

# The Journey

*published by the Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) at  
the University of West Georgia*

Volume 10—Issue 1

Spring 2017

## **DR. BETSY DAHMS : PCCI CHAIR AND CDI RESIDENT SCHOLAR**

It has been my honor to lead the Presidential Commission on Campus Inclusion (PCCI) with co-chair Dr. Lara Willox since its creation by President Marrero in August of 2014. President Marrero tasked the PCCI to evaluate UWG's position in terms of diversity and inclusion with our comparator and aspirational peer institutions and to make recommendations to better align our efforts with these institutions. After conducting this external research, we turned our sights inward as we devised and conducted a campus climate survey to contextualize individual experiences within institutional efforts. Through this research, and in consultation with diversity specialist Dr. C.J. Woods, it became evident that we needed to coordinate the many individual and division-specific efforts toward creating inclusive environments on campus as well as in the broader community. Our recommendation to President Marrero that a Senior Diversity Officer position be created to coordinate these efforts led to the hire of Dr. Yves-Rose Porcena in the summer of 2016.

The PCCI is excited to continue its work in collaboration with Dr. Porcena to further institutionalize our commitment to diversity and inclusion with a strategic diversity plan. As a core institutional value, we know that inclusiveness is not an item that can be crossed off a university's to-do list, but rather is the ongoing daily work of understanding and incorporating multiple experiences and perspectives as we strive to make UWG a safer and richer learning environment. We have confidence in Dr. Porcena's experience and vision to lead our institutional efforts toward inclusion.

## Welcome Dr. Yves-Rose Porcena, UWG's first Senior Diversity Officer



*by: Monquell Middleton*

The Center for Diversity and Inclusion extends a warm welcome to Dr. Yves-Rose Porcena, UWG's first senior diversity officer.

### **PLEASE GIVE OUR READERS A SHORT SUMMARY OF YOUR JOURNEY THROUGH DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

I bring a wealth of leadership experience in higher education and public organizations to the University of West Georgia. Most recently, I served as director of Georgia State University three satellite centers: Alpharetta, Buckhead and Peachtree-Dunwoody. Prior to that, I was the chief diversity officer and special assistant to the president at Georgia College and State University (overseeing institutional diversity, equity, and compensation programs); as director of Equal Opportunity at Tufts University, as executive director of Transition House and the Women's Educational Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts; as executive

director for the city of Somerville Human Rights Commission and a human rights fellow at Amnesty International.

I hold a doctorate in business administration from the Coles College of Business at Kennesaw State and a master's in law and diplomacy from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. It was through my studies at Fletcher that my interest in diversity peaked and it never waned. I cite these experiences to simply show that I bring a rich background to UWG.

### **WHAT HAVE YOU ENJOYED ABOUT CARROLLTON THE MOST?**

I love UWG's campus. A beautiful sprawling campus that is not in the middle of the city, it gives one a sense of peace and serenity.

### **WHY ARE YOU PASSIONATE ABOUT WORKING IN DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?**

I believe it is because I love to bring people together. I was born in Haiti and grew up in Boston, Massachusetts. Early in life, I had many bridges to cross. I traveled to many places prior to making UWG home. My life has been a series of new environments, but I have had success navigating opposite worlds. While attending Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy (a joint school of Harvard and Tufts Universities), I was privileged to learn mediation skills from Bruce Patton, Roger Fisher, and William Ury, authors of *Getting to Yes*. Using these acquired skills helps me build bridges between people who differ by showing them their common humanity. It gives me great pleasure when two people who were at each other's throat are able to find common ground. To me, diversity is about creating solutions and building bridges.

### **HOW DO YOU THINK THAT SOCIETY PROMOTES/ DISCOURAGES DIVERSITY?**

Societal obsession with social media and short conversations does not help diversity causes because there is no medium for in-depth conversations. Diversity is promoted by people who work in the field of diversity; they understand its value and benefit. I think the one sure thing that makes diversity inevitable is the root of this country. This is a country that has always been diverse unlike

so many other countries in the world.

