

Holyoke Community recognizes faculty and staff

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College Anthropology Professor Vanessa Martínez of Holyoke is the recipient of the inaugural Dr. Christina Royal Equity and Action Award, named in honor of HCC's former president.

The award was created by the HCC Board of Trustees to recognize a full-time member of the faculty or staff who, "through their efforts on and off campus, supports a culture of transformational justice, works to remove barriers for historically marginalized groups, improves cultural competency through dialogue and education, exhibits leadership and best practices for social equity, or makes the larger community a more just and equitable place to live."

As HCC's fourth president, Royal broke many barriers as the first woman, first bi-racial, and first queer person to hold that position. She retired in July 2023.

The award was presented to Martínez by Royal's successor, President George Timmons, during the annual faculty and staff awards ceremony May 15.

Her colleagues refer to Professor Martínez as an "equity pioneer at HCC," Timmons said, "sharing knowledge and working hard to open doors to traditionally underrepresented students."

Martínez is chair of the college's Community Based Learning Program and former chair of the HCC Honors Program. Born in San Sebastian, Puerto Rico, she holds a bachelor's degree from Columbus State University, a master's degree from Georgia State



HCC Anthropology Professor Vanessa Martínez accepting the inaugural Dr. Christina Royal Equity and Action Award from HCC President George Timmons.

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University, and a Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts.

In 2020, she received the Elaine Marieb Award for Teaching Excellence, HCC's highest faculty honor. In 2022, she received the Thomas Ehrlich Civically Engaged Faculty Award from Campus Compact, a national coalition of colleges and universities committed to the public purposes of higher education. She is also a past recipient of the "Latino Teaching Excellence Award" from then Governor Deval Patrick (2011), and a leadership fellowship from the American Anthropological Association (2015).

Off campus, Martínez is the founder of the Springfield-based Women of

Color Equity Initiative, a nonprofit that aims to increase access and resources that enhance the health and well-being of women of color. She has been teaching at HCC since 2006.

"This award is not mine alone," Martínez said. "I work in community, and collaboration is how we thrive. Receiving this award motivates me even more to continue my transformative justice and equity work."

Martínez noted that during her interview for a teaching position at HCC 18 years ago, she told the vice president of academic affairs she was the "do good in the world type." The VP replied, "So are we."

"I knew then this was where I needed and wanted to be," Martínez told the audience gathered for the awards ceremony in the Leslie Phillips Theater. "Because together we can make a significant impact on making this world a better place before we leave it."

The college also presented the Elaine Marieb Faculty Chair for Teaching Excellence award to English Professor Fred Cooksey of Easthampton; the Idelia Smith Adjunct Faculty Award to Jessica Strano-Rex, clinical nursing instructor from Suffield, Conn.; the Outstanding Professional Staff Award to Mayra Diaz, senior executive assistant for student and academic affairs from Springfield; the Outstanding Classified Staff Award to Derek Swist, chemistry lab technician from Granby, Mass.; and the Outstanding Part-Time Staff Award to Susan Reade, literacy specialist and ESOL instructor from Northampton.