Diversity Awards 2008

Awards Winner

**Undergraduate Student Excellence (Academic/Service)**

Andrew McQuaide is being honored for his academic excellence, and campus leadership on behalf of Kingian nonviolence. A sophomore from Charlestown majoring in African and African-American Studies, and a member of the Dean’s List, he is also his town’s elected Representative to the Chariho School Committee. Drawn to the work of Dr. Bernard Lafayette and the URI Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies, Andrew was a student coordinator for the 2007 Nonviolence Summer Institute at URI, which enrolled 49 trainees from six countries. A certified nonviolence trainer who assisted Officer Linda Palazzo during the URI Dr. Martin Luther King Week celebration, he has incorporated Kingian philosophy into a curriculum and after-school program for 7th and 8th graders.

Sojattra Soeung is being honored for her academic excellence, advocacy, and her involvement on undergraduate research on multicultural issues. A senior from Woonsocket majoring in Psychology, and a member of the Dean’s List, she worked for three years as a student staff member of the Multicultural Center, who was a valued co-facilitator at URI Unity Weekend. An active member of the Psi Chi, the National Honor Society in Psychology, and the Psychology Club, she has worked closely with Dr. Su Boatright-Horowitz, Associate Professor, Psychology, and Director, Undergraduate Program, to examine the effects of antiracism teaching on student evaluations, and to present the results at a professional conference. Preliminary results show that when racism is addressed, antiracism teaching and black instructors are most likely to have a negative effect on student evaluations. For the research, Sojattra mastered sone-systems research participation software for data collection, while using both Excel and SPSS for data analysis.

**Undergraduate Student Excellence (Artistic/Cultural)**

Shane Lee is being honored for his artistic contributions as a singer, and his leadership in promoting awareness of the American civil rights movement. A sophomore from Providence majoring in Political Science, he was elected to the Student Senate in February. He demonstrated remarkable leadership ability in high school, serving two terms as a RI Senate page, singing the Star Spangled Banner and the Negro National Anthem at the RI Senate’s first annual Black History Month celebration, and traveling to Washington, DC, in support of the RI After School Plus Alliance. His character, scholarship, and advocacy earned him a 2006 Leadership Award from the Lieutenant Governor. After arriving on campus, he created a website that features his performance schedule. Known on MySpace as the R&B King of Rhode Island, he won first place and $250 at the Student Entertainment Committee’s Rhode(oke), singing R. Kelly’s I Believe I Can Fly. He has also performed at the Diversity Week Open Mic, the Dr. Martin Luther King Week Interfaith Service, and a song he wrote at the 2007 Diversity Awards. He will open for Akon at
Theo Martins is being honored for his artistic contributions as a campus and community disc jockey in the hip-hop community, and his commitment to tutoring and mentoring African-American youth. A junior from Providence majoring in Communications and Fashion Design, he is a singer, songwriter, rapper, and aspiring producer, whose persona is S-Class. As an artist, he has performed in the Diversity Week Open Mic, Uhuru SaSa’s SaSa Week, and the NAACP Battle of the Beats. As an activist, he has tutored and mentored incoming students in the Guaranteed Admissions Program and the SEED Program, participated as a Summer Program Tutor for Talent Development; and conducts to high school youth through Brothers On a New Direction. He also served a term as a Student Senator, and was a Representative to the Multicultural Unity and Student Involvement Council.

Undergraduate Student Excellence (Leadership/Service)

Stephanie Beauté is being honored for her leadership and advocacy in increasing awareness within the University community of the historic roles played by multicultural student organizations in the history of the campus. A junior majoring in Pre-Law and Communications, she has worked with Samantha Vaughan and Samuel Aboh to upgrade the infrastructure of Uhuru SaSa, the oldest of the multicultural student organizations, nearing the celebration of its 40th anniversary. With Samuel, Stephanie has brought new standards of excellence to the Uhuru SaSa newsletter. She led the march at the Dr. MLK Week Unity Luncheon; worked to present the Kwanzaa Celebration and the Legacy Ball to end the calendar year; participated in the Multicultural Unity and Student Involvement Council; arranged a poster exhibit to air sensitive issues on campus; and hosted Shadow Day to heighten college aspirations among middle school students through the Clearinghouse for Volunteers. Recently, Stephanie was elected to the Student Senate.

