduate College, who died last year. She worked to extend access to higher education for students who historically have been underserved.*

**Maria Teresa Velez Outstanding Mentor Award ? Appointed Professional**  
**Catherine Merrill**, Technical Project Manager, Steward Observatory

Merrill joined the UA as the lead systems engineer for the OSIRIS-Rex camera suite and immediately began recruiting students to engage in related learning opportunities.

As stated in her nominating letter, Merrill is "an exceptional leader and a rising star at the University of Arizona. She embodies all the traits that a mentee seeks to find when identifying a mentor. These traits extend beyond traditional qualities like leadership, intellect and integrity."

Merrill is a member of the United Way of Tucson and Southern Arizona board of directors and a member of the United Way National Women's Leadership Council.

**Maria Teresa Velez Outstanding Mentor Award ? Classified Staff**  
**Lesia Langan-DuBerry**, Program Coordinator, Confluentcenter for Creative Inquiry

Langan-DuBerry was nominated by **Margaret Preston**, administrative assistant at the Confluentcenter for Creative Inquiry, who wrote that when she first started at the UA two and a half years ago, Langan-DuBerry readily took time to teach and train her, even while dealing with personal matters.

"She regularly comments that she wants Confluentcenter to be a place where I learn new skills that will contribute to my life and future careers," Preston wrote. "I feel that Lesia cares about my success on an individual and personal level. This trait is not apparent only to me, but Lesia's compassion for the individual is felt by the other employees here as well as by many of our constituents."

**Maria Teresa Velez Outstanding Mentor Award ? Faculty**  
**Lalitha Madhavan**, Assistant Professor, Department of Neurology

Madhavan is known as a mentor who both teaches and listens, and who takes in people from all walks of life to be part of her research team.

According to her nomination letter from **Mandi Corenblum**, research specialist in the Department of Neurology, Madhavan is the ideal mentor because she manages to balance meaningful criticism with sincere praise.

"As a scientist, her research is multifaceted and enlightening," Corenblum wrote. "As a mentor, she develops trust and earns respect as she balances giving direction and allowing

independence."

Madhavan is being recognized for providing support to her students, encouraging them to excel as scientists and as human beings while also challenging them to look past their gender, race and upbringing to realize their potential and strengths.

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### **Richard Ruiz Diversity Leadership Faculty Award**

**Alain-Philippe Durand**, Dean of the College of Humanities, Professor of French

This award is given to someone who made a significant contribution toward creating a diverse and inclusive UA community through the implementation of policies, procedures, initiatives and/or programs like retention, recruitment, encouraging diverse perspectives, or fostering equality. According to his nominators, Durand has displayed all of these traits and more.

**Ken McAllister**, associate dean of research and program innovation in the College of Humanities, wrote, "under his leadership, Africana Studies went from being a small and struggling program on campus to being a research and teaching powerhouse. In just a couple of years, several new faculty of color were hired into that unit, the number of majors skyrocketed, a certificate of Caribbean studies was developed and approved, and he helped put into place the nation's only undergraduate minor in hip-hop studies, now a well-known destination program that attracts dozens of applicants a year."

Durand ? who has affiliations with Africana Studies, Latin American Studies and LGBT Studies ? also has provided funding and support for conferences, seminars, lectures and other events that benefit LGBTQ, Asian, Native American, African American and Latino students and programs.

**Melissa Fitch**, professor of Spanish and Portuguese, wrote, "he has made an indelible mark at the UA with a vision that is inclusive, forward-thinking and all-embracing." Durand manages to "bring together the different ethnic, religious, sexual and socioeconomic groups that exist on campus," she wrote, "and "understands that our university, our community and indeed our country's greatness is rooted in embracing precisely this diversity."

The award is named after Richard Ruiz, a professor in the Department of Mexican American Studies whose contributions included efforts to make the UA more inclusive. He passed away in 2015.

