Out and About 2014

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OUT & ABOUT

Newsletter for the Colgate LGBTQ Community & Alumni

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LGBTQ Initiatives Welcomes New Assistant Dean and Director: Dr. Khristian Kemp-DeLisser

“We Hear You”
By Khristian Kemp-DeLisser

Who wouldn’t want to be at Colgate? It’s a top-ranked liberal arts school on the rise! The Princeton Review began the year ranking us #1 Most Beautiful Campus. Professionally, it’s a great place to work or attend if you’re lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. The school is ahead of the curve among its peers, having devoted more resources to supporting LGBTQ students, staff and faculty, than other schools within the upstate New York 6 Liberal Arts Consortium (The other schools are Hamilton, Hobart and William Smith, Skidmore, St. Lawrence University and Union).

That doesn’t mean we can’t be greater, of course. Making the Director of LGBTQ Initiatives position an Assistant Dean appointment and locating it within the Center for Women’s Studies means our community will have a strong voice and influence on Colgate’s efforts to combat gender-based violence and promote social justice. We also have ambitious plans for the growth of the Safe ambitious plans for the growth of the Safe Zone program, which offers leadership opportunities for our students to learn, teach and grow. Safe Zone 2.0 will engage the community in deep and complex ways in order to ensure that as many members of our community can contribute to a collective meaning of “safe” to which all can understand and subscribe. It also allows us to contribute in a small way to the broader move at Colgate toward incorporating principles of cross-cultural and intergroup dialogue.

Personally, this feels a bit like a homecoming for me to return to Central New York – I spent my undergraduate years at Syracuse University. Seeing the passion, intellect and initiative in Colgate’s coeds floods my mind with memories. I too spent my days running from one end of the campus to the other, trying to balance being an agitator and educator among my peers on the one hand with taking care of my own intellectual and developmental needs on the other.

Of course I didn’t need to tap into 14-year-old memories to be reminded that queer students must play a double role of being their own champions and advocates and all too often their own supporters as well. I witnessed students navigating those very tensions in September, when the Association of Critical Collegians, a coalition of Colgate students, staged a powerful weeklong sit-in at the Admissions office.

The protest drew attention to acts of bias and hate that the students had endured at the school. I was saddened the circumstances had led to such drastic efforts to be seen and recognized but at the same time I couldn’t be prouder of the members of our LGBTQ community who sat shoulder-to-shoulder in solidarity with others seeking racial justice. Every single one of the LGBTQ Initiatives student interns spent some time at the sit-in. That was all I needed to understand that our work must be dynamic, intersectional, and student-focused.

For more information about Colgate’s response to the climate and institutional concerns the students rose, check out http://www.colgate.edu/colgateforall. As for our office, I invite you to peruse through this newsletter to see some of the dynamic people and events that have kept the queer community and issues front-and-center throughout the past year.

Despite how many advances Colgate may have made, there is still work to be done. The mantra of the students still echoes: “Can You Hear Us Now?” We must ensure that answer from the Office of LGBTQ Initiatives is a resounding “YES.”

And your voice matters as well! The Colgate connection stretches far and wide and I hope to hear from you wherever you are. I welcome your comments, concerns and questions.
Well yes! What a week. I attended all of the Queerfest events and had a great time. I spoke to and heard from several amazing speakers and activists, not the least of which was Nao Bustamante. From the beginning of her performance I was transfixed as I tried to figure out just what she was doing. I quizzically looked on while she opened up talking earnestly about her amateur status and her humility, undecided whether it was all part of the show or an authentic expression of feeling. As I reflect now on the small part of Nao’s work I experienced, I think the bewilderment I felt is an integral and intentional part of her performance. You are forced to question your preconceptions, which is always a good thing!

