For their long-time commitment to enhancing opportunities for underrepresented students to come to Berkeley then succeed and graduate, Professors Denise Herd (School of Public Health) and David A. Weisblat (MCB) have been honored with the Leon Henkin Citation for Distinguished Service, awarded by the Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Campus Climate of the Berkeley Division of the Academic Senate.

In nominating Professor Herd, Professor Seth Holmes (Public Health) highlighted her significant efforts and success in recruiting underrepresented graduate students to the School and to the Berkeley campus. While serving as Associate Dean of Students, Dr. Herd used that leadership position to “transform the ways in which the School recruits underrepresented students of color. Her motto has been that these efforts are a collective responsibility for the entire unit” according to Professor Holmes. During her tenure at the helm of the campus Health Disparities Cluster of the Haas Diversity Research Center, Professor Herd was successful in gaining authorization to recruit two new faculty members, resulting in the hiring two years ago of Mahasin Mujahid from Harvard to Berkeley (the 2012 Henkin award recipient). Her research has long been focused on the racial, ethnic, and socio-economic disparities that impact lower-income communities. In a letter supporting the nomination, her Student Research Assistant, Sami Newlan, emphasized the impact that Professor Herd’s efforts over the years have had. “She knows that a diverse student body, as well as a diverse faculty are primary to the success of all students.”

Professor David A. Weisblat has “put in an astounding level of time and effort in promoting a supporting and diverse environment within our (MCB) department and on campus,” according to Professors Rebecca Heald, Richard Harland, and David Raulet in their nomination letter. Professor Weisblat has participated in numerous outreach activities to promote UC Berkeley among underserved populations. He has traveled to locations throughout the United States, for example, Kennesaw State University (GA) and UT-Brownsville (TX) and beyond (Puerto Rico) to attract students to MCB and other biology departments on campus. Closer to home, he has been involved in mentoring students in the Bridges to Baccalaureate Program that places local community college students in biology labs on campus; participates in the Berkeley Fellows and Berkeley Scholars Program; and, as Faculty Sponsor for the UCB Society for Advancing Chicanos and Native Americans, and on the Faculty Advisory Committee for Minority Access to Research Careers and Maximizing Student Development, he has successfully recruited minority undergraduate and graduate students to the biological sciences at Berkeley.

Since 2007, Professor Weisblat has been the MCB Equity Advisor, a role that did not exist in prior years. Demonstrating the same commitment to faculty equity and inclusion that he has for students, his strategic equity plan has led to the department forming an Equity and Inclusion Committee. The group organized a workshop for MCB faculty on the subject of “implicit bias,” and is conducting training sessions for all faculty search committees to heighten awareness of how unconscious attitudes can affect the process of recruitment and hiring in the faculty ranks.

In her letter supporting the nomination, Vanessa Flores, a PhD student in the Weisblat lab said, “Overall, I do not think I could have asked for a better mentor as I train for a career in science.