

Thursday, Aug 24, 2017

Oakland University graduate student selected to serve as VISTA

OU graduate student Aja Johnson was recently selected to serve as this year's AmeriCorps VISTA for the university.

The VISTA, which stands for Volunteers In Service to America, program is run by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency that engages millions of Americans in service through its core programs like AmeriCorps.

VISTAs at Oakland work in the education stream with a focus on promoting college readiness, engagement and retention, specifically in the Pontiac area. They have a partnership with the Michigan Nonprofit Association, Project Upward Bound office, Pontiac Schools and the Pontiac Promise Zone.

Besides an undergraduate degree in Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies and a minor in health psychology, Johnson brings a unique outlook to this position due to growing up in Pontiac.

"I am looking forward to working with the community of Pontiac as OU's VISTA," Johnson said. "A lot of the time people leave Pontiac and don't give back, so I want to let people know that success stories can come out of Pontiac and that education is possible for everyone."

Johnson also plans to help support students from underrepresented backgrounds by promoting new resources and redesigning old resources so they better cater towards the needs of students. She will also encourage the parents of Pontiac students to be more interactive and attentive in their children's education.

"The AmeriCorps VISTAs help amplify and solidify the work we do with Pontiac," said Diane Baldwin, community partnership coordinator. "They really help connect campus and the community."

"We are excited to have secured Aja because she is an OU student and will get hands-on experience throughout her studies here," added Baldwin. "Her experiences, education and background are especially relevant for this position and we are fortunate to have her working with us this year."

Johnson hopes that this initiative "shows underrepresented students that they have support and people who care, and that by creating this initiative we are removing some of the hurdles they have to go through. We want the students to feel comfortable rather than defeated, and excited to see how it can grow and what it means for the students of Pontiac."

Johnson is pursuing a master's degree in higher educational leadership at OU.



Oakland's new VISTA Aja Johnson, left, with Diane Baldwin, community partnership coordinator, will work on community engagement programs and the OU/Pontiac Initiative.