Nao was authentic and armature in a sense, particularly because she does not rehearse, but the viewer is also conscious that this is, after all, a performance. Contradictory emotions were aroused by the differences between my preconceived notion of a performance and what I actually saw Nao doing. The uniqueness of each performance was particularly vividly explained in Nao’s description of the different ladders she climbed for one of her acts. There was a certain wondrous element to the shows clips Nao showed. By making herself vulnerable to error she makes herself open and vulnerable to connection with her audience in a way that made me watching the clips feel pulled in.

The very title of the event “Body Vulnerable Protected Body” was queer and contradictory. How can you be both vulnerable and protected at the same time? Nao spoke about using her body in her art to defy what society deems as ideal, normal or acceptable. She explained the process of exposing her body to the viewer as a way of making herself vulnerable to the audience so that they feel uncomfortable or maybe even laugh. The natural question that follows is: Is that really funny? When you laugh at the spectacle and then you ask yourself why you are laughing the answer is not always something you like. This made the performances hit home and left a lasting impression.

Speaking of lasting impressions, I was flabbergasted by the … flying penises! Even now as I think about that part of her act, I am really confused. It was a little funny but I just don’t feel like I got it. I think there was a comment in there about man and men in general raping and assaulting the natural world. The jeweled penis was what? The super-phallic symbol to end all phallic symbols? A picture of ridiculous male privilege? As I said at the end of her talk “Man I love college!” I’m privileged to get to experience so many new and unusual things! I’m thinking in new ways about everything and even though it’s sometimes a bit overwhelming I just love it!

Lastly, I really liked one of the metaphors she used of her mind as a sponge that soaks in information filtering all the stimuli she receives on a given day. In my own life, often as part of a studying technique, I have envisioned myself as a sponge for knowledge and experiences. It is always nice to feel like other people out their use those same metaphors. Maybe the intriguing threads of our thoughts connect us ever so slightly. To me, small simple connections are fun and refreshing and really do help me feel connected to others in quirky little ways.

LGBTQ Initiatives and the Center for Women’s Studies collaborated to help send students and staff to the Michigan Womyn’s Summer Music Festival. We asked student Susan Miller to provide this reflection:

I can honestly say that the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival has changed my life. I went twice in high school, and this summer was my third time at MichFest. My first two times at the Fest were eye opening. It took me a day or two to get used to an all-female space that was also so body-positive and accepting because it was like nothing I’d ever experienced before. The MichFest environment gave me a real, concrete example of how to be a positive loving feminist in “real life.”

This past summer also left a lasting impact on me. It was the first time I’d been to the Fest since I began taking Women’s Studies classes at Colgate, so I was able to view it from a totally different perspective. I was able to apply feminist theory and history to my experience this year, and I think it made it so much richer for me. While I still have deep love for the space and the people attending, I am able to critique some of the histories and practices still in place that I think may be problematic. For example, I disagree with the decision not to let in transgender women, although I understand arguments both for and against. I do know that in order for MichFest to continue, it will need to change in some shape or form, and I would like to be a part of that change.
A Thankful Reflection:
Pausing After Attending the Northeast LGBT Conference

By Niki Keating, PhD
Staff Psychologist, Counseling Center

I recently had the opportunity to accompany seven exceptional Colgate students to the annual Northeast LGBT Conference, held this year at Rutgers University. We had a wonderful experience at the conference and attended some very interesting and thought provoking sessions. However, as often is the case at conferences, it was not the sessions themselves but informal conversations with students that truly inspired my own welcomed dose of self-reflection and growth. The questions posed by the students were simple: how long have you been an ally? Do you try to get others to be allies? What has been your most difficult moment? I did my best to answer their thoughtful questions, but was left with the realization that although this identity is important to me and deeply developed in my professional role, it may be rather limited outside of those roles. I left the conference inspired to further reflect on my ally identity and its intersections with other identities.

I started by reflecting on my history. The roots of my ally identity are about 7 years old; at least that is when I intentionally and publically began to identify as an ally. I have come to know my ally identity mainly through my interactions with LGBTQ communities on college campuses and in providing therapy to students who have sought support. My allyship has played a role in some friendships and with some family members. I perceive these roots as having great depth in my professional life as I have observed my allyship naturally develop to include a broader social justice framework, but have not seen this side of my identity as developed in some of my personal roles.

