



## The Queer Conn Report

*Seven Years of Transformative Policies & Programming*

2006-2013

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Transforming Campus Culture...

...one person  
...one program  
...one policy

at a time.

December 2013

Dear Friends,

So many people have contributed to the important work of advancing knowledge of LGBTQ issues and support for LGBTQ students on campus. It has been a truly collaborate effort of students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alums working together to move the College forward in embracing a more progressive policy of inclusion and engagement with the LGBTQ population on campus.

While most of this work has focused on the experience of students, many LGBTQ faculty and staff report a more welcoming and less heteronormative work environment as well.

This report aims to collect in one place many of the advancements made in the past seven years since the creation of the LGBTQ Resource Center. To list every person, program, collaboration, or training would be impossible. Instead, we have solicited reflections from staff, faculty, and students across campus who have made vital contributions to our community over the years.

With sincere gratitude,

Jen Manion, PhD

Director of the LGBTQ Resource Center  
Associate Professor of History

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Section 1

**One of the Top 25  
Most LGBT-Friendly  
Colleges & Universities  
in the Country**

What exactly does this mean? Each year, the Campus Pride Index serves as the data source for determining which colleges and universities have done the most to make their campuses LGBT inclusive in terms of policy, practice, and programming.<sup>1</sup>

Connecticut College first registered with Campus Pride in 2007 by filling out its online survey. Like so many schools across the country, we were able to use many of their questions as guidelines or benchmarks for our own work on campus. By 2012, we had made major strides and updated our listing accordingly. According to the criteria outlined by the organization, Connecticut College received 5 out of 5 stars in five areas: Policy Inclusion, Support & Institutional Commitment, Student Life, Campus Safety, and Counseling & Health. The College received 4.5 out of 5 stars in three areas: Academic Life, Housing & Residence Life, Recruitment/Retention Efforts.<sup>2</sup>

### **Connecticut College offers ALL of the following:**

#### **Academic Life**

- LGBT specific course offerings
- Gender neutral/single occupancy restroom facilities in academic settings
- New faculty/staff training opportunities on sexual orientation issues
- New faculty/staff training opportunities on gender identity issues

#### **Student Life**

- Student organizations for LGBT & Ally students
- Resource center/office with responsibilities for LGBT students
- Paid staff with responsibilities for LGBT & Ally support services
- Ally program or Safe Space/ Safe Zone
- Regularly plans LGBT social activities
- Regularly plans educational events on sexual orientation issues
- Regularly plans education events on transgender issues

#### **Counseling & Health Services**

- LGBT inclusive counseling/support groups
- LGBT inclusive health services/testing

#### **Campus safety**

- Procedure for reporting LGBT related bias incidents and hate crimes
- Trains campus police on sexual orientation issues
- Trains campus police on gender identity/expression issues

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.campusprideindex.org/about/default.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> To view these results yourself, search the Connecticut College entry on the Campus Pride Index at [www.campusprideindex.org](http://www.campusprideindex.org)

## **Policies & Practice**

- Non-discrimination statement inclusive of sexual orientation
- Non-discrimination statement inclusive of gender identity/expression
- Health insurance coverage to employees' same sex partner
- Accessible, simple process for students to change their name and gender identity on university records and documents
- Standing advisory committee that deals with LGBT issues

## **Housing & Residence Life**

- Transgender student options to be housed in keeping with their gender identity/expressions
- Gender-neutral/single occupancy restroom facilities in campus housing
- Trains residence life and housing staff at all levels on LGBT issues and concerns

## **Recruitment & Retention Efforts**

- LGBT mentoring program to welcome and assist LGBT students in transitioning to academic and college life
- LGBT and Ally student scholarships
- Active LGBT alumni group
- Special Lavender or Rainbow Graduation ceremony for LGBT students/ allies
- Actively participates in LGBT admissions fairs

## **Of the areas outlined in the Index, the College does not offer the following:**

- **Academic Life** - LGBT studies program
- **Housing & Residence Life** - LGBT housing options/themes
- **Counseling & Health Services** - Insurance coverage for students transitioning to cover hormone replacement therapy
- **Recruitment & Retention Efforts** - LGBT and Ally student scholarships

We have come a long, long way. There are areas where we could do more – and so many amazing things we have done that are beyond the scope of the Index. It is not clear that LGBT themed housing, for example, would even make sense or be desired on our campus. Scholarships, an LGBTQ studies program, and crucial medical care for transgender students would definitely add to our work in supporting and encouraging the well-being and success of our LGBTQ students.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> At Conn, we decided including the ‘Q’ for “Queer and Questioning” was very important to our community, so when referencing our community, we always say LGBTQ. Some organizations, such as Camps Pride, omit the Q, hence “LGBT” in this context.

## Section 2

# Creation of the LGBTQ Resource Center



## **Finding Space, Making Place**

**Rachel Zelinsky, '10**

Finding space for meetings was always a challenge for the queer student groups. Regular meeting rooms changed frequently and included Unity House, Fanning 412, Blaustein, and the Harkness Chapel Basement.

In 2001, SOUL held their meetings in Blaustein and shared storage space with the Women's Center in the basement of Larrabee. In 2002, the Women's Center moved to Freeman and SOUL joined Unity House for support and meeting space. They also gained an office space of their own – a small room in the basement tunnel between KB and Larrabee – to ensure confidentiality for (CQ)<sup>2</sup> meetings. This room never functioned due to flooding, mold, and extreme inhospitality.

Queer groups were constantly in search of a safe space to hold meetings and preserve our history. In a recent move in the early 2000s, whole boxes of resources and documents were thrown out by Physical Plant. In 2004, students established a queer-themed apartment in 360 that became a safe space for the year while they worked with their advisors to secure welcoming and safe space on campus for queer students.

In the spring of 2005, the Burdick Lounge was secured for SOUL and (CQ)<sup>2</sup>. It was minimally functional at best. Only one student was given a key and the largely empty room contained an old sofa, a wooden table, and a few plastic chairs. There was no phone line, office supplies, or support for enhancement of its function or student access. A full two years later in the spring of 2007, it officially opened as the LGBTQ Resource Center.

## **Sure, I'll Teach 3 Classes & Start a Center**

**Jen Manion, Ph.D.**

Enough time has passed that many on campus do not realize that I was hired by the College as a Visiting Assistant Professor of History. In October 2006, just two months in to my first semester on campus, I gave a presentation for a R.A.P. Session at Unity House called, "The Politics of Community: LGBTQ Groups, Straight Allies, and You." The many queer students present were frustrated with the lack of formal institutional support for their work. Then Director of Unity House Elizabeth Garcia was present and passed on this information to Dean of the College Community, Armando Bengochea. Not long after, I was asked to formally mentor and advise LGBTQ students as part of my job. With a 3-3 teaching load and a one-year contract, I became Coordinator of LGBTQ Student Services.

In spring of 2007, I met with every openly gay faculty, staff, and student who would talk to me, along with many others who were active allies to the queer community on campus for years. In February 2007, with great support from College President Leo Higdon, the Dean of the College Community, Armando Bengochea, and the then-Dean of Multicultural Affairs, Tracee Reiser, we opened the LGBTQ Resource Center. The students who dedicated many, many hours of their lives to ensuring the establishment of the Center that first semester include Rachel Chase '05, Grant Hogan '07, Gael Johns '10, Aimee Martin '07, Candyce Young-Fields '07, Alice Watson '07 and Rachel Zelinsky '10.

