UA Leaders in Diversity, Inclusion and Mentoring to be Honored

University Communications
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UA employees, students and a program that have proven their excellence in diversity, inclusion and mentoring will be honored at the Visionary Leadership Awards Ceremony this week.

The awards are presented annually by the Office of Diversity and Inclusive Excellence and the Commission on the Status of Women. The ceremony will run from 4:30-6:30 p.m. on Thursday in the lower level of the Student Union Memorial Center BookStore. Those who wish to attend the ceremony are asked to RSVP.

Read more about the 2018 honorees below.

Edith Sayre Auslander Emerging Vision Award
Gurtina Besla, Assistant Professor of Astronomy and Assistant Astronomer, Steward Observatory

Besla is being recognized for her work as co-founder of TIMESTEP, or the Tucson Initiative for Minority Engagement in STEM Program, which holds biweekly mentoring discussions and workshops for UA undergraduates. Workshops cover topics such as navigating their degrees, confronting stereotypes and unconscious bias, and resume writing. The program also helps connect students to employers. In helping establish TIMESTEP, Besla, who began at the UA in 2014, demonstrated her commitment to diversity and inclusivity, according to Eduardo Rozo, assistant professor of physics and one of Besla’s nominators.

"In short, Dr. Besla is doing everything in her power to make traditionally underrepresented groups in STEM feel more comfortable and engaged, while providing critical mentorship and learning opportunities," Rozo wrote.

Edith Sayre Auslander Established Vision Award
Nadia Alvarez Mexia, Director, Study Arizona: Short-Term Programs and Latin American Initiatives in the Office of Global Initiatives

In her role with the Office of Global Initiatives, Alvarez Mexia manages programs that bring STEM students in Latin America to the UA for 10 weeks in the fall, spring or summer. The
programs allow students to conduct research, improve their English-speaking skills, and learn about academics in the U.S.

In this role, Alvarez Mexia works to create an inclusive and safe environment for all students, wrote Adrián Arroyo Perez, coordinator of short-term programs in the Office of Global Initiatives and one of Alvarez Mexia's mentees.

Alvarez Mexia helps students feel safe and "empowered to pursue any dream they have, regardless of their gender, color, sexual orientation, English language command or nation of origin," he wrote.

The Outstanding Mentor Awards were renamed in 2017 in honor of Maria Teresa Velez, associate dean of the Graduate College, who died in 2016. She worked to extend access to higher education for students who historically have been underserved.

Maria Teresa Velez Outstanding Mentor Award ? Appointed Professional
Amanda Gluski, Director of Student Engagement, College of Nursing

Described by some as a "lifeline," Gluski leads initiatives to support College of Nursing students as they apply, matriculate and advance through the program, according to Sheila Gephart, associate professor of nursing and Gluski's nominator.

She's known for being very responsive and thorough, and pursuing issues on behalf of students until they're resolved. In one example, Gluski helped one of Gephart's doctoral students avoid taking a leave of absence from the program due to a medical issue, Gephart wrote in her nomination letter. Gluski is also known for helping faculty follow best education practices.

Her work along these lines, Gephart wrote, "promotes an atmosphere of high-quality mentoring across the College of Nursing."

"Amanda's passion for the University and our students draws them into the Wildcat spirit and makes them feel like they belong here," Gephart added.

Maria Teresa Velez Outstanding Mentor Award ? Classified Staff
Pamela Denney, Administrative Associate, Yavapai County Cooperative Extension, College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

Denney brings more than 15 years of experience working in UA Cooperative Extension to her role at the office in Prescott, according to a nomination letter by Lydia Watts, a secretary in the office and one of Denney's mentees. With her institutional knowledge, Denney is able to advise staff with "wisdom and understanding," Watts wrote.

Denney's open-door policy also makes her approachable, particularly in times of stress.

"Our office as a whole works so well because of Pam's mentoring," Watts wrote. "Her spiritual strength and wisdom has allowed each of us to work the best we can each day."

Maria Teresa Velez Outstanding Mentor Award ? Faculty
Judith Gordon, Professor, College of Nursing
Gordon is being recognized for her mentorship as a faculty member as well as her involvement in Women in Academic Medicine [9], a group that aims to bring inclusivity and equity to women faculty in academic medicine at the UA.

A year after joining the group in 2011, Gordon became a member of its steering committee; in 2014, she became chair of that committee. During her time as chair, Gordon coordinated events and led an effort to revise the group’s mission statement to foster mentorship, networking, career development and institutional advancement for female faculty, according to Archita Desai, one of Gordon's nominators and interim director of the UA's Thomas D. Boyer Liver Institute.

Gordon, Desai added, "is an exemplary mentor herself and has made significant contributions to elevating the quality and enriching the culture of mentoring that women faculty experience in the College of Medicine at the University of Arizona."

Richard Ruiz Diversity Leadership Faculty Award
Andrea Romero, Fitch Nesbitt Professor of Family Studies and Human Development and Director, Frances McClelland Institute for Children, Youth and Families

This award is given to someone who made a significant contribution to embed diversity and inclusiveness into a structural or institutional aspect of the UA, either through policies or procedures. The winner must demonstrate dedication toward retaining and recruiting diverse faculty, staff and students, fostering equality of opportunity, and creating a welcoming and supportive campus climate. The award is named for the late Richard Ruiz, former head of the Department of Mexican American Studies, and professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Sociocultural Studies.