### **HOW DO YOU BALANCE YOUR ROLE AS A CHIEF ADMINISTRATOR WITH YOUR PERSONAL LIFE?**

I really don't have a choice. My family pulls me and demands my attention when I am home. When I am on campus, my work pulls me the same way. Even though I work at home most evenings, I create realistic boundaries between work and my personal life by scheduling and keeping track of my time. For events that interest me, I buy near-front row tickets in advance, so that I have to go to them.

### **HOW CAN STUDENTS BECOME BETTER ADVOCATES FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT UWG SPECIFICALLY WITH THE LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANS\* AND QUEER (LGBTQ) POPULATION?**

First, every one of us must learn to find the middle ground. I think that when people take extreme positions, they shut themselves up and then they offend or attack others because they are unable to see the other side. There are certain groups of people that you may not be able to reach in regards to diversity but I believe they are very small in number. There may be 5% on one side and another 5% on the other extreme side. This means that there may be a middle 90% that we can partner with to do great work. Therefore, everyone has to learn how to reach out including to and from the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, Trans, and Queer ) population in order to touch people in the middle. There is so much good work that can be done as a mediator and a bridge builder. After that, the next task is to build a coalition that includes people from all backgrounds and lifestyles. Imagine the milestones we could achieve if we were united!

### **WHAT TYPE OF CULTURE DO YOU WANT TO IMPLEMENT AS SENIOR DIVERSITY OFFICER AT UWG?**

An inclusive culture. I believe there is diversity here, but there is not inclusion. Diversity is automatic. Diversity is comprised of who we are. However, inclusion is what you achieve with that diversity. I hope to carry out action steps that focus specifically on fostering greater equity, inclusion, and engagement at every level of university life. I want to see UWG diversity efforts be intentionally integrated into the

core aspects of our university. The end result should be that when one goes West, regardless of their role, one engages with diversity.

**WHAT INITIATIVES HAVE YOU NOTICED ON OTHER CAMPUSES THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO IMPLEMENT AT WEST GEORGIA?**

We need more skill building and deliberate training for faculty and staff on diversity. People need skills in order to perform successfully. I would like to implement more LGBTQ awareness, see more of a university presence in regards to diversity, and more programs like TRiO to support the student body.

**WHAT INITIATIVES ARE IN PLACE OR ARE BEING STARTED TO SUPPORT THE LGBTQ POPULATION?**

Specifically, for the CDI office, I am recruiting a graduate assistant to work directly with me to research work being done for the LGBTQ community on other college and university campuses and see what we can

use at UWG. I am also looking to bring a resident scholar/expert on LGBTQ issues to help shape CDI's programming, particularly LGBTQ work. Lastly, I would like to see more coursework at UWG dedicated to the LGBTQ community.

**WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR MOST REWARDING ASPECT OF BEING A SENIOR DIVERSITY OFFICER?**

I like that UWG is small enough to build strong working relationships, which help me in getting my work done. Making an impact at UWG excites me.



## Anne Richard's Perspective on the History of the Responsible Sexuality Committee



*Photo taken by Rachel Dobson  
by: Konica Martin*

**HOW DID YOU BECOME INVOLVED WITH THE RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY COMMITTEE?**

I have been a member of the Responsible Sexuality Committee since 1986. I, occasionally, served as a chair or co-chair of the group when I was employed full-time, but most often served as a secretary for the group. When I retired in 2001 from full-time teaching, I became a community liaison member of the committee and continue to serve as secretary to this day.

Its founders thought "...it might be helpful to provide programming aimed at educating students about the ways they could become more responsible, less abusive or self-destructive in the expression of their sexuality. "