So why until now have I not perceived the lack of breadth of my allyship? If I am really honest with myself, it may be that I fear what exploration or further development of this identity may reveal. What would I have to sacrifice if I truly were to explore the intersections between this and my other identities? I realize that I may have to sacrifice relationships, power, or options in my personal life if others do not accept this part of me. Can I follow through? Can I call myself out? Can I promise to always stand next to those whom I strive to advocate with and for, even if they are not in the room? These questions elicit fear, doubt, and the risk of shame; all emotions that I, as an ally, have helped students to process in the therapy room. So I must ask myself: what is my work worth if I am not also willing to look at and experience these aspects of this developing identity too?

My goal in writing this piece is to communicate the power of examining the necessary intersections between the personal and professional, and embracing self-reflective opportunities. Conferences such as these allow exchanges that often stimulate intentional thoughtfulness and I am grateful for the opportunity to share in the experience at the NE LGBT Conference this year. My ally identity is a work in progress and I want to be more intentional about nurturing it, especially outside of my professional role. Ultimately, I wish to share that I am sincerely thankful to share space with incredible students who continually inspire me to want to be better.

“(As an ally) Can I follow through? Can I call myself out? Can I promise to always stand next to those whom I strive to advocate with and for, even if they are not in the room?”
Creating Change in the World
By Kris Pfister '17

In January of 2014, I was fortunate enough to go to Creating Change, a national conference on LGBTQ equality sponsored by the National LGBTQ Taskforce. This year the conference was held in Houston, Texas. My experience in Houston taught me many things about equality and the vast ways in which it affects our everyday lives. With around 4,000 attendees and over 390 unique workshops throughout the five days, I learned that this conference was about much more than LGBTQ issues.

Many features were geared in the direction of LGBTQ issues direction, but I found underlying points that can be applied to various aspects of life. Equality, or lack thereof, is an idea, which affects many groups of people. After all, we are individuals with many facets to our lives. One of the main vehicles in establishing an atmosphere of equality at Creating Change was group discussion. It is one thing to view a person who is different than you and to think about what obstacles they encounter, but quite another to have a conversation with them about what personal toll those obstacles take as well as how that person copes with those challenges. This not only allows us a more empathetic view of other people, but it also encourages us to understand the best way to facilitate cooperation with other individuals.

As I stated, each of us has many facets to our own life. We carry with us a great deal of stories, scars, titles, and feelings. However, it is only through recognizing these individual parts of our self that we can begin to see how some may contradict each other, help us relate to others, or give us a kind of privilege in life. Intersectionality is what makes us unique; it can also create barriers with privilege. However, recognizing how our own intersections affect our own and others’ lives can create more opportunities for discussion, collaboration, and equality.

Some of my personal intersections include being a student, a woman, a scientist, white, able-bodied, and a native English speaker. Through Creating Change, I learned to recognize that some aspects of my person give me an unrequested privilege, such as being white and able-bodied. Part of my responsibility as an equality activist is to use these labels in discussion. Too often are they assumed as “just who I am,” when they can be made a vehicle to make others aware of their own privileges. Other aspects of myself are less advantageous however. Being a white, middle-class woman, for example, comes with the conventional ideology of a weaker, beauty-focused, homemaker. While it is true that this stigma has changed much from the early nineteenth century, it is still not free from bias.

Having conversations about these intersections of identities is a good place to begin heading toward equality, but it is just that: the beginning. Conversations are useful tools, but actions on an institutional, national, and global scale are needed for more changes to take place. While personal identities are fine to begin the conversation, a broader view of the effect privilege and prejudice is needed to aid the advancement of equality. Discussion is the vehicle behind which action must follow closely. While discussion is a useful tool, it alone cannot change the unequal grounds that many people stand on. For that equality to come about, we must move beyond simple conversation of the personal to actively engage others in the necessity of this cause.