Karina Luna is being honored for her leadership and advocacy in promoting multiculturalism and in building relationships between student organizations. A senior from Providence majoring in Spanish, she is widely respected for her leadership as the Student Staff Coordinator of the Multicultural Center, Student Coordinator of the Multicultural Unity and Student Leadership Council, President of the Latin American Student Association, and Vice President of Keep a Child Alive. In addition, she has been an intern in the MTI Program at Hope High School, and participated in the Rose Butler Browne Program for Women of Color. Recently she was a member of the cast of Vagina Monologues, raising more than $6,000 for URI Violence Prevention and Advocacy Services to provide education and information that stop violence against women and girls.

Michelle Rosa is being honored for her leadership in promoting greater collaboration among diversity student organizations. A junior from Providence majoring in Communications, she volunteered to serve as a spring semester intern for the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, and the Equity Coalition. In the January meetings of the Equity Coalition, she brought a professional demeanor and an array of organizational skills that represented model attributes of a student leader. Several staff and faculty who coalesced around advocacy for a Vice President of Diversity found her growth and development as a student leader among her elders to be another compelling reason to support the work of the Coalition. Upon the
recommendation of the Coalition, Michelle initiated the establishment of the Student Equity Coalition, bringing together 20 student leaders from 12 diverse student organizations to define a range of student needs. In addition, she co-founded PINK Women to encourage positive attitudes toward women and to create an environment for the emergence of women leaders. Recently, she was elected to the Student Senate.

**Graduate Student Excellence (Leadership/Service)**

**Megan Frost** is being honored for her support and service to students of different physical abilities, and her advocacy for multiculturalism on campus. A doctoral student in Psychology, she is also a Counselor in the URI Office of Disability Services for Students. Her dissertation will examine the effectiveness of a stereotype threat intervention on the enrollment of women, Latinos and African-Americans in math and science fields. For URI Diversity Week, she has presented at a workshop on disability issues, and required students from her URI 101 freshman seminars to prepare reaction papers. Working within her academic department, she has conducted focus groups among her graduate students to determine its success in fulfilling its multicultural mission statement; successfully petitioned for more diverse clinical learning experiences; participated on a mobile team conducting outreach to a MET high school in Providence; and was a panel member at a discussion of the effects of military deployment moderated by Dr. Paul Bueno de Mesquita. Fluent in Spanish and French, she has also tutored English to African students in Paris.

**Claire Reynolds** is being honored for her teaching, research, and advocacy to integrate multiculturalism into the mainstream canon of her profession. A doctoral student in English, she has taught Advanced Literature and Writing for the Rhode Island College Upward Bound Program, while helping to prepare underrepresented students to succeed in college. Her dissertation explores race, class, and gender in the works of marginalized American women authors during times of national crisis. “My research champions these authors and the people about whom they wrote, and challenges us to keep listening for all of the voices – no matter how silent or how different from us – that make up our culture.” She has discussed one or more of these authors at a Promising Scholars Symposium during URI Diversity Week 2005; in a regional graduate-level critical essay contest in which she won first prize; at a panel of her peers, “Margins to Mainstream: Literary Intersections of the American Voice”, which she moderated for URI Diversity Week 2006; and in a juried article for College English Association Critic in 2006. In 2007, she was the primary convenor for URI’s First Annual Graduate Student Conference, “Identities: Individual, Cultural, and National”. She was a member of the planning committee and a presenter at the 2008 Conference.