*- Anne Richards*

**COULD YOU TELL US ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY COMMITTEE?**

In May of 1986, Angela Horrison, Ann Phillips, and Sylvia Shortt, three counselors in the Student Development Center (now known as the Counseling Center) began talking one afternoon about the number of troubled students they encountered whose struggles and problems included psychological and emotional after associated with the aftermath of sexual assault, unwanted or unplanned pregnancy, or a sexually-transmitted disease; confusion about sexual identity; and a lack of basic information about sexuality in general because meaningful sex education had never

been offered during their earlier years in public schooling. Concerned that they too often found themselves trying to help students pick up the pieces of their shattered lives after harm had come to them, they tried to figure out what they might do in a proactive or preventive mode to better educate them about the existence of sexual abuse, help them understand ways of reducing the number of incidents of sexual abuse, and more effectively support them in becoming better able to deal with the trauma associated with sexually destructive behavior. They decided that it might be helpful to provide programming aimed at educating students about the ways they could become more responsible, less abusive or self-destructive in the expression of their sexuality. They especially wanted students to have opportunities to get straight answers to questions they found meaningful in a nonjudgmental climate which took their questions seriously, respected their experience, and helped them learn how to become more protective of self and others. Several faculty and staff were identified on campus who might have the interest or expertise to serve on a planning committee. Ann Phillips sent out a mailing to call this group together for an initial meeting, and I

was among those contacted. The group soon adopted the name the RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY COMMITTEE (aka the RX Committee) and began developing programming they hoped would make a positive impact on our campus. Angela Horrison moved on to other institutions a couple of years later, but Ann Phillips and Sylvia Shortt were significant contributors to it for many years afterwards. Dr. Daniel Helminiak was also an instrumental part of the RX committee and later with Lambda .

### **WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU WANT THE UWG COMMUNITY TO KNOW ABOUT THE RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY COMMITTEE?**

Primarily, I'd like faculty, staff, and students on campus to know that this committee exists and has been working for the past 30 years to provide meaningful programming designed to be protective of our campus community. The committee welcomes additional members who want to help us in this work by serving on the committee or by alerting us to particular issues that are of interest or concern to persons in our "pack."

## **Dr. Ryan Bronkema's Insight**



*By: Konica Martin*

Dr. Ryan Bronkema is an Assistant Professor of Counselor Education and College Student Affairs.

### **WHAT INFLUENCED YOU TO COME TO CARROLLTON, WHY THE UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA (UWG)?**

“ It was not until I came here to West Georgia that I realized there were some things I could offer or there were some places where we could provide services and resources to people that I was used to and we could make being an ally commonplace here.”

*- Dr. Ryan Bronkema*

I wanted to teach in a College Student Affairs Program. There are only a few that teach in-person, and have a cohort style. I have a background in counseling which this program offers. When this, my current position, opened up it met all of my requirements. I liked the people I met when I came to interview and I had family nearby. I was offered the position and it wasn't a hard decision to make.



## **HOW DID YOU BECOME INVOLVED WITH THE RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY COMMITTEE (RX)?**

The former chair Liz Butts sent out an email asking if anyone was interested in being part of the community. I emailed her back, expressed my interest and the work that I do and she responded “Great, you’re on.” I went to one meeting, which was good and at my second meeting they made me the new chair, and that was a year and half ago. It was serendipitous, in that I had done healthy relationship programming in a previous job and I have also been interested in this kind of work/hobby and it just worked out.

## **WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN THE RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY COMMITTEE AND WHAT IS THAT COMMITTEE ABOUT?**

I am the chair of the committee, which means I manage the group. Something I was fortunate enough to experience when taking on the chair position, was that the members of the Responsible Sexuality Committee, everyone already had their niche, which means I get to watch people do the great work that they have been doing and see some amazing programs come together. I help out where I can help and do the thing that I do, when needed.

The Responsible Sexuality Committee in a nutshell does supplemental sexual health programming to what Health Education does. I think that the Responsible Sexuality Committee is older than Health Education and some of the programs we put on predate Health Education. The overlap of both is helpful because we can do some things, like advocating for faculty and staff that they may not have an opportunity to do.