"Just as Ruiz was, Durand is an entrepreneurial change agent, a colleague who recognizes the incredible work that goes on at a research university, yet is also pained by the fact that so many people are systematically excluded from experiencing ? and learning to do ? that work themselves," McAllister wrote.

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*The Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Awards were created to recognize students and employees who enhance the UA by creating an inclusive environment through fostering equality, encouraging diverse perspectives, and working on recruitment and retention of a diverse campus community. The award is named for Likins, who served as UA president from 1997 to 2006.*

### **Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Award ? Staff**

Center for Social Justice Education in Residence Life  
**Sherard Robbins**

, Assistant Director of Social Justice Education  
**Lorene Fisher**, Graduate Student

Robbins and Fisher, the only employees in the Center for Social Justice Education in Residence Life, work to create opportunities for all students to be involved and included as part of their work with the Center for Social Justice Education. They offer educational programs for residents, train resident assistants on social justice awareness, and support underrepresented students, staff and faculty. They also are responsible for organizing a social justice education program called "Series On." This semester, the program focused on members of the LGBTQ+ community. Fisher educates Residence Life staff members about issues of diversity, social justice, and ally-ship. Robbins delivers education about bias during the recruitment and selection of diverse staff.

"Sherard and Lorene are big thinkers, who must have incredible ideas about how to change the hiring processes and retention processes to encourage more diversity among students and staff," wrote **Hannah Harp**, graduate student at the UA.

### **Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Award ? Program** Wildcat Writers

The **Wildcat Writers** [2] program in the Department of English pairs high school students from Southern Arizona schools with UA college students. Together, the UA students and the high school students engage in activities and collaborate while exploring critical thinking and effective reasoning, and are thus given opportunities to learn about diverse perspectives both on campus and in regional communities. Most of the high school partnerships are with Sunnyside, where the majority of students are from underrepresented minority groups, and where 86 percent of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch. Wildcat Writers high school students not only hone their writing and rhetorical knowledge to improve their skills, but also are encouraged to see the UA as a viable option for their continued education. Over the course of its 12 years, the program has engaged thousands of high school and college students, as well as hundreds of teachers.

### **Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Award ? Student** **Maggie Melo**, Graduate Student

Melo is a graduate assistant in the iSpace ? a co-working area and makerspace in the Science-Engineering Library ? and a graduate student seeking a doctorate in rhetoric composition and the teaching of English. Her work and research focus on increasing diversity and inclusion in science, technology, math and engineering fields. Melo was part of the team that conceived the iSpace. Since its formation, she has been an advocate of diversity and strives to create open and welcoming spaces and opportunities for nondominant voices to be heard.

She currently hosts inclusive programming in the iSpace, including a monthly maker event called #AZMakersWTF to support community members who identify as women, trans and femme. In 2015, Melo coordinated and hosted the first Women Techmakers Tucson Hackathon for the UA, which had workshops, mentorships and the collaborative creation of projects that allowed participants to acquire and hone skills such as coding, 3-D modeling and printing, and game development. She is also the co-chair of the Women in Technology organization, which convenes women working in technology around campus for regular meetings, trainings, networking and collaboration opportunities.

### **Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Award ? Student Honorable Mention**

**Megan Figueroa**, Graduate Student

Figueroa, a graduate student seeking a doctorate in linguistics, was a driving force behind her department's recent issuance of a diversity statement, now published on the department website which will be included in recruitment materials for future graduate students. As a member of the Commission on the Status of Women, Figueroa was at the forefront of the development of a workshop to educate the UA community on issues of implicit bias, critically engaging workshop participants in an introspective look at how these biases have affected their lives, both personally and professionally. Figueroa also gives back to the Tucson community by volunteering with Reading Seed, a literacy improvement program in elementary schools, and working with the Primavera Foundation, a nonprofit that provides pathways out of poverty.

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#### **Links:**

[1] [https://uarizona.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_0GPSte0vVAPoK8J](https://uarizona.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0GPSte0vVAPoK8J)

[2] <https://english.arizona.edu/writing-program/wildcat-writers>