LGBTQ Community Celebrates Lavender Graduation in April
Alumni Spotlight:
Charles “Casey” M. Sprock

Professor Sprock is a member of class of 1986. Originally from Rome, NY, he pursued his bachelor’s degree with a major in Philosophy and a minor in Political Science. He later attended the law school at University of Notre Dame. Prof. Sprock is currently a practicing attorney, as well as an adjunct faculty at Colgate University and Syracuse University.

Q: What was Colgate’s social climate like in relation to LGBTQ topics and issues during your undergraduate years? How has it changed since then?
A: LGBTQ issues were discussed intellectually just like other prominent issues. Colgate sent the general message that it was OK to be gay. Not a lot of people at Colgate were out.
The big headline was AIDS because it was a fatal disease. By the time the virus was discovered, it was too late and people found that they already had AIDS. There was already a lot of discrimination that homosexuals faced but a new discrimination arose because of the stigma of AIDS. The national recognition of the disease adversely affected the gay population and made it hard to come out. Coming out as a gay man was like coming out as a person who has a high risk of contracting AIDS. The safe sex campaign was launched and widely promoted in order to combat the high amount of people who were dying from the disease but people who were gay were still very much seen as pariahs in a way. For example, it was still illegal to perform acts of sodomy. It is not perfect. As was proven by the recent sit-in protest, there are still issues with full acceptance of the LGBTQ community.

Q: When you think back to your time at Colgate what was the most memorable experience?
A: I can’t really identify one experience as more memorable than others because I’ve had several experiences that have stood out to me during my time at Colgate. I had a job at the pool and I was a Residential Assistant and Head Resident. My junior year, I was voted president of the Cobb fellows. Several first, second, and third year students receive Cobbs Fellowship awards every year and only one is selected to serve as president. This was a big honor and a memory that has stayed with me. I was also on the crew team my sophomore, junior and senior year and I was also able to row at the “Head of the Charles” in the lightweight boat my senior year. Additionally, I worked with Admissions giving tours, processing applications and mail. The summer after graduation, I was a senior interviewer with the Admissions office.

Q: What do you want to see come of the LGBTQ movement?
A: I am happy about marriage equality and the fact that it is becoming a real option for same-sex couples in most states. It’s just a matter of time before it is established in all states. I would like to see the movement call attention to other injustices that do not receive as much consideration as they need. In terms of domestic issues, this would be shedding light on discrimination in the workplace and discrimination that children of LGBTQ people face. There also needs to be a renewed effort to promote safe sex and publicize HIV. In the larger scope of things, we in the US really need to realize that LGBTQ people in other countries face life-threatening discrimination, injustice with severe consequences. There are political forces that fuel governments to discriminate against LGBTQ people.

Q: Is there a local or national LGBTQ cause that you feel strongly about?
A: I focus my energies on the National LGBT Bar Foundation. I am the Past President of the Foundation. I mentor law student groups and student congress groups. I educate attorneys on legal issues and realities of the lives of LGBTQ people and families.

Q: Do you have any words of wisdom for LGBTQ and ally students at Colgate?
A: Everyone has a life story and unique challenges in life so given the uniqueness of every student, I don’t have any blanket advice other than they should know they can rely on faculty, especially out faculty, to be there for them if they want to come to us with any challenges they are facing or for insight. One of the best things Colgate gave me was teaching me that it’s OK to be gay even if I wasn’t ready to be out while at Colgate. I went to law school at Notre Dame. It was very conservative and not accepting. It was the combination of support and knowledge from Colgate juxtaposed to the intolerance of Notre Dame that allowed me to come out. I almost needed to hear the absurd explanations of why being gay was wrong to realize that if those were the best responses there were being offered against being gay, then there can’t be anything wrong with it. I was a late bloomer in that I didn’t come out until my last year of law school, so my coming out experience is most likely different than that of today’s out students at Colgate.
“Welcome to Advocates” “Welcome to SORT” “I am so hungry, do you want to come to the coop with me?”
“I have received a package” “I am going to sleep, wake me up when you are done?” “Did you do the homework?”