**Staff/Administrator Excellence (Leadership/Service)**

**Chris Bannon** is being honored for his leadership and advocacy in promoting interaction between religious orthodoxy on campus and different sacred belief organizations. A Chaplain and Staff Facilitator of the URI InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Chris is an alumnus of the University. He has helped to establish valuable partnerships on and off campus, interpreting the example of Jesus Christ as one who reached across religious boundaries. Under the umbrella of Origins, the group he
founded to promote spiritual community through art, action, and ideas, he has worked with other sacred belief organizations, such as Hillel, the Muslim Student Association, and Anointed, a predominantly African-American and Protestant student group; and collaborated with the URI Multicultural Center to coordinate the popular Diversity Week Open Mic and the Opening Ceremonies, to participate in Unity Weekend, and to organize the Dr. Martin Luther King Week Interfaith Service. Relationships with outside congregations enabled him to form Sankofa: A Worship Service in the African tradition.

**Dr. Celina Pereira** is being honored for her leadership and advocacy for the development of a philosophy and set of practices related to the enhancement of campus wellness. A physician in the Office of Health Services, and a Pediatrician and Family Practitioner with Rhode Island Hospital, and Women and Infants Hospital, she holds an MD from the University of Bombay in India. Her areas of specialty include pediatric and adolescent medicine. Since the outset of URI Diversity Week in 1996, she has organized a team of New Agers to present stress reduction workshops and meditation sessions, applying ancient Eastern practices of breathing, relaxation, and mindfulness. She has also coordinated an annual spring retreat at the Alton Jones Campus. Studies suggest that over 40% of US students experience difficulty in completing ordinary tasks because of stress, while 15% suffer clinical depression. In 2003, she began holding weekly stress reduction workshops at the URI Multicultural Center, teaching students to recognize causes of stress and to adopt techniques for gaining control. In 2006, the popularity of the workshops enabled them to become credit-bearing.

**Faculty Excellence**

**Dr. Donald Cunnigen** is being honored for his campus leadership in founding the URI Black Scholars Award Program, and his professional leadership in promoting scholarship among and about sociologists of African American descent. A professor of Sociology, he holds a BA from Tougaloo (MS) College, where he was a student of the distinguished German Jewish sociologist, Ernst Borinski; an MA from the University of New Hampshire; and an MA and PhD from Harvard University. His principal research areas include the history of black sociology, race and ethnic relations, social movements, and social change. Through the Black Scholar Awards and the related Onyx Senior Honor Society, he has provided an outlet for Black faculty members to actively encourage the recruitment, retention, development, and support of Black students of outstanding merit at URI. He has been elected by his peers in the field of sociology to serve as President of the Association of Social and Behavioral Scientists; President of the Association of Black Sociologists.

**Dr. Yan Ma** is being honored for her leadership in promoting positive relations between the United States and China. A professor of Graduate Library and Information Studies, she holds a BA from Zhejiang University in China; a MLS from Kent State University; and PhD from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Widely published in her research areas, such as visual literacy, information science, and digital media analysis, she currently serves the University community as Director of
the URI Confucius Institute; Director of the US-China Center for Research in Visual Information, Visual Literacy, and Global New Media; and Director of the URI Global Education for Librarians and Information Professionals Program, all intended to enhance understanding of Chinese language and culture in the US, and American culture in China. During 2007, she was a Co-Coordinator of the URI Honors Colloquium: China Rising, providing a window to contemporary China for the academic community.

**Dr. Judy Van Wyk** is being honored for her leadership and advocacy in establishing URI Diversity Week as a stable element of University culture. An Associate Professor of Sociology, she holds a PhD from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville. Her primary research interests include relationship and family violence, consumer fraud, and criminology. After joining the URI Diversity Week Planning Committee in 2002, she concluded that its work deserved formal institutional endorsement, and proposed that elevation to University Committee status be requested. Acknowledging her initiative, members of the Committee asked her to become Chair, feeling that the request would be more successful if she were speaking with the full authority and backing of the group. Her letter of petition was approved by Vice President Tom Dougan and President Robert Carothers. As Chair, she provided new structure to the operations of the Committee, building upon the work of Dr. Paul Bueno de Mesquita while investing 100 to 200 hours per calendar year. Under her leadership, Diversity Week stabilized and emerged as one of the nation’s leading campus-wide programs for enhancing campus climate. Dissertation research by Dr. Bettina Hoppner indicates that the attitudes of undergraduate students toward cultural diversity warmed significantly between 2001 and 2004 – a period which coincides with Dr. Van Wyk’s chairing of the Committee, and with the largest expansion of URI Diversity Week.