The Center has many different friends among the faculty and staff. Our first discussion series featured openly gay faculty and staff who came to the Center to talk about their lives and careers and engage with students informally. We aim to work specifically for LGBTQ students and to educate anyone who wants to learn about sexuality and gender. We do this through a feminist intersectional framework. The original Center mission has remained unchanged:

*The LGBTQ Resource Center aims to serve the unique needs of LGBTQ students at Connecticut College by providing a supportive space, resource library, social events and educational programming. We embrace our connections with all people and are committed to understanding how homophobia, heterosexism and transphobia interlink with sexism, racism and classism to perpetuate oppression. The Center also serves as a resource for the entire College community to learn about issues related to sexuality and gender identity.*

## Leadership in the Early Years...

Many different faculty and staff stepped forward to show their support for the LGBTQ Resource Center in its first year. Original members of the LGBTQ Center Advisory Board were: Deborah Eastman, Biology; Jim Downs, History; Blanche Boyd, English; Susan Wells, Accounting; Rob Richter, Performing Arts; Mary Vona, Information Services; Mab Segrest, Women & Gender Studies.

Great friends of the Center who helped establish us as a vibrant and effective resource on campus include Tracee Reiser, then Dean of Multicultural Affairs; David Kim, then Director of CCSRE; David Dorfman and Heidi Henderson, Dance; Scott Alexander, Admissions; Cathy Stock, History & American Studies; Claudia Highbaugh, Religious Life; Mary Devins, CISLA; Elizabeth Garcia, Unity House; Judy Kirmmse, Affirmative Action; Armando Bengochea, then Dean of the College Community.

Tracee Reiser, Dean of Community Learning, supported LGBTQ students on campus long before 2007. She has been the Center's greatest friend and advocate, consistently without fanfare or fail, for every moment of the past seven years. Year after year, students name Tracee as their "go to" person for help and support. So do I.

Each semester, a group of students work as a team in staffing the Center, planning programming, and educating the campus. All of those students have made lasting and important contributions. Beginning in the 2007-08 academic year, we formally recognized outstanding leadership at campus-wide award ceremonies.

### Community Builder Award

- 2013 Meghan Rossini, Trina Townsend, Karina Hernandez
- 2012 Meghan Kelley & Carolyn Sundstrom
- 2011 Jonathan Skalski & Andrew Sowle
- 2010 Currie Huntington, Meaghan Kelley, Luisa Dickson
- 2009 Chad Stewart
- 2008 Lakshmi Kannan

### Leadership & Advocacy Award

- 2013 Andrew Sowle & Karina Hernandez
- 2012 Meghan Rossini & Trina Townsend
- 2011 Jessica Bombasaro-Brady & Brittany Armstrong
- 2010 Rachel Zelinsky, Lakshmi Kannan, Brenner Green
- 2009 Seth Wallace
- 2008 Gael Johns

## Section 3

# Building Community

## **Scott Alexander**

**Senior Associate Director of Admission  
Coordinator of International Admission**

Upon my arrival at Connecticut College in the summer of 2000, I requested the creation of “LGTBQ liaison” as a responsibility for my position. Lee Coffin, the openly gay dean of admission and financial aid, agreed and allocated funding for a recruitment brochure targeting LGBTQ prospective students. Working with student leaders from Spectrum and a senior in the Arts and Technology certificate program, we coordinated the College’s first targeted recruitment for LGBTQ prospective students. The publication was displayed in the Office of Admission lobby and at LGBTQ college fairs organized by Campus Pride in Philadelphia and youth festivals connected with June Pride celebrations in Boston and Washington, D.C. In addition, the piece was mailed to select LGBTQ organizations and Connecticut College alumni who identified as part of the LGBTQ network.

The number of applications where prospective students identified as LGBTQ, held leadership positions in LGBTQ activities and/or identified same-sex parents increased over the years. Most often, references were made in the application through the personal statement, personal interview and/or extracurricular activities. The Admission Committee identified these students during application reviews and those offered admission received an additional congratulatory email highlighting campus resources, student leaders and alumni. Interested admitted students were offered an overnight stay by coordinating with a leader of Spectrum. As popularity in Facebook grew, announcements about LGBTQ campus life and resources were posted to the group for admitted students. Similar efforts were made through other social media.

Connecticut College was one of the first colleges and universities in the United States to include “trans” in addition to “male” and “female” as an option for gender identification on the application for admission. There are still only a select few schools with this option. For more than a decade, Connecticut College established some of the best practices for the recruitment of LGBTQ students:

- Have a member of the admission counseling staff serve as the LGBTQ liaison
- Develop a robust relationship with the campus LGBTQ center/director
- Have the LGBTQ director meet yearly with admissions staff to discuss updates
- Construct a website detailing the campus LGBTQ resources for prospective students
- Develop sound financial aid and housing policies for trans students

As the landscape of college admissions evolves, Connecticut College will continue to be a leader in LGBTQ recruitment.

## **Classroom Advocacy**

**Julia Cristofano, '14**

When I think of how The LGBTQ Center has affected me, the most prominent thing that comes to mind is my ability to speak out as an LGBTQ advocate in the classroom. Earlier in my college career, I may have let homophobic comments or off handed remarks slide, but now I feel a responsibility to address these remarks made by my peers and professors. I have become acutely aware of micro-aggressions, or at times egregiously ignorant comments, in which my classmates convey unrecognized or uninformed homophobic views. The LGBTQ Center has provided me with the support I needed to embrace and celebrate my own sexuality and the resources to address the inequalities I see around me. I feel an obligation to represent my community in the classroom, even when that means outing myself to a group of strangers and taking on the risk of being personally targeted.

Through defending LGBTQ rights and addressing harmful stereotypes, I have also found myself much more aware of the intersectionality of oppression, extending beyond gender and sexuality, to race, class, and ethnicity. The Center has broadened my critical outlook on the world, my peers, and myself in a way that I was sheltered from for most of my life. I now feel both a passion and an obligation to continue to expand my own understanding of oppression in society and amongst individuals. I am aware, in a way I never was before, of the meaning behind my actions and my words; how they are influenced by and affect other people.

When I first set foot into The LGBTQ Center my freshman year, blinded by the jarringly colorful walls, I could have never imagined how it would come to be such an integral part of my life at Conn. Even until this year, I liked to maintain the notion that whatever the physical space of the LGBTQ Center itself had provided me paled in comparison to the incredible faculty, staff, and students that I have met who care so deeply about human rights. Despite my continually offended color pallet, the friends, meetings and conversations that have helped to form the person that I am today would not have been possible without The Center itself.

People devoted to a cause will always find each other; they will make room for themselves and their work when there is none. The LGBTQ Center takes away that burden and acts as an ever-present space where people and ideas can converge. It is a sacred space. It is a safe space. Because of The Center, I feel empowered to bring that space into my classrooms, my residence halls, my family and every aspect of my life.

## **The Reverend Claudia Highbaugh, D. Min.** **Dean of Religious & Spiritual Life**

The Office of Religious and Spiritual Life has enjoyed collaborating with the LGBTQ Center over the years. We have been pleased to share the experience of four seasoned chaplains who are open and active with the issues students face in a college environment as they set about choosing vocations and exploring issues of identity. Our work in the chapel has been to present ourselves as religious professionals who are allies, gay, and parents of gay children. Our staff welcomes the hard questions that students have about religious values, the institutional church and how to live with and work out spiritual and religious questions.

The Office of Religious and Spiritual Life has been included both as individuals and as a group of chaplains in events that focus on education, and the life and spirit of the whole person. In a moment of cultural crisis, when a young man took his life as the result of bullying and harassment, it was an honor to participate in a teach-in with colleagues and students across disciplines on campus. The event reflected commitment to the college community as we used our voices and resources to engage thoughtful discussion and reflection in a time of sadness and loss. The LGBTQ Center under Jen's leadership organized an outstanding event that allowed for questions and commitments to be aired. Those attending the event were lead to understand that the leadership of Connecticut College is committed to a healthy community that will work toward academic, psychological, and spiritual for everyone, especially our students.

