



News

Eberly College of Science announces 2022 Climate and Diversity Awards



7 February 2023

The Eberly College of Science Climate and Diversity Committee has selected three individuals and one group to receive 2022 **Climate and Diversity Awards** in recognition of their extraordinary commitment to enhancing the environment of mutual respect and diversity in the college over the past year. The award is supported by the Santacroce Family Climate and Diversity Fund in the Eberly College of Science. The awardees and nominees were honored at an annual ceremony on Thursday, January 16, 2023, to recognize their efforts to make our college community supportive and welcoming to everyone.

This year's awardees are Research Professor of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology **Cheryl Keller**, academic advisor **Jennifer Stingelin Keefer**, biology graduate student **Dynsity Wright**, and the physics department's CalBridge program committee.

In 2022, Penn State alumni **Andy and Tina Santacroce** endowed the awards to ensure that climate and diversity remain priorities in the college. They joined members of the college community at the ceremony.

"Andy and I take the "We" in "We Are" very seriously and that is why we have chosen to help fund the Dean's Climate and Diversity Award," said Tina Santacroce at the ceremony. "Fostering diversity, including underrepresented groups isn't just nice; it's critical. If we want to live in a better world, if we want to solve the world's problems, if we just want a better quality of life, we need diversity, and we need a climate where everyone feels welcomed, valued, appreciated and where everyone's voices are heard and respected."



Left to Right: Tracy Langkilde, Verne M. Willaman Dean; Cheryl Keller, research professor; Jennifer Stingelin Keefer, academic advisor; Stephanie Wissel, Downsborough Early Career Assistant Professor of Physics and Astronomy and Astrophysics; Dynisty Wright, graduate student; Tina Santacroce and Andy Santacroce.

Cheryl Keller

Keller was recognized for her efforts to improve policies and attitudes related to non-tenure track faculty, who often come from underrepresented backgrounds. As co-chair of the Non-Tenure Track Faculty and Postdoc Subcommittee of the college Climate and Diversity Committee, Keller led an effort to draft and disseminate a report that provided recommendations on policy, procedure, and practice to improve workplace climate for non-tenure track faculty. Many of the included recommendations have been adopted by departments.

“Cheryl is passionate about her professional contribution to our college community and is a tireless advocate to make sure all our non-tenure track teaching and research professors are included and valued for their vital contributions to our mission,” said a nominator.

Keller also helped draft a similar report aimed at improving climate for postdoctoral fellows. One nominator stated that her efforts have improved faculty meetings in the department and have also encouraged other departments to conduct business in an inclusive way. Keller is also part of the Rainbow Science Network, which fosters an inclusive environment for members of the LGBTQ+ community within the college’s research groups and learning environments.



Cheryl Keller (middle) poses with nominator Barb McGrath (L) and Verne M. Willaman Dean Tracy Langkilde (R).

Jennifer Stingelin Keefer

Keefer was recognized for her dedication to advising all students, including those from underrepresented backgrounds, and for her efforts to coordinate professional development programming for other advisors and the college community. She is the liaison to students that have changed campuses and puts in considerable effort to advocate for her students. A large world map hangs on her office wall that serves as an ice breaker for getting to know new international students. Students love placing flags on the map to show where they are from and to talk about their country of origin.

“It is clear that Jennifer has spent a great deal of time getting to really know her advisees and the situations that they are facing,” said a nominator. “She often puts in extra time to try to bring advisees together in a group to build community among the students she works with, and from feedback I have seen, her advisees truly appreciate her

continuous efforts on their behalf.”

Keefer has organized several workshops for staff and faculty in the college on topics such as pronouncing Chinese names, DEI, transgender and gender Inclusion, and trauma-informed advising for diverse students. She also serves on the college’s Climate and Diversity Staff Subcommittee, helps review scholarship candidates, and participates in student-led events.



Jennifer Stingelin Keefer (middle) poses with nominator Carolyn Jensen (L) and Verne M. Willaman Dean Tracy Langkilde (R).

Dynisty Wright

Wright was recognized for her efforts to support first-generation college students at Penn State and improve programming and resources for underrepresented students. She co-founded and served as president for the First Gen Advocates organization, which helps first-generation students transition to university life and provides resources, programming, and a welcoming community. She has provided trainings to faculty, staff, and students at University Park on mentoring first-generation students, and has provided trainings about the challenges that first-generation students face at several other Penn state campuses.

