

ECSU honors three with MLK Awards

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WILLIMANTIC — Political science major Morgane Russell, Isabel Logan, assistant professor of social work; and Leah Ralls, president of the NAACP Windham/Willimantic branch, received Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Distinguished Service Awards at Eastern Connecticut State University's annual awards reception Feb. 27.

In her sophomore and junior years, Russell was president of the Black Student Union, a role in which she saw that she needed to gain more knowledge of policies affecting minority populations.

As a result, she changed her major from business administration to political science.

Russell is currently the president of the campus NAACP chapter and an intern in the Connecticut General Assembly.

As she gains first-hand experience in the legislative process, she is learning more about public policy.

Russell aspires to serve as a legislative representative while gaining insight into issues affecting marginalized communities around her.

"Morgane is a team player who carries out all of her duties professionally and with high quality and distinction," said Stacey Close, associate vice president of equity and diversity.

Logan's passion for issues of social justice and equality began in 1996, when she was a social worker for the Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services in the New Haven Superior Court and Superior Court for Juvenile Matters at Hartford.

In 2001, American University selected her to assist with the development of the cultural competency curricula for drug court professionals.

Logan's research has led to policy implementation and a continued cultural competence movement within the Connecticut Judicial System.

She also assisted the Connecticut Court Support Service Division with the development of its cultural



Leah Ralls, left, president of the NAACP Windham/Willimantic branch; Isabel Logan, middle front, assistant professor of social work; and political science major Morgane Russell, Class of 2019, right, received MLK Awards at Eastern's annual ceremony. Keith Beauchamp, middle back, a documentary producer, delivered the keynote address. Contributed photo

competence curriculum.

"Dr. Logan's support of restorative justice mirrors the message of Dr. King," said Eunice Matthews-Armstead, professor of social work and program coordinator of Eastern's Social Work Program. "She is an organizer, teacher, leader and consummate fighter for justice, freedom and equality."

Ralls is a social worker for the State of Connecticut, Public Defender Division.

She started her career working in a local substance abuse agency helping people deal with homelessness, substance abuse, mental illness and other chronic medical conditions.

She now works with the same population but in a legal environment, where the consequences are greater for clients because they are facing incarceration.

Ralls has a passion for advocating for those less fortunate in the community.

As president of the NAACP Windham/Willimantic

branch, she brings that same compassion and energy in fighting for civil rights.

In her remarks, Ralls thanked members of the local NAACP branch for their activism, and said Dr. King had the "tenacity to help those who were voiceless."

Three years ago, the branch was in reactivation status and needed 50 active members to re-establish operations.

Under Rall's leadership, the branch has grown to more than 120 members.

She and branch members have worked hard to start a conversation and increase awareness and appreciation of Black History and civil rights in the local community.

"In the past two years, under the leadership of Mrs. Ralls, our NAACP Windham/Willimantic Branch has run community conversations on race and addressed individual and institutional examples of racism in our area with a combination of education and legal action" said

Cassandra Martineau, university assistant in Eastern's Pride Center.

"She has worked with community leaders, schools and other institutions to raise awareness of racial disparity, helping ex-inmates find employment, and brought African American History to schools and libraries in the area."

Keith Beauchamp, producer of the documentary "The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till," delivered the keynote address.

"Racial issues are deeply embedded in the American lifestyle," said Beauchamp.

He called Martin Luther King Jr. a "gentle warrior," and said Dr. King "left us with a vision of what this country can become. Regardless of our skill set, we are obligated to use it to uphold the legacy of Dr. King."

Eastern President Elsa Núñez opened the ceremonies, noting current racial tensions in the nation and encouraging the audience to "stand tall as Dr. King did, confronting every instance when a person or a group of people acts out their prejudice and bigotry."