These are some of the words that unravel throughout the Center for Women’s Studies (WMST) lounge space every day as students filter in and out. The lounge has become the hub of education (weekly brown bags) and club meetings (Sisters of the Round Table & Advocates). The lounge frequented often by students has been referred to as home. Here are some testimonials from some of these students:

The new Women’s Studies space is the optimal common and community area. “Common” in that all who enter it are welcome and respected, there to enjoy each other’s presence and conversation. “Community” in that the identities and experiences that intersect in the space are all recognized as valid and interconnected, as well as individual; because it is a place of humanity and human discourse. - Chantel Melendez ’16

WMST’s renovations have allowed the space to physically embody what it has always embodied ideologically: openness. Walking in to the center now, it is clear that WMST is a space where everyone can feel comfortable. There is no compartmentalization, but a running together of different peoples, ideas, and backgrounds. An environment where people can put out their views and know that no negativity is festering in the next room. The new space also allows for greater exposure to WMST as more people can engage in the open conversations happening in the main space at the same time. - Sharon Nicol ’17

As mentioned in the comments by the students, WMST was renovated (just in time for the Center’s 20th year anniversary). The renovation entailed taking down the intern office, making the conference room smaller, which allowed for a new space to be created, the restructuring of the ramp along the main wall by the entrance, changing of the carpet, buying a hundred new rainbow chairs for the brown bag series. The outcome of the renovation is a larger open space to host up to 115 people for events, a small conference accessible to students and faculty, and a classroom. Another outcome of the renovation is office space for LGBTQ Studies & Women’s Studies faculty, and an office for LGBTQ Initiatives!

LGBTQ Initiatives moved from Shaw Wellness Institute to WMST in November. Khristian Kemp-DeLisser had this to say about the move:

The new location not only situates LGBTQ Initiatives and its staff in the heart of campus, but affirms the office’s long-standing close ties to Women's Studies and other academic programs that explore the academic, social and political development of gender and other intersecting identities. (Women’s Studies housed LGBTQ Initiatives when the first LGBTQ Program Assistant was hired in 2003). The move reflects the collaborative and interdisciplinary spirit that guides Colgate’s efforts to meet the needs of the LGBTQ community. It would not be possible without the efforts of Dean of Students Scott Brown, Thad Mantaro and the staff of Shaw Wellness Institute, and Meika Loe and the Center for Women's Studies staff. We are also grateful to Helene Julien and the advisory boards of LGBTQ Studies and Women’s Studies for providing advocacy and support for the move.

Professor Ken Velente, (pictured on the right) and other faculty, staff and students welcomed LGBTQ Initiatives to the space at a LGBTQA community mixer.
Meet Our Newest Interns

Taylor

Huffer ’18 is from Dallas, Texas. As a first year, she has found herself in all of the queer spaces that Colgate has to offer. “Working with LGBTQ Initiatives is a dream come true for a person like me” Taylor said. She has always been interested in consciousness raising and making the LGBTQ community more known and welcomed. Coming from the South, Taylor has definitely seen the negative effects of denying the rights of the LGBTQ community and it is something that she most definitely wants to change. She wants to take the skills that she learns from Colgate and becomes a social justice activist for all intersections of identities.

Michael

James ’17 is from Trinidad and Tobago. The Office of LGBTQ Initiatives was one of the reasons he was attracted to Colgate. He was excited at the prospect of not only student activists and support groups but also an actual school sponsored and staffed office to help act on behalf of LGBTQ interests. Perhaps particularly due to the lack of open LGBTQ community at home, Michael has involved himself, as he likes to say, in "everything queer at Colgate". He is excited to be on the team in the LGBTQ Initiatives office and help support administrative inclusion of LGBTQ identities in addition to his activity with his classmates in Advocates and...