A violence prevention specialist at The University of Arizona who is encouraging men to become advocates for eliminating violence against women has earned a national award for his efforts.

Zach Nicolazzo received the 2008 Harry Canon Outstanding Professional Award during the American College Personnel Association conference, which is being held in Atlanta this week.

"I am incredibly humbled by the award," Nicolazzo said, adding that he is not devoted to his advocacy work for the benefit of being recognized.

"I'm still getting used to the idea of getting the award, but it's nice to know that good work that is being done is getting recognized," he said. "It's very touching to be noticed by colleagues on a national level."

The associations' Standing Committee for Men grants the award and, in a congratulatory letter to Nicolazzo, said his "contributions to the area of men's studies should be commended."

The letter also noted that Nicolazzo was deserving of the award because of his "consistent work in the areas of outreach, prevention, presentations and publications and your commitment to promoting men's development through your work in student affairs."

Nicolazzo has been at the UA for just under a year, serving as a specialist for the UA's Oasis Program for Sexual Assault and Relationship Violence. The program operates out of Campus Health Services and provides counseling, consultation and confidential reporting for victims of sexual assault and supports those who are in abusive relationships or who are being stalked.

Before coming to the UA, part of Nicolazzo worked with fraternities at Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., figuring out ways to make their houses "more open, inclusive and welcoming for all, which included work around taking an active stand against sexual and interpersonal violence," he said, adding that his research has focused on topics such as gender socialization and violence prevention.

At the UA last year, Nicolazzo helped a group of students to form Men Against Violence, and now serves as advisor for the organization.

The group shares Nicolazzo's values and exists to end violence against women on the University campus while educating people about ways that male dominance and male privilege are the source of violence against women. Nicolazzo said such efforts attempt to force men out of their socially-prescribed role and to question what it really means to be a man.

"Men have privilege in society and we don't often think of ourselves as gendered beings," Nicolazzo said. "I think that men have a very big role to play in ending violence, which is something we're all affected by because we either have friends who are victims, hear stories of others being victimized or are survivors ourselves."

Part of his effort involves helping men to recognize that violence is not always the result of mental illness and that substance abuse cannot serve as an excuse for male violence that men must begin to also take responsibility for their violent behavior.

Nicolazzo also has been highly involved in programming for Take Back the Night, which will be held April 15 to commemorate Sexual Assault Awareness Month.

The event, which involves numerous on- and off-campus partners, begins at 6 p.m. at the UA's Women's Plaza of Honor with speakers, poets, musicians and a survivor speak-out. Attendees will then lead a march around the UA campus before meeting up with collaborators for a candlelight vigil at Catalina Park, which is located west of campus.

"We need to take a leadership role," Nicolazzo said, "and learn from the women who have started the movement against violence."