Wright is involved with the Summer Research Opportunity Program at Penn State and has worked with the college’s Office of Diversity and Inclusion on events such as the STEM Open House and the Reverse Career Fair. These events are designed to recruit and support students from underrepresented backgrounds. She has also participated in the college’s STEM career day for young women, ENVISION, where she mentored a group of middle and high school girls.

“She has served as a role model for making our college accessible at all levels, from young middle and high school students to college students making the transition to graduate school,” said a nominator. “She has done this through sharing her personal enthusiasm and her academic journey in the leadership roles she has had in STEM at Penn State.”

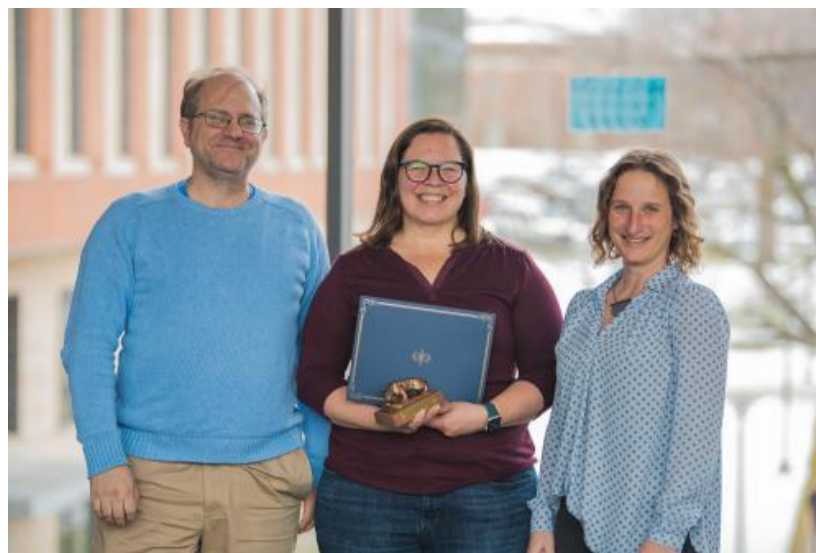


Dynisty Wright poses with nominators Steven Schaeffer (L) and Isaac Wright and Verne M. Willaman Dean Tracy Langkilde (R).

Physics CalBridge Committee

The CalBridge program—initiated at Cal Poly Pomona—aims to increase the diversity of physics practitioners by identifying and assisting members of groups historically underrepresented in physics, including by connecting students with Ph.D. programs. With guidance from the Physics Department’s CalBridge program leadership committee, Penn State is one of a handful of universities outside of California to welcome CalBridge participants to its graduate program. The leadership committee includes **Stephanie Wissel**, Downsborough Early Career Assistant Professor of Physics and of Astronomy and Astrophysics; **Nathan Keim**, associate research professor of physics; and **David Radice**, assistant professor of physics and of astronomy and astrophysics. The committee prepares recruiting materials for the program, tracks applicants through the admissions process, and provides feedback about all applicants at the end of the process. It also helps to support these students’ progress once they are at Penn State.

“This feedback is important to the program and future students in making sure that they understand what we are looking for in applicants, but it has also generated important discussions with the admissions committee about how to equitably evaluate applications,” said a nominator. “After just two years with the program, it has already become a major part of our efforts to diversify the Physics Department’s graduate program.”



Stephanie Wissel (middle), who accepted the award on behalf of the CalBridge leadership committee, poses with nominator Eric Hudson (L) and Verne M. Willaman Dean Tracy Langkilde (R).

About the Climate and Diversity Awards

The Eberly College of Science Dean's **Climate and Diversity Awards** were created in 2009 and received generous support from the Santacroce Family Climate and Diversity Fund in the Eberly College of Science in 2022. The awards allow the college to celebrate the success, leadership, and vision of members of the college community—including undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral fellows, staff members, and faculty members, as well as programs within the college—who have displayed extraordinary commitment to enhancing our environment of mutual respect and diversity.

RELATED STORIES

- [1 Two Eberly students selected as Perreault Fellows](#)
- [2 2022 Dean's Climate and Diversity Award Recipients](#)
- [3 Alumni Mark Becker and James Stith honored with Distinguished Alumni Award](#)
- [4 Ashtekar Frontiers of Science Lectures to begin Jan. 21](#)
- [5 Bortiatynski selected as 2022-24 Teaching and Learning with Technology Faculty Fellow](#)

College Resources >

Offices and Centers >

Student Programs >



[College Org. Chart](#) [Hotline](#) [Contact Us](#) [Log in](#)

Follow the Eberly College of Science



Copyright © 2023, The Pennsylvania State University | [Privacy and Legal Statements](#)