The Office of Religious and Spiritual Life partnered with the Center offered a discussion on issues that the Christian faith and the institutional church need to speak about in response to people in the life of faith. It was heartening to have both a good response to the event and the strong committed voices of the college chaplains, as students asked hard questions of faith leaders. These discussions will continue at our college as we work together to support, interrogate and affirm our various backgrounds and traditions.

It has been a joy to be included by the center leadership in events and programs that examine the whole person, offering religion and spirituality as a resource. We feel that our office a part of a team that is active in the life and education of the Connecticut College student.

## Why I Like Studying Gender & Sexuality

Dakota Peschel, '15

Coming to Conn, I had a vague understanding of gender and sexuality based on what I had learned from alternative media and in my high school classes. Everything seemed very abstract to me, and I have to admit I was terribly uninformed about the history and recent advancements of the feminist and LGBTQ movements.

I have taken multiple classes that have focused on issues of gender, sexuality, class, and race. This has helped me to develop a different lens through which to see the world. I have learned the importance of deconstructing a range of different mediums in order to address how power and privilege are exercised in order to marginalize those deemed “other.”

A lot of my own personal growth has come from talking with my peers outside of the classroom. There are consistently a myriad of events about these issues organized by and for students. I am also lucky to have many friends who are passionate about gender and sexuality studies, and as such, have had in-depth conversations with them about issues that have made me question my own beliefs. One issue that I have struggled with recently was whether to label myself a “feminist” or a “pro-feminist.” This came up while I was up late writing a sociology paper with my classmate and one of my best friends explained to me that I could not actually label myself a “feminist” because I had never been oppressed by my gender. This is just one small example of the discussions that have had on this campus that have shaped my views about gender and sexuality. I have grown into a well-spoken and informed individual through my experiences here, and my hope is that I will continue to learn about these issues and grow for the rest of my life.

As a gay man, I have been made to feel uncomfortable in many public spaces. I have always been acutely aware of how heteronormative and sexist most people are through their actions and their words. My friends from my hometown still use the word “gay” as a synonym for stupid. I have never taken this personally, although lately my critical eye has been sharpened and I will use it to call out injustices I see around me, and I will probably start fighting back. I believe that it is important for me to study these issues because equality is not something that naturally happens on its own; it takes changes within people who then organize their communities to effectively change the way the world operates. I feel as though my experiences at Conn are preparing me to take the next steps in fighting for a more equitable society.



## **Sarah Cardwell**

**Associate Dean of Student Life**

### **Remarks from the 2008 Matthew Shepard Vigil**

Who do we choose to be as a community? As an academic community, all too often our talk about diversity and respect for others is couched in theories, philosophies, and books. This is after all easier for our minds to process and allows us to keep the discomfort at bay. But in remembering the news we received last week, the reason we are prompted to be here tonight, the death of Matthew Shepard and all the other persons who've been harmed by hate, the discomfort is deep within my heart. Although the philosophers in the crowd might disagree with me, communities do not exist in the abstract but are vibrant, energetic entities because of the people in them.

When I came to this community two years, I did so on a leap of faith hoping that the existence of a LGBTQ Center signified a community that would welcome my partner and our son. I spent the first few months in the company of students carefully referring to my family as "my family" rather than my partner and our son while I tried to grasp the pulse of this community. While I have been personally fortunate, I am all too aware that people within this community struggle to feel welcome here. I had the luxury of choosing this community but I am also well aware that I should not have to search for the "context clues" or consider safety and welcomeness in calling some place home simply because others choose to hate.

Your choice to come tonight suggests that you choose to be engaged in defining this community as one that says no to hate. But I challenge you not to stop there. I ask that you not dismiss the discomfort in your heart. The people in this community need your words and actions to definitively say "yes" to them. It is only then that I believe we will continue to move our community to a place that does respect the dignity of all human beings.

## Why QPOC+

**Karina Hernandez, '14**

Working in the LGBTQ Center literally thrust me from the margin to the center. I was visibly out on campus and visibly not white (a complete outsider). There were few queer students of color who felt comfortable enough to enter the LGBTQ Center. Working in the LGBTQ Center as a coordinator and joining the Exec board of Spectrum was difficult. Yet, I was grateful that Jen pushed me to step up and speak out when my internalized homophobia shook my core. Jen helped me find the words that called out LGBT oppression. Slowly, I collected the tools necessary to empower my community and my identity. At the end of my sophomore spring, the LGBTQ community and our allies formed great coalitions (including the Connecticut College Diversity Coalition/ CCDC) in order to demand gender inclusive bathrooms for the campus (and we won that).

While things progressed for LGBTQ students at Conn, I continued to feel a divide between my sexuality and racial differences. Racial difference was one intersection where queer students could not see eye to eye, partly because we could not understand it. Our queer community feared discussing race. Yet, many queer students of color, including myself, were hurt by the overt and covert racism we experienced, both on campus and in our queer communities. We were all still discovering the words that could tackle racial oppression. Out of that pain, queer students of color organized, with Anthony Sis and I leading them in a new group called Queer People of Color. We envisioned QPOC as a group that would meet maybe once a month, or once every two weeks, to come together and heal our wounds. When we met, we immediately recognized QPOC as one of the safest spaces for queer students of color to learn from each other and from our experiences. We deliberately remained an unofficial group on campus with no hierarchies and met weekly. It has been a whole year now since QPOC started and the group is stronger than it has ever been. Anthony and I managed to bridge the tensions between sexuality and race and/ or ethnicity.

As seniors, Anthony and I feel so proud to see many new faces at QPOC. We have so many strong and intelligent freshmen that want to learn how power and oppression works. We decided to make QPOC an Affiliated Student Organization of the college. We changed QPOC to QPOC+ to represent all of our allies who face the front lines with us. QPOC+ represents the culmination of my work as an activist and my queer identity. Without QPOC+ and the LGBTQ Center, I would never have found the strength to come out to my family.

## **LGBTQ Athletes**

### **You Can Play: Fighting Homophobia in Sports Lowell Abbot, '14**

Through watching and hearing about friends from other schools get involved with their athletic departments' You Can Play videos, I learned about the You Can Play project.<sup>4</sup> I have played on enough sports teams to know that homophobia in sports is a topic that is not talked about, but very important. I really like the You Can Play project because it involves everyone, not just gay athletes. The idea that straight and gay athletes are taking a pledge together to make the athletic experience a safe one is what motivated me. I wanted the Connecticut College Athletic Department to come together as one team and take a pledge: at Connecticut College we do not discriminate against sexuality. This is a topic that is relevant to everyone, and given the changing times, it is amazing how far the You Can Play project has come and we should be proud that Connecticut College will be a part of it.

### **Brenner Green, '12 and "Out for the Long Run"**

Brenner Green, '12 ran on the cross country team during his time at Connecticut College and was featured in the documentary "Out for the Long Run" about openly gay student athletes. Green was out and active in the LGBTQ Center as a student coordinator and co-chair of Spectrum in addition to many other centers and clubs. "Conn has really allowed me to combine my academic and social interests. Through the LGBTQ Center and the psychology department, I've been offered great opportunities here," Green said in College profile.<sup>5</sup> Green wrote a Psychology Department honors thesis about masculinity, homophobia, and friendship in sports titled, "'The Bonds of Teammates' An Exploration of Men's Friendships Between Gay and Heterosexual Athletes."

