



COLLEGE OF COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION

# Experience Diversity Banquet

HOSTED BY THE CCI DIVERSITY STUDENT LEADERS SOCIETY

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April 9, 2021 | Virtual Event

## PROGRAM



### **Welcome**

Joshua Melendez & Maria Takele  
Jonathan Chaffen - MC

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### **Opening Performances**

Diversity Student Leaders Society "Rise Up!" Dramatizations  
*Producer & Writer: Alice R. Bowling Wirth*  
*Choreographer: Alexa Marie Melendez*

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### **Performances**

Obayana Ajanaku, Drummer  
Oba from Indigenous Vibes  
Lyla June  
Angelia Onuoha, "Rise Up!"  
Wilfredo Jose Melendez  
Kelly Shipe, Bagpipes

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### **CCI Diversity Award Presentations**

Dr. Mike Wirth

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### **Keynote Speaker**

Dr. Theotis Robinson Jr.

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### **Announcements of Diversity Banquet Scholarship Winners**

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### **Acknowledgement of Sponsors**

Lorna Keathley & Alice R. Bowling Wirth

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### **Closing Remarks**

## 2021 CCI DIVERSITY AWARD RECIPIENT

*Yassin Terou*

Yassin Terou is founder and owner of Yassin's Falafel House in Knoxville. He arrived in Knoxville as a refugee from Damascus, Syria, and by the time he became a US citizen a decade later in 2020, his kindness, enthusiasm, hard work, and generosity had earned him a remarkable number of awards and recognitions.

In 2014, he opened Yassin's Falafel House in downtown Knoxville and dedicated the space to be welcoming to people of "all sizes, all colors, all ages, all sexes, all cultures, all religions, all types, all beliefs." He works tirelessly to help the Knoxville community, including many without permanent homes who suffer from hunger.

In 2018, Yassin's Falafel House was recognized by Reader's Digest and ABC's Good Morning America as the "Nicest Place in America." The same year his shop was also chosen as the Knoxville News Sentinel's Best Middle Eastern Food, he opened a second shop, he received the 2018 Peace Award from Knoxville's Rotary Club, and he was named the 2018 News Sentinel Person of the Year.

Since then he has won the Pinnacle Award from the Knoxville Chamber of Commerce, was named Knoxville's Person of the Year in 2019, and he presided over the inauguration of Knoxville's new mayor.

He has used his fame to help those in need in Knoxville and beyond including feeding children in need in Knoxville and feeding hurricane victims with a pop-up kitchen in Nashville.



## 2021 CCI DIVERSITY AWARD RECIPIENT

*Tyvi Small*

Tyvi Small is Vice Chancellor for Diversity and Engagement at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Prior to becoming a vice chancellor, he served UTK for 13 years in the Haslam College of Business, where his culminating role was as Executive Director for Talent Management, Diversity and Community Relations. Before coming to Knoxville, he was the Education Coordinator and Assistant to the Mayor for the City of West Palm Beach, Florida.

He is very involved in the Knoxville community and serves on the board of directors of the Knoxville Area Urban League and on the executive committee of The Tennessee Valley Fair. He is currently vice chair of the Knoxville Utilities Board (KUB), a member of Leadership Tennessee Class VII, a 2012 graduate of Leadership Knoxville and a 2008 graduate of Introduction Knoxville. He is also past Secretary/Treasurer of The Development Corporation (TDC) of Knox County and former secretary, development chair and board member of Big Brothers, Big Sisters of East Tennessee.

He has received a number of awards including: a 2020 Diversity Champion Award from the Knoxville Martin King, Jr. Commemorative Commission, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.'s 2020 Southeastern Region: Public Servant Unity Leadership Award, the UT Office of Multicultural Student Life's Beacon of Light Award, the Greater Knoxville Business Journal's 40 Under 40 Award, and UT's Dr. Marva L. Rudolph Commitment to Diversity Award.





## 2021 KEYNOTE SPEAKER

### Theotis Robinson Jr.

Theotis Robinson Jr. is a Volunteer, trailblazer, and an advocate for equality who has diligently served the University of Tennessee since working to open its doors for African American undergraduates when he and two other black students, Charles Blair and Willie Mae Gillespie, were admitted to UT in January 1961.

He worked in various capacities at UT for 25 years and as vice president of equity and diversity of the University of Tennessee system for the last 14 of those years.

During his time as a UT student, he became involved in civil rights demonstrations on campus and in the Knoxville community. He also became involved in campus politics, planning the elections of black students for Student Government Association offices.

After leaving the university, Robinson went on to become the first African American in more than 50 years elected to the Knoxville City Council, where he served through 1977. He also served as vice president for economic development for the 1982 World's Fair.

He has won numerous awards over the years including: selection as a charter member and inductee into the UT African-American Hall of Fame (1994); named by Knoxville's Metro Pulse newspaper as one of the most 100 influential Knoxvilleans of the 20th century; selected as the inaugural recipient of the UT College of Communication and Information's Diversity Award (2009); receiving the prestigious Whitney M. Young Lifetime Achievement Award from the Knoxville Area Urban League (2015); having the I-40 underpass on 17th Street that leads to the UTK campus named the "Theotis Robinson, Jr Underpass" (2017); receiving UT Knoxville's highest alumni award - the Distinguished Alumnus Award (2018); receiving an Honorary Doctorate from UT Knoxville (2019); and having a UT residence hall named in his honor - Theotis Robinson Jr. Residence Hall (2021); Robinson is also a regular contributor to editorial pages as a freelance columnist for the Knoxville News Sentinel (USA Today Network).



## PAST CCI DIVERSITY AWARD RECIPIENTS

**2020**

Robert Booker

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**2019**

Arnold Cohen

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**2018**

Cylk Cozart

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**2017**

Rev. Dr. Harold Middlebrook

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**2016**

Lelan Statom

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**2015**

Dr. Tom Kim

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**2014**

Robin Wilhoit

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**2013**

Mayor Madeline Rogero

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**2012**

Avon Rollins

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**2011**

Jose Aponte

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**2010**

Phillys Nichols

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**2009**

Theotis Robinson Jr.

## CCI EXPERIENCE DIVERSITY BANQUET

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**Dr. John Zomchick**

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Gracie Strange, Vice President  
Brandon Turner, Vice President  
Alexa Melendez, VP - Social Media  
Alice R. Bowling Wirth, DSLS Director  
Lorna Keathley, DSLS Assistant Director

### SPECIAL THANKS

Jake Albright  
Beth Cole  
Justin Crawford  
Jacque Esai  
Mark Geller  
Anne Hensley  
Lorna Keathley

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Alice Wirth  
Michelle Wirth  
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### DSLS Students

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### Video Specialists

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*Co-Producer & Director*  
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*Co-Producer &  
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Lukas Vysniauskas  
*Editor, Production Assistant*

Katherine Barker  
*Teleprompter, Production Assistant*  
Haley Hodges  
*Audio, Production Assistant*