

# 2025

## **DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING LIVING LEGACY CONVOCATION**

### **Emcee**

**Jonelle Reynolds, Ph.D.**

*Director of Diversity and Inclusion Initiatives*

### **Land and Labor Acknowledgement**

**Ananda Griffin**

*Ph.D. Student in Philosophy*

### **Welcome Message**

**Anne D'Alleva, Ph.D.**

*Provost & Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs*

### **2025 MLK Legacy Awards**

**Alicia McKenzie**

*Director of the H. Fred Simons African American Cultural Center*

### **Presenter of the Awards:**

**Nathan Fuerst**

*Vice President for Student Life and Enrollment*

**Lakeesha Brown**

*Vice President & Chief Human Resources Officer*

**Mo Cotton Kelly**

*Chief People Officer & Senior Vice President for Alumni Relations*

*State Senator Julie Kushner Presents Citation to Nelson Merchan*

### **Spoken Word**

**Nadia Sims**

*Poet and Spoken Word Artist*

### **Musical Performances**

**UConn Voices of Freedom & Rev. Lisa Clayton**

### **Musical Performances**

**Todd Dulaney**

### **Closing Remarks**

**Jonelle Reynolds, Ph.D.**

# ***MLK LEGACY AWARDS AWARDEES***



## ***UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT: ANDY ZHANG***

Andy Zhang is a junior at the University of Connecticut pursuing dual degrees in economics and environmental sciences. At UConn, Andy works as a Sustainability Intern within the Office of Sustainability and is the Founder and President of the UConn Chapter of Plant Futures. Outside of UConn, Andy works as a Food Policy Intern with Friends of the Earth. Passionate about progressive policy and food advocacy, Andy is dedicated to pursuing a career focused on creating equitable and sustainable food systems through innovative policy solutions.

## ***GRADUATE STUDENT: ADANMA AKOMA***

Adanma Akoma is currently a PhD candidate in the Materials Science and Engineering department at the University of Connecticut where she focuses on advanced characterization of materials used for industries that span energy, biomedicine, etc. She also serves as the President for BlackSTEM (2024/25) - a thriving organization for Black scholars pursuing graduate degrees in STEM and is the Creative Director and Founder of the Writing Black Collective (WBC 2023). Her most recent project provides a platform for a cohort of writers that aim to demystify (through published manuscripts) the challenges that are often faced by minority students in pursuit of doctoral degrees. WBC provides unique insights that aid in reducing the barriers to diversifying academia and provides solutions that promote a more equitable experience for black and brown scholars.



# ***MLK LEGACY AWARDS AWARDEES***

## ***FACULTY: KATE CAPSHAW, PH.D.***



Kate Capshaw served as Associate Dean of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in CLAS, where she shaped cluster hires that brought spectacular faculty to UConn, worked with departments on inclusion, and supported research and pedagogy on diverse topics and approaches. She is Professor of English and Social and Critical Inquiry, teaching courses on Black youth culture, the graphic novel, and youth literatures. Her research focuses on the role of Black childhood to social justice movements, and she has published books on the Harlem Renaissance, Civil Rights Movement, and nineteenth-century Black childhoods and dozens of essays on race, culture, and creativity.

## ***STAFF: ALEXIS T. R. MONTEIRO***

Alexis Monteiro (he/him/his) is a Residence Hall Director at the University of Connecticut, committed to fostering equitable and developmental spaces for students and professionals. A first-generation FYE instructor, Alexis also champions impactful initiatives like the prayer room and "Humans of UConn" art exhibit in McMahon Hall. He holds a master's in College Student Personnel from the University of Rhode Island. Serving as NEACUHO's DEIB Officer and Chair of ACUHO-I's Black Professional Network, Alexis works focuses on uplifting and celebrating marginalized voices. Outside work, he enjoys spending time with family, basketball and listening to music.



# ***MLK LEGACY AWARDS AWARDEES***

## ***TEAM: THE COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE, HEALTH AND NATURAL RESOURCES' DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND JUSTICE STRATEGIC VISION IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE (CAHNR DEIJ SVIC)***

The CAHNR DEIJ SVIC includes faculty and staff representing the nine academic units in the college. The team's overarching goal is to develop mechanisms to build systems with clear and meaningful commitment to DEIJ in CAHNR. The group's contributions address four priority areas: increasing the diversity of CAHNR community; creating inclusive, culturally sustaining learning environments; identifying and addressing harmful institutional policies and practices; and creating pathways to successful community engagement. Specifically, the group worked with the HartBeat Ensemble to engage and educate faculty, staff, and students within the college leading to the development of a DEIJ statement for CAHNR.



## ***ALUM: N. CHINEYE (CHI) ANAKO, MPH, CHES***



N. Chineye (Chi) Anako is a public health practitioner whose work has focused on the intersection of public health and health equity solutions. Chi is currently the Regional Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion for Trinity Health. She also serves as the administrator of the 3+1 Language Services Program at the organization, which provides cultural and linguistic services to patients. In addition to her role at Trinity Health, she is also an Adjunct Instructor at Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, CT in the College of Health Professions and University of Houston Downtown, in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. Currently, Chi serves on the board of the Copper Beech Institute (CBI) and Universal Health Care Foundation of Connecticut.

# ***MLK LEGACY AWARDS AWARDEES***

## ***COMMUNITY MEMBER: NELSON MERCHAN***

Nelson Merchan is a business advisor at the University of Connecticut's Small Business Development Center. In 2019, he was recognized as the state's top business advisor for securing the highest lending impact. Merchan is a board member of the Foundation at WCSU, Housatonic Habitat for Humanity, and Housatonic Industrial Corporation. Merchan has been invited to participate in entrepreneurship development programs in Costa Rica, Chile, and El Salvador. He holds an MBA from Georgia State University and a BBA from Universidad del Rosario in Bogota, Colombia.



## ***ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS***

***THE OFFICE FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WOULD LIKE TO THANK***

### ***MLK LEGACY SELECTION COMMITTEE***

***Alicia McKenzie – co chair***

***Jonelle Reynolds – co- chair***

***Marketa Burnett***

***Cary Chadwick***

***Miguel Colon***

***Kimberly Curry***

***Kate Gannon***

***Kathleen Holgerson***

***THE OFFICE OF THE PROVOST***

***JORGENSEN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS***

***UCONN VOICES OF FREEDOM & REVEREND LISA CLAYTON***

***NADIA SIMS***