

# RyersonToday

## Social justice, women's empowerment fuel award winners

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From left: Social Work Professor Akua Benjamin and Sue Chun, RTA School of Media '12 alumna, both received a YWCA Woman of Distinction Award.

Akua Benjamin and Sue Chun are two women who have made a mark on their communities.

Benjamin, social work professor, and Chun, RTA School of Media '12 graduate, are both YWCA Women of Distinction Award recipients, announced last night. Benjamin won in the social justice category while Chun is a Young Woman of Distinction. The YWCA Women of Distinction Awards is an annual gala that honours the important work of seven women and their life-changing impact on the lives of females in the community. The awards will be celebrated May 22 at The Carlu.

Benjamin's groundbreaking work weaves together feminism, anti-racism, immigration, policing and economic justice. From 2003 to 2008, Benjamin served as the first black director of Ryerson's School of Social Work where she was vital to

creating its justice-oriented framework for social work education. She has transformed the way frontline services are delivered to women and other marginalized groups by positioning feminism and anti-racism as a priority.

Benjamin has provided countless organizations with anti-oppression training, and her advocacy has drawn attention to the systemic racism in local and national organizations that serve marginalized women. She's also the founder of the Black Action Defence Committee, where she was an early identifier of the impact of racial bias in Toronto policing on women and families. A champion of immigrant women's success, she was also a key voice in the fight for legislation to allow domestic workers (many of whom are women of colour) the right to bring family members to Canada.

Benjamin's achievements have been so significant and widely recognized that she was among the 1,000 women nominated worldwide to share the 2005 Nobel Peace Prize. Benjamin's passion for coalition-building and education as a tool for social change has been instrumental in creating groups such as the Coalition of Visible Minority Women and the Toronto Chapter of the Congress of Black Women.

Chun's gift for multimedia storytelling has cast Toronto's Jane-Finch community in a new light and empowered countless marginalized girls and young women. As founder of multimedia project Newcomer Tales, Chun produces compelling, authentic stories of newcomers' experiences, promoting social inclusion and media diversity. Her videos – ranging from interviews to documentaries to music videos – put young, racialized women and girls from priority neighbourhoods in the spotlight.

As an advocate, Chun has appeared on CBC, the Toronto Sun and OMNI TV to speak about issues such as youth violence, poverty and crime. She volunteers as a mentor to girls in her community and is a producer for Jane-Finch.com, a community website Chun has been involved with since high school.

Her creative and community work has captured high honours such as the National Ethnic Press Award, Canadian Ethnic Media Association Award, Heritage Toronto Award of Excellence, the Volunteer Service Youth Award from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration, and the Family Service Toronto Youth Volunteer Award. As a YWCA Young Woman of Distinction, Chun received a \$3,000 grant from the Julia M. Ruby Fund, which she plans to use to pursue a law degree so she can continue to make an even stronger impact in her community.

Past community members to receive a YWCA Woman of Distinction Award include: RTA School of Media'08 graduate Saron Ghebressellassie in 2007; Rona Abramovitch, advisor on outreach & access, in [2010](#); and Pamela Palmater, chair in indigenous governance, in [2012](#).