

Project M.O.S.T. Celebrates Student Success

Project M.O.S.T. (Men of Southwest Tennessee) held an awards program on February 7 to recognize the accomplishments, community service, and academic achievements of its participants. The theme of the program, “Men in Black,” the organizers noted, was not a play on the movie by the same name. Instead, it focused on some of the positive attributes symbolized in the color black. Some of the qualities emphasized were: innate intelligence, original nature, faith, a sense of potential and possibility, authority, strength, and humanity (in that black symbolizes the combination of all colors of the universe).



Pictured are members of Project M.O.S.T. along with the platform party at the culmination of the “Men in Black” Awards program.

The program opened with greetings from Paul Robinson, a secretary for Project M.O.S.T., followed by the welcome from Southwest President Nathan Essex.

Kariem-Abdul Salaam, director of Project M.O.S.T., set the occasion by recapping some of the tenants of the program, highlighting achievements, and encouraging continued growth. “Engage in activities that support your dream,” he said to the men.

Aubry Odom, a Project M.O.S.T. participant, recited an original poem, *Black Men*, before keynote speaker Verties Sails Jr., retired head men’s basketball coach/athletic director for Southwest, took the podium. Coach Sails retired from Southwest in June 2012, ending a 33-year coaching career at the college.

Coach Sails laid the foundation for his speech by briefly discussing his childhood, before delving into the inspiring and motivating chronicles of his career path. He ended with what he called seven slogans to live by, “(1) Two things are bad for the heart; running upstairs and running down people. (2) Men who gossip with you, will gossip about you. (3) If you really want to keep a secret, you don’t need any help. (4) You can do a little with faith, but you can do nothing without it. (5) Education is that which remains when you’ve forgotten everything you’ve learned in school. (6) Love your enemies; it will drive them crazy., and (7) The race is not given to the swift, nor to the strong, but to that person who holds out to the end.”

Project M.O.S.T. case managers Angelo Williams, Danesha L. Ward, and Verties Sails III presented the “Academic Excellence Awards” to participants whose GPAs were 3.0 and above. Also, because of their hard work and persistence, Aubry Odom, Harvey Burke, and Phillip Warren were presented the “Grit Award.” The “All-M.O.S.T. Award,” embodying what Project M.O.S.T. epitomizes, was presented to Vervie Moses.

The platform guests included Tennessee Board of Regents Board Member Greg Duckett, who greeted the assembly, along with Provost and Executive Vice President Joanne Bassett and Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs Barbara Roseborough.

Project M.O.S.T. is currently serving approximately 350 participants, exceeding the funding agency’s requirement of 240 participants. Based on the two-annual cohorts, the average annual rate of retention is 73.8 percent.

- Fall 2012 to Fall 2013 - 75.6%
- Spring 2013 to Spring 2014 - 72%
- Fall 2013 to Spring 2014 - 75.8%

Salaam attributes the success of the program to:

- A strength-based approach that focuses on restoring intrinsic motivations (i.e., self-esteem, self-awareness, confidence, trust/cooperation, curiosity, and a yearning for learning).
- An intrusive advising/counseling model and continuous student engagement activities (meetings twice a month).
- Supportive services (i.e., monthly stipends, transportation assistance, scholarships, tutoring services, and mentoring).