Suzan Shown Harjo to receive NCORE’s first Activist for Systemic Social Justice Award

NCORE launches annual award at 28th conference this week in Washington, D.C.

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE), the most comprehensive national forum on race relations, equity and access on college campuses, will award Suzan Shown Harjo the Activist for Systemic Social Justice Award at 11 a.m. on Thursday, May 28 at the Washington Hilton.

The award recognizes the work of an individual or organization whose actions have been transformational on social justice issues of race, ethnicity and sovereignty at the systemic level by affecting laws, policies, organizational structures and community practices.

Adrienne Thunder and Jack Soto, Co-Chairs of the National Coalition for the Advancement of Natives in Higher Education (NCANHE), will help present the honor to Harjo, along with Dr. Kathleen Wong(Lau), director of NCORE.

“We are so incredibly honored to create this award that recognizes Suzan Shown Harjo’s body of work over her lifetime on behalf of native and indigenous communities,” said Wong(Lau). “Her work in civil rights for native peoples and sovereign nations spans an incredible breadth of policies in public and private corporate arenas and institutions. She is a trailblazer who inspires all of us at NCORE and is a standard for social justice and equity work on race, ethnicity and sovereignty in higher education.”

Created in 2015, the inaugural award is inspired by the life and work of Harjo, an unwavering champion, thoughtful leader and advocate whose talents as a poet, curator, author, national political leader and legal advisor created action on the American Indian Religious Freedom Act (1978), American Indian Museum Act (1989), American Indian Graves and Repatriation Act (1990) and the elimination of the Native American cultural appropriation in sports mascots.

Harjo will receive a bust designed in her likeness created and gifted by Sohail Shehada, faculty member in the School of Art and Art History at The University of Oklahoma. Shehada has is a master sculpture and painter whose work is highly sought after both for public and private commission. Several examples of his work are on permanent display on the University of Oklahoma campus.
“It is difficult for American Indians to express and exercise the ideological frameworks of sovereignty,” said Jack Soto. “Through Suzan's courage, many have found a way to share their stories which empowers them to act, giving new energy in a fight for equity.”

NCORE is a dynamic annual conference that creates a community for individuals and campus teams to work collaboratively under the guidance, tutelage and expertise of recognized and effective scholars, practitioners and change makers. It is a place where individuals and institutions share their on-the-ground knowledge, analyses, innovative program development, assessment tools, effective theoretical frameworks, latest practice-based research findings and radical and innovative experiential curricula to transform higher education in its mission for diversity and inclusion for students, staff, faculty and administration.


**About NCORE**
The National Conference on Race and Ethnicity in American Higher Education (NCORE) was launched in 1988 by University of Oklahoma Outreach to address social justice issues impacting higher education institutions. The NCORE conference is designed to support movement toward campus communities that are supportive and inclusive across racial and ethnic identity intersections, and to improve the access and success of traditionally underrepresented populations. More information can be found at [www.ncore.ou.edu](http://www.ncore.ou.edu).

**About Suzan Shown Harjo**
Suzan Shown Harjo is a Cheyenne citizen of the Cheyenne & Arapaho Tribes and is Hodulgee Muscogee of Nuyakv Ground. She is the mother of two adult children and the grandmother of two grandsons. President of The Morning Star Institute in Washington, D.C., she is a poet, writer, curator, lecturer and policy advocate who has helped Native Peoples protect sacred places and recover more than one million acres of land. She has developed key laws in five decades to promote and protect Native nations, sovereignty, children, arts, cultures and languages, including the American Indian Religious Freedom Act, National Museum of the American Indian Act and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

President Obama presented Harjo with a 2014 Presidential Medal of Freedom in a White House ceremony honoring 18 recipients – the Medal is the United States’ highest civilian honor. She was honored with the 2015 Native Leadership Award by the National Congress of American Indians, which she served as executive director during the 1980s. Harjo is the first woman to receive an Honorary Doctorate of Humanities from the Institute of American Indian Arts (2011), the first Vine Deloria, Jr., Distinguished Indigenous Scholar (University of Arizona, 2008 and a 2013 Deloria Lecturer), the first person to be awarded back-to-back fellowships by the School for Advanced Research (in Poetry and as a Summer Scholar, 2004) and the first Native woman to be honored as a Montgomery Fellow (Dartmouth College, 1992).

For more information about Dr. Harjo, visit [https://ncore.ou.edu/en/schedule/presenters/00100451/](https://ncore.ou.edu/en/schedule/presenters/00100451/)