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.youcanplayproject.com](http://www.youcanplayproject.com)

<sup>5</sup> See [www.conncoll.edu/news/news-archive/2011/brenner-green-12-tells-gay-student-athletes-it-gets-better.htm](http://www.conncoll.edu/news/news-archive/2011/brenner-green-12-tells-gay-student-athletes-it-gets-better.htm)

## Section 4

# Changing Policies & Practices

**Janet Spoltore, Ph.D.**  
**Director of Counseling Services**

The Student Counseling Services (SCS) has collaborated with the LGBTQ Resource Center since its inception seven years ago. At its inception, SCS supported the Center and discussed what we do and how we address issues of sexual orientation and gender. We have collaborated with the Center to stay apprised of Center programming offered and to gain insight into what was missing in our services. We have continued over the years to be supporters of the Center's cause and have watched the Center grow and expand, not only its physical space, but its reach to the students, staff and faculty at Connecticut College. We have been happy and eager to support the vibrant attitude and voice of the LGBTQ students. We have tried to become not only allies, but to provide a service where our LGBTQ students can seek support and treatment in a safe and accepting space, a space where there are magazines, decorations, posters and information proclaiming an LGBTQ friendly environment. This is important since, historically, not all of the LGBTQ people have felt supported by the mental health environment.

To provide better care, the staff at SCS sought out clinical training by attending conferences, bringing in speakers to staff meetings, reading and discussing current LGBTQ literature and media from both within and outside of our field. These activities have facilitated our growth in our ability to provide clinical care. We have hired a full-time Coordinator of Multicultural Counseling to better address issues with this and other underrepresented and marginalized populations. We have directed focused outreach to LGBTQ students. We have supplied clinical and college resources for the students. We have provided training to the peer queer mentors and other LGBTQ students. We have partnered with the students in bringing speakers to the campus, bringing the AIDS quilt, participating in rallies and memorials. We have collaborated in creating an "*It Gets Better*" campaign. We have attended teas and other less formal events at the Center. We have enjoyed seeing our LGBTQ students on campus learn, become more confident with themselves and feel safe as they move through their four years at Connecticut College and are honored by the opportunity to participate in this process. Student Counseling Services has positive, collaborative, and supportive relationships with the Center. We look forward to the continued opportunities to serve and collaborate with LGBTQ community members.

**Judy Kirmmse**  
Affirmative Action Officer

## **Including Gender Identity, Characteristics and Expression in the Nondiscrimination Policy**

During the 2004 fall semester, a group of students formed an unofficial Gender Equity Task Force. Its membership included Robert Rex-Waller '06, Priyanka Gupta '06, Sara Walker '05, and Alice Watson '07. Their goal was to encourage Connecticut College to include the phrase, "gender identity, characteristics and expression," in its nondiscrimination policy. After doing substantial research on their own, the group met with Judy Kirmmse, the College's affirmative action officer, to seek assistance in moving their request forward through administrative channels. She continued to meet with them; their meetings culminated in a letter and packet of information that was sent to President Norman Fainstein. The packet included a comprehensive list of 21 US academic institutions whose nondiscrimination policies included that phrase, examples of policies containing the phrase, and an appendix containing definitions of gender-related terms. Judy Kirmmse met with President Fainstein to discuss the letter and packet of information; he was fully supportive and decided to create a representative Commission on Gender Identity to further the work of the task force during the 2005 spring semester; he asked Kirmmse to chair it.

Members of the Commission included Krystle Guillory '05, SGA Chair of the Diversity and Equity Committee; Bridget Baird, Professor of Mathematics and Director of the Ammerman Center for Arts and Technology, and Chair of FSCC; Joan Hunter, Director of Human Resources and member of Staff Council; Jules Chyten-Brennan '05; Kip Dople '07, SGA Chair of the Judicial Board; Mab Segrest, Fuller/Maathai Professor and Chair of the Gender and Women's Studies Department; and Mary Devins, Associate Director of CISLA and Assistant Dean of International Studies.

On April 29, 2005, the Commission sent its recommendations to Acting Dean of the College, Maria Cruz-Saco. Its recommendations included adding the phrase, "gender identity, expression and characteristics" to the College's nondiscrimination policy and setting up a task force to create an action plan for ensuring a respectful environment for and accommodating the needs of members of our community whose gender identity does not fit current stereotypes (including transgender students/faculty/staff). The Commission added suggestions for the task force to consider.

A packet of information was then prepared for the Board of Trustees. Dean Cruz-Saco presented the proposal to change the wording of the nondiscrimination statement to the Board at their May 2005 meeting. While the Board typically hears a proposal at one meeting and votes on it at its next meeting, in this case, the Board decided to vote on this change at the same meeting at which it was presented. The Board voted overwhelmingly in favor of the change.

Here is the Proposal Submitted to the Board of Trustees:

### **Proposal to Change the College's Nondiscrimination Statement**

**Proposal:** After a process of broad consultation, we are proposing a change to the College's nondiscrimination statement, which is included below in its current form. This statement appears in College documents such as the Catalogue. We propose the addition of the phrase, "**gender identity, expression and characteristics,**" to the list of groups cited in the statement, to appear after "sexual orientation." (Definitions: Gender identity is the way an individual self-identifies in terms of masculinity and femininity; gender expression is the way an individual communicates that identity through dress, speech, mannerisms, etc; and gender characteristics are physical characteristics that are perceived in our society as masculine or feminine.)

**Current Nondiscrimination Statement:** "Connecticut College is committed to the goal of achieving equal opportunity for all and, accordingly, does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, religion, national or ethnic origin, visible or invisible disability, or status as a disabled veteran or veteran of the Vietnam era. The College complies with federal and state legislation and regulations regarding nondiscrimination. This policy applies to faculty and staff, applicants for faculty and staff positions, students and applicants for educational programs and activities. Inquiries concerning this policy should be addressed to: Affirmative Action Officer, Fanning Hall, Connecticut College, 270 Mohegan Avenue, New London, CT 06320-4196."

**Rationale:** On our campus and others, there is an emerging and growing understanding that colleges and universities should include people who do not fit gender stereotypes among the groups they protect against discrimination.

The "gender identity" group encompasses 1) males who have feminine physical characteristics or express their identity in ways perceived to be feminine, 2) females who have masculine physical characteristics or express their identity in ways perceived to be masculine, and 3) individuals who identify as "transgender." (Definition: Transgender includes people transitioning from one sex to the other. Other individuals who identify as neither male nor female or as having aspects of both sexes may include themselves in this category as well.)

**Process:** A group of students formed a “Gender Identity Task Force.” They spent a semester doing research to determine which colleges, universities, and corporations had included gender identity in their nondiscrimination policies. They submitted their research to the President, along with a letter asking that the College make its nondiscrimination statement more inclusive. The President asked the Dean of the College to form a commission to explore this possibility: to look at legal implications and to vet the proposal with students, faculty, and staff. The Dean created the commission; it did additional research and took the proposal to the Faculty Steering and Conference Committee (FSCC), the Student Government Association (SGA), and the Staff Council. All three groups approved the inclusion of the phrase, “gender identity, expression, and characteristics.” The commission also recommended that a second task force be formed to explore ways to educate the community about gender issues and to ensure that the campus is welcoming and respectful to individuals who do not fit gender stereotypes. The commission also brought its recommendations back to the senior administrators. Trustee review is the final step in the process.