## **WHAT SPARKED THE IDEA TO CHANGE/REVIVE SAFE ZONE TRAINING?**

When I came here, in the Responsible Sexuality Committee, Dr. Helminiak managed the Safe Zone portions of the committee. There came a time when Dr. Helminiak said that he was okay transitioning away from Safe Zone and that’s when as a committee we had to figure out what to do next. As a committee, we discussed if we are going to do anything with Safe Zone; what would we do. We evaluated what we had and talked about what it would look like to rework the program. Around the same time I was talking to a colleague, Meg Bolger, who works on the Safe Zone Project with Sam Killerman, who could come in and

teach us how to facilitate a Safe Zone training and give us the material we needed to get it done. Again, things worked out that they would be able to come and host a train the trainers’ session and we have been doing the updated version of Safe Zone since Spring 2016.

## **WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN BEING AN ALLY FOR THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY?**

It has always sort of been a thing. My fourth year of college, my hall director was gay and she opened my eyes to all of this LGBTQ information. I grew up in a small town, and didn’t really have to think about those things because I didn’t have to and she helped me unpack a lot of that privilege to think about things in a way that I hadn’t before. Starting at that point, I realized all these things I need to be cognizant of. I did my best to do the ally work at that point, but I didn’t really think about it. In grad school, I continued to learn some but I wasn’t as invested in it as I am now. I would also say that I was always on campuses where the culture was different, it was more normative to be in an Ally group. I felt like I was catching up to people in undergrad and grad school and even when I got my first job. The university I was working at was very progressive with LGBT resources. They had their own center, we did Trans proactive training and there was a lot of information I was learning to get up to speed with everyone else. Being an ally was normal and common.

It was not until I came to West Georgia that I realized there were some things I could offer or there were some places where we could provide services and resources to people that I was used to and we could make being an ally commonplace here. Many of the differences I noticed between this campus and campuses I previously worked at come from state culture and campus culture, not good or bad I just wasn’t expecting it. Much of my passion came from seeing that there was a need for LGBT services at UWG. I will say that since bringing Meg and Sam on campus I have learned tenfold what I knew before. As a result of opening the door to curiosity there is all this information that I received from the process. On top of that, I have gained a lot from the research that I am doing for the “Let’s Talk About Sex” program, that I hadn’t anticipated.

## **WHAT DO YOU ENJOY ABOUT THE WORK THAT YOU ARE INVOLVED IN WITH THE RESPONSIBLE**

## **SEXUALITY COMMITTEE AND SAFE ZONE?**

I like meeting the people, getting to do Safe Zone training, the programming and to continue learning. It seems like every time I do one of the trainings, I leave out having no idea about something that was brought up and need to go look it up and learn about it. The student trainings in particular are fun to do because I get to see students who are excited about advocacy and curious to learn about LGBT issues. I also like seeing the campus culture slowly shift, those random things like someone bringing up Safe Zone shows that everything we have worked hard on is getting out there to the masses. With the Responsible Sexuality Committee, I like that we have the ability to do programming that others may or may not want to do or aren't able to do because it may have some political charge to it, but we have faculty and staff input. The presence of the committee means that there is someone out there doing the work for the common good.

## **WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES YOU FACE IN THE RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY COMMITTEE?**

I think there is so much stuff we could do, that knowing what we should do sometimes can be challenging. There are so many opportunities to put together programming. Even with Safe Zone, there could be twice as many Safe Zone trainings, we could add Safe Zone trainings on specific gender and sexuality identities. There is never a shortage of opportunities for things to be done, but we have to be thinking carefully about others' time because we are all volunteers. So the question is, how do we move forward with these ideas, while upholding the quality and keeping the integrity of the programs we already have intact? We also look at ideas dealing with sexual assault and safe sex, there is no limit to the programming we could do to help students better understand that. We are still learning about how we can communicate Title IX and consent to students in a way that they will hear it. There is a lot that can be done and being careful with not doing too much or being strategic in what we do decide to do is important.

## **HOW CAN THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY BECOME MORE INVOLVED WITH SUPPORTING THE LGBT COMMUNITY AT UWG?**

One goal is to get an organization known as the Queer Alliance off the ground. Hopefully, that will be a place to have dialogue about gaps in the structure of our university so far as the LGBT community is concerned. This is envisioned as a group for faculty, staff, and students to discuss areas where we can address current concerns and look for ways to serve as a bridge between UWG and the Carrollton community. When we think about our experience with undergraduate students, we've come to understand their first dialogue and exposure to the LGBT community happens in middle school or high school, so we are catching them five to six years too late. How can we form a network of resources that we can work with? How can we dialogue with adults about this in the community in ways that could help? Again, the same challenges exist here with efforts we undertake in the RX Committee. There are lots of opportunities, but we all have only so much time and energy.

