
30TH ANNUAL DINNER CELEBRATES PROPONENTS OF EQUITY



November 22, 2024

PennWest Clarion's 30th annual Student Senate Equity Awards and Dinner recognized campus and community proponents of equity Nov. 19 in Gemmell MPR. The event celebrates the outstanding contributions of people who are dedicated to advancing equity on campus or in the community.

Thirty years ago, then-Pennsylvania Governor Robert P. Casey Jr. proclaimed that a day in November would be celebrated as Diversity Day on the Clarion campus. Over the years, the celebration has included guest speakers on equity-related topics, panel presentations on relevant equity topics, and, for the 30th consecutive year, the Equity Dinner and Awards Banquet, hosted jointly by Student Senate and the Office of Social Equity. This year's theme was "Celebrating 30 Years of Connecting Students through Inclusive Engagement." Student Senators Rachel Kister and Adison Etling were coordinators of ceremonies.

Keynote speakers were Rogers Laugand, assistant vice president for DEI Student Support, Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Ron Radaker, director of the Center for Access and Success, Office for Students with Disabilities.

“As we all know, universities are not just places of academic learning,” Laugand said. “They are spaces where diverse communities come together, learn from each other, and grow through shared experiences.”

He reflected on his 34 years at PennWest Clarion, a journey that he said has given him the privilege to work on several impactful programs: Building Bridges, which engages students in dialogue about issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion; Frederick Douglass Scholars, which provides financial support, mentorship and academic resources to help students navigate the challenges of higher education; Martin Luther King Jr. Community Breakfast, through which students, faculty, staff and community members engage in dialogue that connects their lived experiences to the broader struggle for equity and justice; and DEI Student Recognition Awards, which highlights students who actively engage their peers in conversations around diversity and who take action to make the university a more welcoming place for all.

Radaker’s remarks highlighted his work with students and various programs during his 24-year tenure at Clarion.

“I had the privilege to be a part of the formation of the Presidential Commission on LGBT+ Concerns in 2009. This was a small group of individuals who decided to make a difference in the development of policies on our campus,” Radaker said. “This commission, along with the Office of Social Equity, developed the Preferred Names Policy and (was behind) the development of gender-neutral restrooms on our campus.”

The commission led training of individuals in our Safe Zone Program, a voluntary program of students, faculty, staff and administrators who have completed educational training to develop a greater awareness of issues affecting students of all genders and sexual identities. In 2017, it established the campus’ first Lavender Graduation, a ceremony that celebrates the achievements of LGBTQ+ students and allies, and recognizes their contributions to the university community.

Radaker noted that the environment of listening that he created in his office gave four African American women a space where they felt comfortable studying.

“By observing and listening to their needs, the PUSH (Persist Until Something Happens) group was formed. We had on average 30 women that would come to our events,” he said. “One meaningful connection can make such a huge impact.”

Laugand emphasized that these programs and others have provided opportunities for students to build lasting connections: “Connections between students of different backgrounds, identities, and beliefs. Connections that foster a deeper understanding of each other and the world we live in. Connections that last far beyond their time at university. Together, we can continue to build bridges, support one another, and create a stronger, more inclusive campus community.”

Award recipients are:

- *Little Leaders Project – Outstanding Community Award*
- *Dr. Brandon Packard – Outstanding Supporter Award*
- *Dr. Kevan Yenerall – Outstanding Employee Award*
- *Katelyn Campbell – Outstanding Student Award*
- *Golden Eagles football team – Special Group Award*
- *Kennedy Brown – Special Equity Award*

- *Presidential Award – Selamawit Yilma*

To view photos from the evening, go to <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjBSD9g>.