**Legal implications:** There is always a certain amount of risk attendant to adding another group to the list of those included in our non-discrimination statement, because it adds another ground on which discrimination claims can be based. There are ways to minimize risk: 1) the College could add the term “gender identity” only; 2) it could apply the altered policy to students only (since employees have more bases on which to sue the College than students do), and 3) it can take proactive measures to educate the community and to create a respect for gender differences.

Of these risk reduction methods, we are proposing that the College adopt only the third. There is broad support on campus for including the more inclusive phrase, “gender identity, expression, and characteristics,” and to apply the policy only to students would signal that the College did not want to protect faculty and staff in the same way.

**Context:** Our research has shown that many other colleges, some of which are our peers, have already included gender identity and/or expression and/or characteristics in their nondiscrimination policies. They include American University; Arizona State University; Brown University; University of California; City University of New York; Colby College; DePauw University; University of Iowa; University of New Hampshire; Kalamazoo College; Knox College; Lehigh University; Middlebury College; Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Ohio State University; Rockport College of Maine; Rutgers University; the Universities of Oregon, Pennsylvania, Puget Sound, and Washington; and Wesleyan University. Tufts University is in the process.

In addition, many corporations have taken this step. The following corporations are among 65 on the list we have obtained, most of which are household names: American Express, Citigroup, Hewlett Packard, JP Morgan Chase, Pfizer, General Mills, Merrill Lynch & Co., MetLife, Sprint, Sun Microsystems, and Whirlpool.



## Why Bathrooms?

Jen Manion, Ph.D.



A few years ago, when students first raised the issue of needing more restrooms on campus to be available to anyone (meaning they would be non-gendered, gender neutral, or gender inclusive spaces) I thought we would be in for a very slow, drawn out process of educating the campus about why this was important and an even slower uphill effort to see it materialize. It did not happen overnight – and was not without its bumps (see Amber’s article) but the progress made on this issue in a relatively short amount of time surprised me.

Now, you can scan this code with your QR app if you have a smart phone and instantly have a list of single-user gender inclusive restrooms across campus. This list is also available on the LGBTQ Center website under the transgender resource guide.<sup>6</sup>

Access to public accommodations has been a central struggle of many civil rights movements including that of African Americans, Disability Rights Activists, and LGBTQ people. Restrooms, locker rooms, dressing rooms, and changing areas are common spaces that we navigate on a daily basis; they also serve as lightning rods for the enforcement of gender norms, the policing of transgender people, and sadly, a significant amount of violence.<sup>7</sup> Gender inclusive restrooms are one small step in making the world a safer place for trans\* and gender non-conforming people. It is also one tiny step towards undoing the disciplinary apparatus of gender.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.conncoll.edu/offices/lgbtq-resource-center/resource-guides/for-transgender-students/>

<sup>7</sup> Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of Law* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> See Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004) and Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: vol. 1, An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990).

## Activism & Academics

Amber Villanueva, '14

When I first came to Connecticut College, I knew that I wanted to be involved with Queer activism on campus. Growing up with the knowledge that my grandmother was murdered for being openly gay and living with her partner has fostered my commitment to activism. In her life, she was herself committed to activism, as a co-founder of the first Queer group in her area. Sharing her memory offers a powerful story to for others, demonstrating the importance of activism. At Conn, I have told her story several times at the yearly vigil for victims of hate crimes as well as at new student orientation. I have found that people are very affected by this story and come to understand the importance of their words and actions everyday. With the realization of my own Queer identity, my commitment to activism only increased.

I have taken my interest in Queer activism and melded it with everything I have been involved with in my time at Connecticut College. My major in Gender and Women's Studies, becoming a PICA scholar (Certificate in Community Action and Public Policy) and many of the organizations I am part of have provided opportunities for queer activism. I have chosen to volunteer, intern and organize events at Alliance for Living, a non-profit that serves the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS and chosen the subject of HIV as part of my PICA project and MMUF research, partially as a result of the relationship this disease has with the LGBTQ community. As a writer for *The College Voice*, I wrote about the suspension of the bathroom conversion in Fanning, helping to kick off the protest. I was then also heavily involved in the activism that followed, collecting signatures and educating people on the issues, (learning a lot myself), attending meetings and the discussion with SGA. This one was of the most significant direct actions I have been involved with in on campus.

The morning of the protest in Spring 2012, we placed signs announcing the opening of the bathrooms as gender inclusive and decorated the halls of Fanning with rainbow streamers and balloons. We passed out invitations to students to come support our demonstration and hear our speech and celebrated our gender inclusive bathroom opening and collected over 300 signatures. Our voices were heard, and the administration proposed building a new gender inclusive bathroom, which was completed last year. Afterwards, President Higdon even invited us to a meeting with several deans and himself to discuss other issues that concerned us. This form of social activism is exemplary of the struggles and successes involved in achieving goals of social justice at Conn.

# The 2013 Queer Course Guide

Michael Murgo, '15

*Faculty self-report their background in LGBTQ, or Gender & Sexuality Studies to help students make informed decisions in their course selection.*

## 1. I have training in my field concerning LGBTQ People & Issues and apply this in my teaching:

- Ginny Anderson *Theater*
- Courtney Baker *English*
- Karen Gonzalez Rice *Art History*
- Sayumi Harb *East Asian Languages & Cultures*
- Taleb Khairallah *Psychology*
- David Kim *Religious Studies*
- Jen Manion *History; American Studies*
- Ken Prestininzi *Theater*
- Rosemarie Roberts *Dance*
- Ari Rotramel *Gender & Women's Studies*
- Dana Wright *Education*
- Audrey Zakriski *Psychology*

## 2. I have training in my field concerning issues of Gender & Sexuality and apply this in my teaching:

- Carol Akai *Human Development*
- Ginny Anderson *Theater*
- Waed Athamneh *Classics*
- Courtney Baker *English*
- David Canton *History*
- Sheetal Chhabria *History*
- Joan Chrisler *Psychology*
- Jim Downs *History; American Studies*
- Leo Garofalo *History; Latin American Studies*
- Sayumi Harb *East Asian Languages & Cultures*
- Cherise Harris *Sociology*
- Michael James *Education*

- Eileen Kane *History*
- Taleb Khairallah *Psychology*
- Jen Manion *History; American Studies*
- Nina Martin *Film Studies*
- Fred Paxton *History*
- Ken Prestininzi *Theater*
- Julie Rivkin *English*
- Rosemarie Roberts *Dance*
- Andrea Rossi-Reder *Dean's Office; English*
- Ari Rotramel *Gender & Women's Studies*
- Jennifer Rudolph *Hispanic Studies*
- Shubhra Sharma *Gender & Women's Studies*
- Paola Sica *Italian*
- Catherine Stock *History; American Studies*
- Derek Turner *Philosophy*
- Lina Wilder *English*
- Lisa Wilson *History*
- Dana Wright *Education*
- Audrey Zakriski *Psychology*

### 3. I am attuned to the needs and issues of LGBTQ students in the classroom:

- Carol Akai *Human Development*
- Ginny Anderson *Theater*
- Waed Athamneh *Classics*
- Courtney Baker *English*
- MaryAnne Borrelli *Government*
- David Canton *History*
- Sheetal Chhabria *History*
- Joan Chrisler *Psychology*
- Jim Downs *History; American Studies*
- Deborah Eastman *Biology*
- Leo Garofalo *History; Latin American Studies*
- Karen Gonzalez Rice *Art History*
- Martha Grossel *Biology*
- Sayumi Harb *East Asian Languages & Cultures*

- Cherise Harris *Sociology*
- Heidi Henderson *Dance*
- Aida Hereida *Hispanic Studies*
- Michael James *Education*
- Eileen Kane *History*
- Taleb Khairallah *Psychology*
- David Kim *Religious Studies*
- Jen Manion *History; American Studies*
- Nina Martin *Film Studies*
- Fred Paxton *History*
- Ken Prestininzi *Theater*
- Julie Rivkin *English*
- Rosemarie Roberts *Dance*
- Andrea Rossi-Reder *Deans Office; English*
- Ari Rotramel *Gender & Women's Studies*
- Jennifer Rudolph *Hispanic Studies*
- Shubhra Sharma *Gender & Women's Studies*
- Paola Sica *Italian*
- Christopher Steiner *Art History*
- Catherine Stock *History; American Studies*
- Derek Turner *Philosophy*
- Lina Wilder *English*
- Lisa Wilson *History*
- Dana Wright *Education*
- Audrey Zakriski *Psychology*

Section 5

**The Queer Conn  
History Project**

## **The Power of the Past**

**Jen Manion, Ph.D.**

The widespread ignorance about the history and diversity of LGBTQ people stands as the single most significant obstacle to our freedom, justice, and equality. While anti-gay right wing forces actively work to suppress such information, even those who support and defend the dignity of LGBTQ people, even liberals, fall prey to this insidious form of homophobia.