We are open to ideas anyone might have for becoming better advocates for the LGBT community here. The first step to getting more of those ideas is letting others know that they can bring their ideas to us. We want people to know that if they want to get involved, they can join the Responsible Sexuality Committee, and participate in Safe Zone trainings. If persons want to become Safe Zone trainers themselves, we can figure out ways to make that happen. We are also open to thinking more broadly about community outreach in Carrollton. These are all great opportunities for moving forward as allies in Carrollton/UWG.

## **WHAT IS SOMETHING YOU WANT THE UWG COMMUNITY TO KNOW ABOUT THE RESPONSIBLE SEXUALITY COMMITTEE AND SAFE ZONE?**

As far as the Safe Zone concept is concerned, we hope others will consider participating in one of the trainings. If they want to do more than the training, there are plenty of things that can be done. We encourage persons to be willing to have conversations about where they want to be involved and what their interests are. We have more than enough space for more people to become involved. The committee is made up of faculty, staff volunteers, and students who do this work because they like to do it and care about it. If others have ideas, we hope they won't be afraid to share them. Much of what the committee does today started from ideas shared by others.

## Dr. Jeffrey Zamostny, the Director of the Minor in Gender and Sexuality Studies



“I also like the fact that the restrooms are labeled all gender, it suggests that there are more than just two fixed genders or even fixed sexes, and makes these restrooms a place for people who don’t care to or are unable to fit into the two categories that are largely recognized.

- Dr. Jeffrey Zamostny

by: Maricarmen Pantoja

Dr. Jeffrey Zamostny is a Spanish faculty member in the Department of Foreign Languages & Literatures. Dr. Zamostny joined the Department of Foreign Languages & Literatures in the Spring of 2012. His research focuses on the culture and literature of Silver Age Spain (1898-1936), placing special emphasis on questions of gender, sexuality, celebrity, and fandom. He also enjoys teaching courses for study abroad in Costa Rica and for FLAIR, the Foreign Language and International Relations Living-Learning Community for first-year students.

### **WHAT INITIALLY INTERESTED YOU THE MOST ABOUT GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES?**

When I started at the University of West Georgia, this minor had just been created. It was spear-headed by Dr. Gary Schmidt in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures. Dr. Schmidt left the university that semester, so I was asked to step in to direct the minor. Logistically, I was well positioned to do that, as my dissertation was about the literature of male homosexuality in early twentieth-century Spain. I have been interested in this subject for a long time now, including different subcultures and how literary works and visual representations help them be cohesive, so the minor coincides in part with my scholarly interests.

### **SINCE YOU ARE THE DIRECTOR FOR THE MINORS IN GENDER AND SEXUALITY STUDIES AT WEST GEORGIA, CAN YOU TELL ME MORE ABOUT THIS MINOR?**

The minor got started in 2012 and it has been growing steadily since then. In 2012, there were about 2 students minoring, today there are around 20 students minoring at the university. The minor requires 5 courses, no more than 2 at the 2000 level, and at least one at the 4000 level. As an interdisciplinary minor, the courses must come from at least 2 departments, probably more. The minor is anchored in a humanities approach to questions of gender and sexuality. There is one required course, the Introduction to Gender and Sexuality Studies, which up to this point has been offered every Spring, and sometimes in the Summer. It is getting to the point where this course is so popular and well enrolled that it will likely be offered both in the fall and spring.

### **ARE YOU AWARE OF THE ALL-GENDER RESTROOM INITIATIVE ON CAMPUS? WHAT IS YOUR VIEW ON THIS INITIATIVE?**

Yes, I am.

