



Diversity Advisory Council

Outstanding UMB Faculty Award

Bret Hassel, PhD

Bret Hassel, PhD, associate professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at the School of Medicine, has been a team player, helping with multiple Universitywide initiatives, since coming to UMB in 1995.

So it shouldn't be surprising that when Kevin Cullen, MD, director of the University of Maryland Greenebaum Comprehensive Cancer Center, asked Hassel to be UMGCCC's liaison for the UMB CURE Scholars Program that he jumped in with both feet.

"What started as a peripheral role on the UMB CURE team rapidly evolved to a more substantial commitment as I was 'infected' by the contagious enthusiasm for this program that has now spread as an 'epidemic' for the good across UMB schools and the entire city of Baltimore," Hassel said of the UMB pipeline program that is preparing West Baltimore children for health and research careers through hands-on workshops, lab experiences, and mentorship.

"Indeed, the UMB CURE team is a microcosm of diversity that is at the heart of its goal, with each member bringing a unique skill set that fuels the program," Hassel said.

For his contributions to CURE and many other programs at UMB and beyond that help under-represented minority students find success, Hassel will receive the Outstanding UMB Faculty Award as part of the University's Black History Month celebration on Feb. 1.

Hassel, a member of the UMB CURE Scholars team since its inception, serving as a mentor and co-chair of the Sustainability Subcommittee that is charged with writing grant applications to fund the program, said he shares the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Diversity Recognition Award with many colleagues.



“It is a humbling honor especially in the context of the many UMB faculty and staff who are also deeply passionate about the importance of diversity and inclusion,” he said. “In that vein, the committed people that I work with are equally responsible for the success of the different outreach and education programs and should be considered as co-recipients of this award.”

In addition to the CURE Scholars, Hassel plays leadership roles in multiple National Institutes of Health-funded programs that promote minority inclusion and diversity at UMB. He has directed the School of Medicine’s Nathan Schnaper Intern Program in Translational Cancer Research for 16 years and is a member of the core team for the STAR-PREP minority post-baccalaureate program.

Most recently, Hassel received a Bridges to the Doctorate grant in partnership with Towson University to foster the progression of minority master’s degree students to PhD programs. He also contributes to minority-focused training programs at Morgan State, Coppin State, and the University of Maryland, Baltimore County.

“Bret does not treat scholar diversity as a dream, he is a team player who helps find the funds and helps build the structures to make this a reality,” said Gregory Carey, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Microbiology and Immunology at SOM, who nominated Hassel for the MLK award.

“Bret is focused on diversity achievement at the individual level as well,” added Carey, director of student summer research and community outreach at the school and a former MLK award winner himself. “A faculty member recently asked Dr. Hassel and I to help with a Howard Hughes research fellowship application for one of our PhD-track, African-American scholars. This talented and wonderful young lady happens to also have a certified neurocognitive disability. Bret and I responded enthusiastically! Proudly, we learned from her mentor last week that the student has been advanced to the finalist round for a Howard Hughes Medical Institute student award! What greater reward for service than to

read through the letter sent by this proud young lady and celebrate her win with her? This is Dr. King’s dream and what Bret lives for.”

Hassel, who loves mentoring, teaching, and interacting with students, said he gets back more than he gives.

“Working in an environment that promotes a culture of diversity, like UMB, has allowed me to experience the benefits of a diverse workplace and understand the importance of efforts to expand this at UMB and beyond,” he said when asked why helping minorities is so important to him. “The impact of programs that advance minority representation, and benefit all parties involved, provides plenty of motivation to continue this work.”

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