**Organization Excellence (Leadership/Excellence)**

**URI Chapter of Keep a Child Alive** is being honored for its campaign to increase awareness and to provide accurate information about the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa and India. “With more than 28 million dead and 15 million orphaned, the disease continues, wiping out whole societies and creating family devastation.” Headquartered in Brooklyn, NY, KCA was founded by Leigh Blake, a movie and film executive, in 2002. Supported by Alicia Keys, Bono, Don Cheadle, Brad Pitt, Iman, and others, KCA asks the public to contribute a dollar a day to purchase the lifesaving antiretroviral drugs available to only one in five people who need them. 100% of donations are directed to treatment. Founded in 2007, a goal of the URI KCA is to sponsor 2 children and their families annually. Through its numerous, student-oriented fundraisers, including the annual Black Ball, Holler-For-A-Dollar/Who-Gives-A-Buck, and screenings of documentaries, URI KCA raised $365, forwarding this to the national headquarters. $700 has been raised from this year’s campaign. In 2007, URI KCA sent delegates to the annual KCA Conference in New York City to attend organizational development workshops. The student group appreciates the support of Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, National Society of Black Engineers, Latin American Student Association, Peer Advocates, Flavor Unit, and URI Dance Company.

**Mentor/Tutor Internship** is being honored for the reciprocal benefits in learning and personal development provided to college
student interns and the at-risk students with which they work. Founded in 1998 by Dr. Al Killilea, Professor, Political Science, and coordinated by Cherie Aiello as an initiative of the South County Coalition Against Racism, the MTI Program was piloted with eight college interns of color seeking to help students of color in Kingston-area schools in a racially hostile environment to feel cared for. The Program has now grown to over 300 URI interns from diverse backgrounds annually, of which 14 serve as Teaching Assistants. Through the generosity of John Murphy, President and CEO of Home Loan Investment Bank, 10 students annually are recruited from the Talent Development Program to serve as interns in Providence-area schools. At the end of a semester, interns will have volunteered for a total of 44 hours as classroom assistants or one-on-one tutors; attended a weekly class and compiled a weekly journal to reflect upon their experience; completed two papers on selected topics; and received three academic credits. “MTI’s influence is felt throughout South County, and up to Providence and Central Falls, with over 40 participating K-12 schools, and after-school and adult education programs.”

*Lifetime Achievement Award*

**Leo DiMaio, Jr.**, is being honored as the seventh recipient of URI’s Lifetime Achievement for his leadership in developing the business and service delivery models of Special Programs for Talent Development, arguably Rhode Island’s most historically significant diversity program; and his lifelong commitment to constructing equitable pathways for underrepresented students to complete college. Born and raised in Providence’s Federal Hill neighborhood, he holds a BA degree from Providence College, and an MA from URI. After working as Director of Education and Recreation at the Adult Correctional Institution for 12 years, he served as Talent Development’s first Assistant Director, assisting his friend and colleague, Rev. Arthur L. Hardge, from 1969 to 1980. As a response to the nation’s awakened social conscience in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968, Talent Development was founded to recruit, support, and retain underrepresented students from Rhode Island, initially admitting 15 students. Campus diversity institutions, such as the Multicultural Center, and the African and Afro-American Studies Program, owe their existence to the political initiatives of the students and staff of TD. In 1980, Mr. DiMaio succeeded Rev. Hardge, directing Talent Development until 2001. Over their combined tenures, approximately 1100 students were graduated. Since 2001, Mr. DiMiao has administered the College Readiness and At Ease Programs on the URI Providence campus. His service has previously been recognized by a host of awards, including the URI Presidential Alumni Excellence Award in 2001.