But there are many resources available now for people who want to learn. Book length studies documenting the history of LGBTQ people and communities now number in the dozens and are widely available. The gay community took it upon ourselves to preserve our past, establishing historical archives around the country, with major collections in New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Los Angeles.

The Queer Conn History Project was a collaboration initiated in Spring 2010 by two seniors: Lakshimi Kannan and Rachel Zelinsky. Each had a different goal for the project: Zelinsky wanted to document the history of LGBTQ student activism at Conn; Kannan wanted to explore the contradictions of multicultural and diversity initiatives on college campuses. Both Kannan and Zelinsky worked tirelessly on behalf of the LGBTQ community their four years at Conn. Kannan was also active with the Women's Center and CCASA. Zelinsky held leadership positions in Spectrum and CQ2 for years.

The final project was installed in the LGBTQ Center in May 2010 and remains to this day. Much can be learned by browsing the documents on display. The first wall provides national context, highlighting important documents from the early years of Gay Liberation and Lesbian Feminism. The second wall documents the thirty-year history of student activism beginning in 1979. The third wall captures the energy and challenges that marked the founding of the LGBTQ Center in 2007.

Here, we have reprinted the reflections that each of the students wrote as part of the process. They are full of important insights – and community history. Interesting excerpts from the project follow their reflections.

## **Thirty Years of Student Activism**

**Rachel Zelinsky, '10**

I do not like taking credit for this project because it was built on the work of many others. Most of the documents were provided by two alumni, Carrie Hackett '05 and Chris Fray '86. The inspiration came from stories I was told my freshman year at Conn. The activists in the senior class emphasized the history of their struggles to create LGBTQ community. They talked about the unwelcoming basement spaces they met in as underclassmen and the frequency of bias incidents in the past. They graduated in May 2007, soon after the opening of the center. While they never got to experience the College as a place where students could comfortably be “Out,” the following year’s freshman class arrived with an established Resource Center, lots of programming, and an apparently supportive administration. Each subsequent year, the incoming class has less knowledge of and connection to the students who fought for years against a hostile student body and unsupportive administration. My friends in the class of 2007 had a really hard time being “Out” at Conn; I feel that it negates their experiences and almost insults them when people assume that this campus has always been a safe and supportive place.

This project stemmed from my desire to document the history of the founding of the LGBTQ Center before my class graduated. We were first year students in 2006-2007 when the Center opened and many of us hold the institutional memory of this period. I ended up expanded this project far beyond the scope of the LGBTQ Center to a study of queer activism at Conn over the past 30 years. Some of the findings were predictable, while others debunked my assumptions about the past. Historical narratives of marginalized groups often emphasize and promote the notion of progress towards ever increasing equality and social justice. People assume that Conn has become more gay friendly from year to year, but this has proved to be blatantly untrue. I was shocked to see that the campus seemed to have a more supportive community in 1999 than in 2005. As students graduate and administrators change, the campus climate changes, for better and worse.

By the time I arrived at Conn, the late 1990s had all but disappeared from the memory of the student body; if there had once been a more supportive administration, no one knew about them. Knowledge of institutional activism often rests in the minds and files of supportive faculty and staff, but this information is so rarely shared with students. Good historical record keeping of our own activism is the only way for students to continue a project after the founding activists have graduated.



By researching the history of queer activism at Conn, I have recognized the incredible importance of the LGBTQ Center in building a community and preserving its history. Carrie Hackett '05 visited campus a number of times when I was a freshman. I knew her as a dedicated activist who sacrificed years of sleep and good grades for her work with SOUL. She compiled the first collection of newspaper clippings and event advertisements, informing me that she was prompted to do so after Physical Plant threw out two boxes of their documents. Our own documentation of our history was literally thrown out by the College. The College Archives has virtually no records of LGBTQ life, people, community, or activism. When I tried to do research in the College Archives, I found one small folder with four documents from the late 1970s and early 1980s. We have no idea how many other students went to the archives to research Conn's queer past and were disappointed. We also don't know how many other students compiled records of their own or past activism (like Carrie and Chris did, thankfully) and we don't know how much was lost. Although students should not carry the responsibility for documenting our history (and we can only hope this exhibit will inspire the College to actively document queer life and preserve what records still exist), the LGBTQ Resource Center at the very least provides space to collect and store documents that might otherwise be lost.

As I collect documents that illustrate our past activism, it is becoming increasingly clear how much things have changed, in both positive and negative ways. LGBTQ students at Conn seem happier and more comfortable than ever before, but our community is more divided and less outspoken than it once was. LGBTQ activists at various points in the last thirty years worked in close conjunction with Unity House and students of color to make the campus more inclusive for everyone. White lesbian, gay, and bisexual students actually locked themselves inside Fanning Hall with students of color in 1986 during the Fanning Takeover, and students of color stood with LGBTQ students in protest of bias incidents in 2003 and 2004. Aside from periodic movie nights, how much do current student activists work across identity lines? How often do current students make demands? Have the suggestions in the 1997 Task Force on Sexual Orientation and Campus Climate been met yet? After looking at past campus activism, I regret not taking more of a stance on issues I care about. No one, myself included, has protested very loudly that we don't have a queer studies major or minor. We still don't have gender-neutral bathrooms in public buildings. I challenge you to look over the activism of the last thirty years and be inspired to carry on the work of these brave student activists, to make demands and to continue making change.

# The Limits of Liberal Multiculturalism

Lakshmi Kannan, '10

The Connecticut College LGBTQ Resource Center opened its doors to the college community in March 2007. This essay is my attempt to understand and place the creation and existence of the Center within the larger context of the rhetoric of multiculturalism and diversity, both at the College as well as in a national framework.<sup>9</sup> How has liberal multiculturalism, once a radical cry of the left, been co-opted to maintain those very hierarchies and structures that it sought to dismantle?

“If there’s one thing that Americans can agree on, it’s the value of diversity,” argues Walter Michaels in his book *The Trouble with Diversity: How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*. In her book *Respectably Queer*, Jane Ward describes the crucial importance that diversity rhetoric plays in all aspects of American life, from progressive activism to boardrooms to university campuses. Respect for diversity, she argues, has become the “centerpiece of American culture and citizenship” and those who do not adhere to it lose a competitive edge - be they progressive activists, business managers, universities or politicians.

The diversity and multiculturalism rhetoric has a long, complex, and evolving history in the United States, and in the West more generally. Liberals have argued for inclusive spaces for decades. The commitment to fair representation of racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities has been a hard fought struggle for many groups that arose out of the civil rights movement and post-civil rights era. The celebration of “diversity,” itself a highly contested umbrella term, is used to represent multiple things in different contexts.