I think it is a really important initiative for a couple of different reasons. First of all, logistically, there is already a large number of restrooms on campus that are not identified as men’s rooms or women’s rooms, and I think this initiative in some ways helps make people aware that those exist for people who may want to use them, making them more visible. We are not suddenly changing all of the restrooms on campus; we are drawing attention to those that already exist. Also more philosophically, I really like the term “all gender” for a couple of different reasons. First of all, it suggests that there are a variety

of different types of genders, different types of masculinity and femininity, and it suggests a knowledge that gender, masculinity and femininity and all the varieties that are not so clearly placed, are not the same as biological sex, which in itself is also a very complicated issue. I also like the fact that the restrooms are labeled “all gender,” it suggests that there are more than just two fixed genders or even fixed sexes, and makes these restrooms a place for people who don’t care to or are unable to fit into the two categories that are largely recognized.

**DO YOU THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO DEVELOP AWARENESS ABOUT GENDER AND SEXUALITY DIFFERENCES AT WEST GEORGIA? WHY?**

Absolutely and probably never more so than ever before. Every day, in the news, we read about issues regarding gender and sexuality. Look at the election cycle this year, where we are seeing very troubling news about the treatment of women, about the role of women, about the public and private sphere, and about the future of marriage equality in the United States, for example. I think this minor can help people to be aware of the news and to think about it critically. Also every one of us is going to, whether or not we realize it consciously, deal with issues of gender and sexuality every day. Gender in many ways is how we stylize ourselves, the clothes we wear, and the way we stylize our bodies to send signals to other people. Those are things that we do every day. Whether or not we think about it as being gender and are self-consciously aware of it is another question. The Gender and Sexuality Studies minor is designed in part to help people think more critically about themselves and about others.

**WHAT ARE YOUR MOST RECENT RESEARCH INTEREST?**

I am a cultural and literary historian of early twentieth-century Spain and the Hispanic world, and most of my research deals with Spain in particular. I’m interested particularly in early twentieth-century non-heteronormative subcultures in Spain. Gay is an anachronistic term to talk about early twentieth-century Spain, but to simplify I’m interested in the formation of early gay and lesbian subcultures in the 1920s and 1930s. Right now, I’m particularly interested in the relationship between these subcultures and fan cultures or cultures of fandom and

celebrity in early twentieth-century Spain. One of the arguments I’m going to try to make is that an incipient queer subculture in the early 1900s was at the forefront of promoting fan practices that were very new at the time, but that are all around us today.

**COULD WE EXPECT MORE PUBLICATIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE FROM YOU?**

Yes, absolutely. I have a forthcoming book. It is a collection of coedited essays entitled *Kiosk Literature of Silver Age Spain: Modernity and Mass Culture*. It is a collection of seventeen essays written by scholars in the United States and in Spain, and it has chapters that look at women as readers, writers, and characters in pulp novels. It also has chapters that look at queer sexualities in that context and also cultures of fandom and celebrity, often in relationship to questions of sexuality.

**WHAT COURSES DO YOU TEACH?**

In Gender and Sexuality Studies specifically, I taught the introductory course, but there is a lot of faculty interest in the course, and so it does rotate. I have not taught it since spring 2013. In addition to being the director to this minor, I’m an Assistant Professor of Spanish here at West Georgia, and many of my upper-division Spanish courses also incorporate questions of gender and sexuality. For instance, in the introduction to Hispanic Literature course we talk about the representation of men and women and different types of sexualities in some of the poetry and short stories that we read. This spring semester, I will be teaching an upper-level Spanish class entitled *Gender/Nation/Narrative*, which will look at gender and sexuality in nineteenth-century Spanish and Latin America novels and short stories. We are going to connect these nineteenth-century texts, which were written during a period of nation building in both Latin America and Spain, to some of the issues we see in the news today.

**WHAT WAS YOUR UNDERGRAD MAJOR?**

I majored in Spanish at McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland. I chose Spanish for many different reasons. One of them was that I was very drawn to learning about different cultures. I grew up in rural Maryland, actually in a county called Carroll County, Maryland, ironically. Obviously, there are



some differences from rural Georgia, but I do know what it is like to grow up in a rural, fairly homogenous area with not a lot of racial diversity or visible sexual diversity. For me learning about the Spanish-speaking world opened my horizons, making me aware of numerous types of cultural diversity of which I was not aware previously. I think that also made me more interested in gender and sexual diversity.

