

► In The News

HCC criminal justice professor honored

HOLYOKE – Holyoke Community College criminal justice professor Nicole J. Hendricks was honored Oct. 6 with an Inspiration Award from the African American Female Professor Award Association.

Each year, the association celebrates a handful of Black female professors at its annual awards banquet, which this year was held at the Griswold Theater on the campus of American International College in Springfield.

Hendricks, a 17-year faculty member at HCC, was one of four Black female professors recognized.

“It was a great honor to receive this award,” said Hendricks. “The ceremony itself was a great celebration of the incredible women who are working in education and a wonderful moment to bring attention to the fact that so few college faculty are Black women, less than 2 percent.”

That statistic was also emphasized by Traci Talbert, AAFPAA’s president and founder, who said professors like

Hendricks are making strides to improve diversity and inclusion at their own institutions.

“Just their presence alone helps to engage with the students and help them identify and relate,” Talbert said. “They are also working in affinity groups and doing other things on college campuses as well as in the community to ensure that these experiences continue to enhance and build equity.”

Hendricks has served as chair of the Criminal Justice Department at HCC and teaches a variety of courses in that area, including criminology and women’s studies. She also teaches interdisciplinary courses as part of HCC’s Learning Communities program. For example, in “Reimagining Incarceration,” she and her teaching partner, economics professor Mary Orisich, explore mass incarceration through the lens of feminist social justice theory, gender and sexuality studies, crit-



Nicole J. Hendricks

ical race theory, and political economy.

Hendricks’ efforts to reimagine incarceration extend well beyond the classroom. Together, she and Orisich founded Western Mass CORE, a prison education program based at HCC that seeks to facilitate pathways to college for people impacted by the criminal legal system.

“Her strong commitment to education as a vehicle for social justice and societal change is evident in her work inside and outside the classroom,” said Kim Hicks, HCC’s dean of Arts and Humanities, who introduced Hendricks at the banquet and nominated her for the award.

In her own remarks at the banquet, Hendricks talked about the “cognitive dissonance” she experienced as a teenager visiting her older brother in prison while she was attending Deerfield

Academy, an elite prep school, and later Wesleyan University, a private college in Middletown, CT.

Holyoke Community College President George Timmons also attended the event and offered remarks at the banquet celebrating the Black women in his life, including his grandmother, who raised him, and his wife, Frankie, a tenured professor of criminal justice at Columbia-Greene Community College in New York.

In addition to a physical award inscribed with a personal message, Hendricks received an embroidered sash with colors representing African ancestry.

In accepting the Inspiration Award, Hendricks said she also accepted the responsibility that goes along with it.

“It signifies, to me, a dedication to continuing to live my purpose,” Hendricks said, “fostering a political consciousness that places equity and racial justice at the center, and does so in community with others.”