In most cases, however, multiculturalism promotes naming and servicing the “other” while retaining the white male heterosexual as the subject. Jabir Puar describes the emergence of liberal multiculturalism, “As a process of inclusion, incorporation, normalization, and assimilation. . . and a form of *governability*<sup>10</sup>.” Sara Ahmed powerfully and scathingly argues, “Multiculturalism is a fantasy which conceals forms of racism, violence and inequality as if the organisation/nation can now say: How can you experience racism when we are committed to diversity?” She goes on to critique diversity as, “An ego ideal [that] conceals experiences of racism, which means that multiculturalism is a fantasy which supports the hegemony of whiteness<sup>11</sup>.” It is this

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<sup>9</sup> Written in Spring 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

<sup>11</sup> Sara Ahmed, “‘Liberal Multiculturalism is the Hegemony- Its an Empirical Fact-’ A response to Slavok Zizek.” *Dark Matter*, February 2008.

particular appropriation of multiculturalism as normativity that then provides a cover for institutions to hide the lack of support services or bias-incident response protocol that is most problematic and dangerous.

What is lost in this discourse of mainstreaming diversity? Has institutionalization of diversity become an alibi, a way to avoid questioning the structural inequalities and oppression that still persist in our lives? Does creating and nurturing the marginalized subject provide a viable space for radical politics? Judith Halberstam argues that diversity rhetoric seems to be about “*normativity*” and “conventional forms of association, belonging and identification.”<sup>12</sup> Diversity rhetoric leaves little room for challenging the real structural inequalities (such as social and economic class) that perpetuate most forms of oppression. The neoliberal market structure now benefits from this diversity model. As Ward points out, differences in race, gender, and sex are embraced by multiculturalism when they are seen as “predictable, profitable, rational, or respectable” yet suppressed when these differences are “unpredictable, unprofessional, messy or defiant.” Here lies the danger in allowing the ‘naming’ of the multicultural to be undertaken by those in power.

There is a necessary dialectic in the process of naming the multicultural other. Identification and naming are powerful tools of social activism. In fact, we spent a great deal of time in conversation and debate before naming the LGBTQ Center as such. There is value in public identification of categories. At the same time, there is a difference between larger social/structural categories that mark the multicultural other and self-identification as such. Constant identification as the marginalized other can also manifest a desire to reject categories and even move beyond them. This desire to reject categories often occurs simultaneously with the need to claim them for purposes of community building. It is an unavoidable dialectic of identity-based social activism.

The third tangential yet crucial aspect of naming the multicultural other is the violence embedded in the process. When undertaken for publicity purposes, such as for a college catalogue, the process of “naming” automatically excludes many who will not be “named” either because they are “universal” subjects (aka white and heterosexual). It is a violent process because we vest power on institutions which decide who will be named “the other.” The question of power and who qualifies as “the other” is a deeply political one. Multiculturalism and the rhetoric of “diversity” is profoundly embedded with these questions of power and recognition.

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<sup>12</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2004).

In the context of Connecticut College, I am interested in two interrelated aspects of multiculturalism: first, the implication of naming certain subjects as diverse; second, multiculturalism as unequivocally heteronormative and racial. To address the first issue, what does the naming of the “diverse student” really mean in a small liberal arts campus such as ours? It puts the burden of educating the rest of campus on multicultural issues (which encompasses all that is not white, male, and heterosexual). It often evades institutional responsibility for creating real structural change, putting real policy in place, and providing support services for these “diverse students.” Instead, we, the “diverse students,” make the overall experience of the universal student somehow more enriching because of the “diversity” that ze is surrounded with. This can be seen with initiatives such as the International Commons where the focus is on internationalizing the experience of the “universal” student rather than providing more support services to international students. It can also be seen in the overwhelmingly disproportionate stories of “multicultural students” in college catalogues and magazines to attract prospective students.

Closely related is the issue of the multicultural subject’s perceived heterosexuality. Jasbir Puar articulates, “A pernicious binary has emerged in the post-civil rights era in legislative, activist, and scholarly realms: the homosexual other is white, the racial other is straight.” Multiculturalism on the one hand is an “accomplice to the ascendancy of whiteness,” by reproducing the biopolitical mandate of a certain kind of capitalist kinship mode. On the other hand, by defining, framing and understanding multiculturalism and diversity strictly along racial lines, it becomes heteronormative. The conflation of race first and foremost with multiculturalism leads to the automatic exclusion of women (including white women) and gay subjects (who may not be people of color). Such exclusion perpetrates the notion of multiculturalism being unequivocally heteronormative. It re-iterates and re-inscribes an additive model of identity politics where the multicultural is defined uniquely by race. One can be queer, and be a woman or be an immigrant, but one must be first and foremost a person of color to be identified as “multicultural” in this context. The primary example of this playing out at Connecticut College can be seen in the institutional lack of support and funding for the Women’s Center. Women, in this case, do not constitute a strong enough identity group, as they are neither a racial category (even though issues of women students on this campus transcend racial lines) nor a ‘minority’ in a conventional sense. This is precisely the downfall of a liberal multiculturalism that is strictly based on racial and ethnic categories.

The Connecticut College Mission Statement states, among other things, “The College strives to be a community in which all members feel comfortable, respect each other's differences, and seek common ground.” The opening of the LGBTQ Center in Spring 2007, and the growth, support, and wide popularity it enjoys today is a joyous and

remarkable achievement for all those involved with it. In theory, such a Center enables the College to fulfill this goal. But to establish a community that truly makes its members feel “safe and comfortable” requires a wider definition of what constitutes ‘multicultural.’ It requires an overhaul of institutional policies and structures to incorporate the missions of centers such as CCSRE, LGBTQ, and Unity House throughout mainstream campus life rather than containing these principles under the umbrella of the “multicultural”. Such an overhaul requires an understanding of the limits of multiculturalism. The distinction between having safe spaces such as the LGBTQ Center and the transformation of a campus culture into a ‘safe space’ requires this broader vision of multiculturalism while understanding the limits of the same. We are not in a post-identity society or even a post-racial one (following much of the rhetoric after Barack Obama’s election as President), and I am not advocating adopting a poststructural rhetoric of identity. Instead, we must acknowledge, understand, and work with the limits of liberal multiculturalism until we have an alternative viable politics of social change. As Judith Butler articulates, “a politics that incorporates a critical understanding is the only one that can maintain a claim to being self-reflective and non-dogmatic.”<sup>13</sup>

### **The Limits of the Mainstream LGBTQ Movement**

I discussed how a certain kind of liberal multicultural discourse reproduces the rhetoric of the ‘homosexual other as white, and the racial other as straight.’ This is indeed a crucial question for the present day mainstream LGB movement to consider. What is at stake for queers of color when the mainstream gay movement reproduces this rhetoric? The past decade has witnessed narrowing of goals on the part of mainstream LGBT rights organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign (the largest, most wealthy gay organization in the United States). Many have adopted a privacy-based rights movement that places legal recognition at the forefront of its demands. The 2003 Supreme Court ruling *Lawrence and Garner versus Texas* made it unconstitutional to prohibit sexual acts between two consenting adults. Following this ruling, most mainstream organizations placed gay marriage at the center of the national agenda. A second striking example of this narrowing framework rooted in legal recognition is the passing of the non trans- inclusive version of Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) in 2008, which effectively excluded from protection those in greatest need of it – transgender and other gender non-conforming people. Mainstream LGB groups celebrated this as a victory. It is reflective of the rift between the transgender movement and the relatively more ‘mainstream’ and ‘politically correct’ LGB movement of the day.

