



The History of the Rainbow Center at UConn: An Oral and Written History Project

2013

Purpose

The purpose of this assessment was to document the history of the Rainbow Center, including what led to the founding, and how it changed over time

Literature Review

1969: Stonewall Riot
1971: First LGBTQ Center opened at the University of Michigan
1973: UConn Gay Alliance at UConn
1977: Second LGBTQ Center opened at Minnesota State University
1979: Storrs Gay Coalition at UConn
1980s: Student Affairs practitioners began to utilize student development, identity, and activist theory to justify creation of intentional, inclusive space for empowerment of marginalized groups (Ringgenberg, 1989). Multicultural Affairs offices also began to be created (Manning, 1988)
1990s: Majority of existing LGBTQ Centers in the United States are formed
1998: University of Wyoming student, Matthew Shepard, is murdered in hate crime

Methodology

Participants: Key Stakeholders, Center Directors, and Administrative Staff

Data Collection:

Interviews:

- In person and by phone
- Asked open-ended question about resources, programs, goals, and challenges

Document Collection:

- Rainbow Center Files, The Dodd Research Center at UConn, Daily Campus Archives, Presidential Archives, and Board of Trustees Archives

Data Analysis:

Interviews:

- Transcribed and coded for key historical events and openly for emergent themes.

Document Analysis:

- Organized in order by date and used constant comparative analysis to identify additional participants, and to confirm themes and events from the interviews

Conclusions

- Access to and visibility through space was important.
- Students and staff took political and personal risks in the creation and continuation of the Center.
- Support from other cultural centers was crucial to the Rainbow Center's success.
- Having access to financial and political resources was important for the Center
- The success of the Center depended on energy and momentum of students
- Promoting diversity on staff has been a continued goal

Findings

Founding (1990-1998)

Location:
- SU 258

Goals:
- Create a Center
- Create a Full-Time Staff Member

Challenges:
- Space
- Resources
- Political Tension

Resources:
- Other Cultural Centers
- Subcommittee on LBGT Issues
- University

Major Programs:
- Safe Zone
- LGBTQ Awareness Month
- Education and referrals
- Boxed Lunch Speakers

Martha Nelson (1998-2000)

Location:
- SU 214
- Whitney House

Goals:
- Develop Center as a resource
- Address campus climate issues
- Increase visibility

Challenges:
- Institutionalized homophobia
- "Unwelcoming" campus climate

Resources:
- Budget
- Partnerships with cultural centers
- State-wide organizations
- Other departments (i.e. Athletics and Human Resources)

Major Programs:
- Out to Lunch
- The Speakers Bureau
- Safe Zone Training
- CommunitE weekly e-mail
- Café Q

Seth Marnin (2002-2007)

Location:
- Whitney House
- SU 403

Goals:
- Reduce homophobia and transphobia within the University and state
- Make LGBTQ students and issues "part of the fabric of the institution"

Challenges:
- Lack of diversity on staff
- Decrease in budgets
- Smaller speakers (national to local)

Resources:
- Student workers
- Faculty/staff support
- Cultural centers
- Community

Major Programs:
- QRRN
- LGBTQ Awareness Month
- Out to Lunch (including academic credit)
- Homecoming Events

Fleurette King (2007-Present)

Location:
- SU 403

Goals:
- Get the Center "on the map"
- Diversify staff members
- Encouraged students at the Center to participate in campus activities such as Homecoming
- Maintain Rainbow Center unity among students/staff members
- Prioritize activities based on student needs

Challenges:
- Budget cuts
- Homophobic incidents
- Concern about students when they graduate and apply for jobs in an environment that may not be as LGBTQ accepting as UConn

Resources:
- Cultural centers
- Student workers

Major Programs:
- Out to Lunch
- Husky Ally Safe Zone
- Speakers Bureau

Future Research

- Campus Climate for LGBTQ students at UConn
- Identify the number LGBTQ students at UConn
- Interview students involved in the founding

Implications for Practice

- Importance of Archiving
- Knowledge of cultural center creation
- Knowledge of LGBTQ students through identification and tracking