



Photo by Daniel Dubois
Award to Keivan Stassun, professor of astronomy, during a ceremony Oct. 18 at the Student Life Center.

Opportunity Development Center recognizes champions of campus diversity

by Kara Furlong

The Opportunity Development Center recognized groups and individuals from across the university for their efforts to actively support and promote diversity in campus life during the 19th Annual Affirmative Action and Diversity Initiatives Awards.

The awards were handed out during a ceremony Oct. 18 at the Student Life Center.

“Know that the purpose of this gathering is to celebrate,” said Chancellor Gordon Gee, who noted that the award recipients “by their work, their deeds and the quality of their lives have made a positive impact on the entire Vanderbilt community.”

Those honored at the ceremony “are the standard setters, not the standard followers” when it comes to supporting affirmative action, diversity and opportunities for persons with disabilities at Vanderbilt, Gee said.

Gee, along with Opportunity Development Center Director Patricia Pierce and Associate Director Anita Jenious, presented six Affirmative Action and Diversity Initiatives awards, an honor which includes a \$500 cash prize. Those receiving the award were:

- The Conexión Project, an information and assistance program housed at Nashville’s Woodbine Community Center, whose purpose is to assist underserved Hispanic individuals with disabilities and their families by increasing knowledge of available resources and community support. The program was developed by a team from the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center and is led by Elise McMillan, Jan Rosemergy, Carole Moore-Slater and Claudia Avila-Lopez of the Kennedy Center Institute.
- The Fisk-Vanderbilt Masters-to-Ph.D. Bridge program, a partnership between Fisk University and Vanderbilt that enables minority students in the sciences to earn a master’s degree in physics at Fisk and then a Ph.D. in a related science at Vanderbilt. The program is led by Keivan Stassun, professor of astronomy, who has a joint appointment at Fisk.
- Bharati Mehrotra, a graduate program student adviser in the Office of Biomedical Research Education and Training and a contributor to the Vanderbilt Initiative for Minority Student Development. Since 2002, Mehrotra has provided career guidance to 34 minority students from around the United States, 15 of which have entered Ph.D. programs at Vanderbilt.
- Project Opportunity, a pilot career and employment training program that helps local high school students find employment after graduation at Vanderbilt University Medical Center. The program is led by Terrell Smith, director of Patient/Family Centered Care at Vanderbilt University Hospital and clinics.
- The Vanderbilt-Fisk Interdisciplinary Program for Research and Education in the Nanosciences, which has been successful in fostering a relationship between Vanderbilt’s physics and astronomy department and the faculty of Fisk University, as well as introducing minority students to the nanosciences. Students in the program can earn an M.S. degree from Fisk and then matriculate to the Vanderbilt Ph.D. program. Leonard Feldman, professor of physics and astronomy, serves as principle investigator for the program.
- The Vanderbilt Muslim Student Association, which has grown in size and increased its presence on the Vanderbilt campus in recent years. MSA sponsors a host of events for Muslims and non-Muslims alike, including Fast-A-Thon, which celebrates Ramadan with speakers, cultural meals and fundraising events and is open to the entire Vanderbilt community. Through the Muslim-Jewish Dialogues program, MSA works with Vanderbilt Hillel to organize joint public service events and interfaith panels specific to Muslim-Jewish relations.

Thirteen certificates of recognition also were presented to individuals and one group for their efforts to support and promote diversity.

Those receiving certificates of recognition were Michael Crowe, associate director of residence life; Fred DeWeese, vice president for facilities planning and development; Frank Dobson, director of the Bishop Joseph Johnson Black Cultural Center; Carol Eck, administrative director of the Cancer Patient Care Center; Mona Frederick, executive director of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities; Karen Jackson, operations manager of the Medical Center’s animal care division; H. Richard Milner, professor of education; Arts and Science sophomore Abby Mintz, leader of the hip-hop dance group VIBE; Neil Osheroff, professor of biochemistry; Andy Porter, director of the Learning Sciences Institute and professor of leadership, policy and organizations; **Jack Sasson, the Mary Jane Werthan Professor of Jewish Studies**; the Vanderbilt Lambda Association; and Gary White, university associate chaplain.