In one nomination letter, members of the UA's Minority Women Faculty detailed Romero's involvement with the group since she helped form it in 2003. The members who signed the letter were Paloma Beamer, associate professor in the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, Sonia Colina, professor in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and director of the National Center for Interpretation in the College of Humanities, and Celeste González de Bustamante, associate professor in the School of Journalism.

"Through her leadership she easily integrates issues of equity and diversity into everything she does, from her research agenda to the way she mentors students, to the courses she teaches and committees she chairs," the letter says. "She has exceptional skill at raising difficult issues about race and gender as well as other issues central to the concern for equity and diversity of the faculty and students. Dr. Andrea Romero embodies this and exemplifies the criteria for the Richard Ruiz Diversity Leadership Faculty Award in her service, teaching and research."

Several of Romero's students and mentees also wrote nomination letters describing her dedication to their success. Among them was Michelle Rascon-Canales, a doctoral student of family studies and human development and a member of Romero's research lab, which includes several female researchers and researchers of color.
"Despite the hardships I had experienced personally and professionally in higher education," Rascon-Canales wrote, "I had no doubt that I would pursue my doctoral studies at the UA and that, with Dr. Romero as my adviser, it would be an inclusive and humanizing journey."

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 President Emeritus Peter Likins, who served from 1997 to 2006.

Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Award ? Staff
Cheree Meeks, Director, First Year Experience in the Honors College

As director of the Honors College's First Year Experience, Meeks is responsible for creating programs and activities that help with students' transition to college. Her other responsibilities include helping plan the Honors Orientation, programming the college's Common Reading Program [6], and coordinating the First Year Project [7], which gives first-year honors students opportunities to become involved with research in the second semester. Meeks is also the adviser for the Honors Mentor Association.

Meeks also chairs the Commission on the Status of Women. Jill Burchell, senior coordinator of sustainability education in Housing and Residential Life and chair emerita for CSW, spoke to Meeks' willingness to take a leadership role on the commission earlier than expected and excel at it.

"She was able to bring the new leadership on board in a way that actually got people excited about the coming year," Burchell wrote. "From the very beginning of her time as chair, Dr. Meeks had a vision for CSW and worked to get everyone excited about and working toward those goals."

Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Award ? Program
C.A.T.S. Life Skills

C.A.T.S. ? Committed to Athletes’ Total Success [8]? Life Skills is a program that supports all aspects of the student-athlete experience, including strength and conditioning, academics, life skills and physical and mental health.

The program recently created an inclusion banner that all Athletics staff and student-athletes were encouraged to sign to show support for people of all backgrounds, according to a nomination letter from Dave Heeke, vice president and director of athletics. The group also has worked with the Office of Diversity and Inclusive Excellence and the Office of LGBTQ Affairs to bring in speakers to discuss women's empowerment and provide LGBTQ education awareness.

"C.A.T.S. Life Skills programs directly address diversity and inclusion efforts for our minority, international and female student-athlete populations," Heeke wrote. "I understand the importance of supporting those who feel marginalized, and I am grateful for the quality support this program provides."

Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Award ? Student
Sophie Alves
Alves is a doctoral student in the Department of Mexican American Studies and a graduate assistant at the THINK TANK, where she supervises science tutors, according to Laura Everett, tutoring services coordinator at the THINK TANK and one of Alves’ nominators. Alves also helps support and schedule tutors who work with students in the UA’s cultural centers, including African American Student Affairs, Asian Pacific American Student Affairs, Native American Student Affairs and the Adalberto and Ana Guerrero Student Center.

In these roles, Alves has strived to make tutoring services available to those from historically underrepresented and marginalized groups, according to her nominators. Alves — who began a tutoring program for undergraduates in the Department of Mexican American Studies — also led an effort to recruit students to the Mexican American Studies major and minor programs. This led to significant growth in undergraduate enrollment for the department, Randy Yazzie, academic adviser in the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, wrote in his nomination letter.

Anahí Herrera, one of Alves’ students, said Alves has an impressive ability to foster supportive, safe and inclusive learning environments for all her students.

“As one of her first mentees,” Herrera wrote, “I can attest that Ms. Alves is a gifted mentor and one of the most compassionate and selfless human beings I have ever met in my life.”

Peter Likins Inclusive Excellence Award ? Student Honorable Mention

Lexy Reyelts, Undergraduate Student

Reyelts is an undergraduate majoring in public management and policy, with a minor in sociology. She also serves as the lead student peer adviser for Equity and Student Engagement within the Dean of Students Office and Housing and Residential Life, and helps facilitate the Safe Zone training program in the UA LGBTQ Resource Center.

Reyelts, according to her nominators, has shown a strong ability to connect with a wide range of students, especially those struggling academically, and guiding them to campus resources. She also helped plan Diva la Paz, a program of Housing and Residential Life that aims to educate program attendees about the LGBTQ+ community. Reyelts helped ensure the information presented in Diva la Paz accurately represented the LGBTQ+ community, according to Matthew Linton, a community director for Housing and Residential Life and one of Reyelts’ nominators. She also went out of her way to extend invitations to the event to the UA’s cultural centers.

Stephanie Troutman, assistant professor of emerging literacies in the Department of English, serves as a mentor to Reyelts as a faculty fellow for equity and student engagement. In her nomination letter, Troutman wrote: “Lexy is the type of young adult who shows up for multiple communities and for peers in myriad ways, lending her voice to many struggles wherein allies are required.”

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