

Access



Professor Khan received the Rutgers Clement A. Price Human Dignity Award in May 2018 for his commitment to promoting and practicing diversity and inclusion as director of ODASIS. Joining him at the award ceremony were (l. to r.) Juan Cerezo EOF SEBS '18 Microbiology; Tochi Unegbu-Ogbonna SAS '18 Biological Sciences; Paul Gallina SAS '18 Cell Biology and Neuroscience. All three ODASIS graduates are attending Temple Lewis Katz School of Medicine with full 4 years scholarships.

Three Decades of Helping Students Succeed in STEM

A conversation with Kamal Khan, director of the Office for Diversity and Academic Success in the Sciences

In 1986, two Rutgers faculty members, Kamal Khan and Francine Essien, started an academic support program for disadvantaged and underrepresented students. Today, that program is called ODASIS, the Office for Diversity and Academic Success in the Sciences, and is recognized universitywide and beyond for its work preparing students for STEM professions. It has a staff of eight full-time employees and serves more than 1,000 students every year with a myriad of programs that begin at the high school level.

In the interview below, Khan, the longtime director, discusses how ODASIS got started and why it has been so successful.

Q: *Where did you grow up, and what is your educational background?*

A: I was born and raised in Trinidad and in 1973 I had the opportunity to spend the summer with my uncle and his family in New Jersey. He was a family physician in Camden and a great mentor in my life. I finished high school in Cherry Hill and continued at Rutgers for my undergraduate and graduate degree. I ultimately went on to receive my doctorate degree.

Q: *What inspired your commitment to helping students from underrepresented backgrounds?*

A: When I was a graduate student at Rutgers, I was an instructor in the sciences. I found that when you combine personal commitment and a regimented study method, the result was always success!

Q: *Is that the ODASIS approach?*

A: Yes, our unique program is to take each student and map out a rigorous program tailored for them. We have applied this model for the past 30 years and I am proud to say that over 1200 ODASIS alumni have gone on to pursue professions in the health allied fields. These professionals are some of our most generous alumni supporters!

Q: *What do you like most about your job?*

A: The satisfaction of seeing hundreds of students become successful doctors, dentists, and other medical professionals. Being able to mentor underrepresented students is amazing. These are some of the same students who once doubted themselves and are now the ones that come back to advocate for the ODASIS program. Seeing this big picture is my greatest reward!

Q: *ODASIS has grown. Do you still have time to work one-on-one with students?*

A: Oh, absolutely! For example, with seniors going on to medical, dental, and other health related professional schools, I do mock interviews to prepare them for their interviews. This is very important work and has to be done on a one-to-one basis. The students have to be able to express themselves and demonstrate that they have the passion to become doctors and take care of people; the humanistic side of things is very important for their success and being able to help them one-on-one is very powerful!