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<sup>13</sup> Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 109.

In her 1995 book, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of the Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* Urvashi Vaid argues that our conscious choice for “legal reform, political access, visibility, and legitimation over the long-term goals of cultural acceptance, social transformation, understanding and liberation” had led to a state of “virtual equality” where blatant homophobia, and violence still persists in spite of gay marriage (which is considered the epitome of equality) laws in some states. These choices, she argues, are reflective of a “top-down approach” and the failure of wealthy white gay men and lesbians to build a multi-issue framework for gay liberation.<sup>14</sup>

Placing Vaid’s concerns in the context of *Lawrence and Garner versus Texas* and the post 9/11 racial profiling of Muslims and Arabs raises many interesting questions for the gay liberation movement.<sup>15</sup> What is lost when legal recognition is placed at the center as the penultimate state of equality for a social movement? This is not to say that legal recognition should not be the concern, rather that we must think critically about the implications of the fight for legal equality. Surely legal equality and an end to discrimination through laws has been at the forefront of most social justice movements. A discussion of whether social justice movements should fight for any kind of legal recognition does not lead to a constructive debate, since there will always be individuals who see it as important, those that are indifferent, and those that view it as important for others but not for themselves. All of these views are fully justified. Speaking on this “ambivalent gift that is legitimation” Judith Butler states, “to be legitimated by the state is to enter into terms of legitimation offered there, and to find that one’s public and recognizable sense of personhood is fundamentally dependent on the lexicon of that legitimation.<sup>16</sup>” This legitimation inherently excludes those who favor a radical sexual politic that is not based on the state’s legitimation. It further excludes those who are not capable of desiring state legitimation because they fall outside of the purview of the state. Deploying sexuality within this legal discourse of privacy further depoliticizes and demobilizes the gay subject and turns a potentially radical sexual movement into one that is fighting to be incorporated into a heteronormative kinship structure.

It is useful to evoke Lisa Duggan’s homonormativity to further understand the depoliticization of the gay movement that now largely rests on securing gay marriage rights. Lisa Duggan defines the new neoliberal sexual politics as the new homonormativity, “A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the

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<sup>14</sup> Urvashi Vaid, *Virtual Equality: The Mainstreaming of the Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (New York: Random House, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> Using gay liberation (instead of queer liberation or even LGBTQ) is a conscious choice because the mainstream movement is precisely that- gay liberation and very little about queers or trans or queers of color.

<sup>16</sup> Butler, 105.

possibility of a demobilized gay constituency.”<sup>17</sup> The new homonormativity, far from being a single issue, then becomes part of a multi-issue neoliberal politics of minimal state interference, little to no social welfare and access to corporate life for certain gay citizens (assumedly white).<sup>18</sup> Building on Duggan’s theorizing of homonormativity, Puar invokes homonationalism or homonormative nationalism to discuss how the gay subject – historically seen as outside the nation state – is now folded into the nation. But as any process of state legitimation excludes certain subjects, this particular homonationalism in a post 9/11 America excludes queers of colors, specifically Muslim and Arab queers of color. That the rampant spread of racial profiling in a post 9/11 “War on Terror” moment has been seized by mainstream gay rights organizations (such as the HRC campaign) in their fight for ‘equality’ within a neoliberal discourse reflects who is worthy of inclusion within the fold of contemporary American nation state. Queer politics has been routed from “Stonewall to the suburbs.”<sup>19</sup> The mainstream gay movement in the US has essentially become a handmaiden for the project of American empire.

Where does that leave us- progressive activists- who seek social change that is intersectional and offers possibilities for both those who seek legal recognition as well as those that reject state legitimation and refuse to be co-opted into nationalistic and imperial rhetoric? Butler once again offers possibilities, “...the task of a radical democratic theory and practice” lies in extending norms that “sustain viable life to previously disenfranchised communities” and bringing “into the human community those humans who have not been considered part of the recognizable human.”<sup>20</sup> As Butler claims, to critique categories is not the same as doing away with them. The task then is to develop more inclusive categories that are not violent in their process of naming. Secondly and perhaps more importantly, a radical politics should acknowledge and consciously and deliberately work at the intersection of issues. The gay movement is not isolated from 9/11 racial profiling, the feminist agenda is not isolated from an imperial project, racialization and ‘War on Terror’ is not isolated from history and the lived experiences of those in the margins are certainly isolated from those that benefit from it. The recognition of these intersections requires a great deal of self-reflection for any movement, especially the gay movement at this juncture. Yet, it is crucial if we are to liberate ourselves.

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<sup>17</sup> Lisa Duggan, “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism” in *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics* eds. Castronovo and Nelson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Duggan, 191.

<sup>19</sup> Angela Harris, “From Stonewall to the Suburbs: Toward a Political Economy of Sexuality,” *William and Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 14 (2006): 1539- 82.

<sup>20</sup> Butler, 225.

## **Student Groups Then and Now**

**Rachel Zelinsky, '10 & Amber Villanueva, '14**

**Then...**

### **CCGC**

Founded in 1979, the Connecticut College Gay Community was the first gay & lesbian student group. The CCGC records are the only documentation of queer life at Conn held in the library archives.

### **The Alliance**

In 1983, gay students decided they needed a fresh approach to activism and began the Gay/Straight Alliance with an explicit mission to educate straight people. One year, later they expanded the official title to include “Bisexuals” and later added “Lesbian.” These additions reflected growing awareness that “Gay” did not accurately describe the identity or experiences of many members. The group was active throughout the 1980s and was informally known as The Alliance.

### **SOUL**

A few years after The Alliance fell apart, it was replaced by the group Sexual Orientations United for Liberation. SOUL aspired to provide better support for LGBT students, including those who were closeted or questioning, while continuing activism on campus. The organization formalized the distinction between support and activism with the creation of a support group named BGALA.

### **BGALA**

The Bisexual, Gay and Lesbian Alumni Group was formed in 1986 to foster a relationship between Alumni and the college. BGALA goes through periods of great activity and occasional inactivity, but has consistently provided support to LGBTQ student groups and spoken out in issues that are important to the LGBTQ community at the College.



**Now...**

## **SPECTRUM**

Spectrum works toward ending homophobia and transphobia through education and advocacy. We are dedicated to raising awareness about issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, changing discriminatory policies and attitudes and providing support for our members. Allies have always played a special role in Spectrum.

## **(CQ)<sup>2</sup> Connecticut College Queer & Questioning**

(CQ)<sup>2</sup> aims to build a supportive community for LGBTQ students. The group meets weekly to build social and community ties as well as to support each other in dealing with coming out and being out.

## **VERSUM**

Versum is a group designed to support trans students on the Connecticut College campus and make the campus a safer environment for trans people. This will be done in two ways. First, by providing regular meetings for trans-identified or questioning people that are safe for students to express their feelings about gender and the problems they face and ask questions without fear. Second, by working with the school to get trans friendly policies in place and doing events around campus to spread awareness of trans people to the students and faculty.

## **QPOC (+): Queer People of Color**

Queer People of Color [QPOC(+)] is an educational support group where different experiences and perspectives all come together. We serve as an additional resource to educate our Camels on issues pertinent to queer people of color on campus and in our surrounding communities. QPOC shall commit itself to deconstruct and analyze systems of injustice and seek tools to empower our community. Our group is open to people from all backgrounds who wish to explore how our campus is progressing on issues related to gender, sexuality, race, class, religious expression, adultism, and ableism.

CONNECTICUT COLLEGE  
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*Logo by PAIGE MILLER, '14*