#### **WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO CONTINUE YOUR EDUCATION AFTER UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOL?**

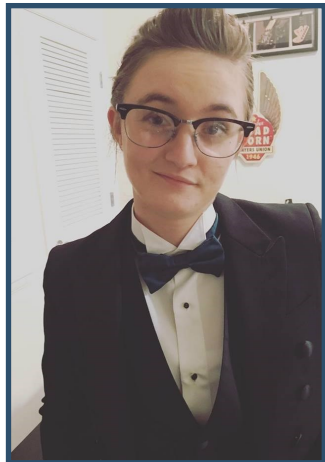
For me there was never any question that I wanted to continue. I saw my studies as a refuge, a place where I felt safe and at the same time challenged to continue growing as a person. I knew that I wanted to study nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Spanish literature for a while because that is a time of intense modernization, in both Spain and Latin America, a period that really shapes the world as we know it today. My commitment to understanding that

modernization required studies beyond the undergraduate degree.

#### **WHAT WAS THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT ABOUT OBTAINING YOUR PH.D?**

I think the academic rigor of doing a Ph.D. is challenging, you have to be organized, you have to be motivated, and you have to deeply believe in what you are studying and its importance. Those were things that were relatively easy for me. What was more difficult for me is that as an undergraduate I was extremely bookish and introverted. I probably still am, but in graduate school I became more social, and I formed a bigger network of friends than I had previously developed. I think opening up personally was one of my biggest challenges in graduate school. In graduate school people will try to take advantage of you, for instance professors are always looking for students to do their research and fellow graduate students will ask you to edit and revise papers. So you do have to learn how to stand up for yourself as well,

### **Shelby Hearn, President of Lambda's Outlook...**



by: Konica Martin

I am the president of Lambda. I joined Lambda in 2014 when I was a sophomore in college because I needed a queer community. I was recently out and all of my friends at the time were straight and I felt a shift in our relationship when I came out. I needed people who understood me on a different level, who wouldn't look at me funny for commenting on the cute barista at Starbucks. That's how I found Lambda, just looking for likeminded individuals and then the following year the former president decided to step down to focus on

**"We exist!"**  
- Shelby Hearn

school. When no one decided to step up, I took on the responsibility because there has always been an organization like Lambda on campus since the 70's. I didn't like the idea that the legacy of the organization would fall off that semester if no one stepped up, leaving other students who may need the same support and community that I did when I came out with nothing. Especially, since the university on an institutional level lacks that support for queer students.

#### **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE AND MISSION OF LAMBDA?**

We have a three tiered purpose as a social, educational and political group. Our weekly, Wednesday night, meetings provide a social outlet and experience for many queer students on campus and for some it is the only place they are out. We try to provide a space where queer students can really be themselves and be around other people who think the same way. We also aim to educate both the broader campus and ourselves. People tend to think that once you are queer you know everything within the queer community which is not always the case. We have had a lot of hard conversations during our meetings over certain topics that people didn't quite have a good grasp on

yet, that helped us get a better understanding of each other which is always great. Besides this, we are a political group. When I talk about politics within Lambda I really talk about politics within higher education and politics that affect the queer community and other marginalized groups. This goes beyond queers supporting queers. We support the Black Lives Matter movement and others like it. Usually, the executive board of Lambda advocates for not only queer equality, but for other groups as well.

### **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE AN ORGANIZATION LIKE LAMBDA ON CAMPUS?**

For most campuses it is important for the social aspect. For students who want that connection with others who have similar life experiences, an organizations like Lambda can provide that without outing the person. On a campus like UWG where the support is lacking institutionally and there aren't many educational programs, Lambda becomes all the more important. This adds pressure for the organization to continue to exist and continue to do well because it has to pull double duty: not only supporting ourselves and advocating for ourselves, but in doing so for all queer students.

### **WHAT ARE SOME OF LAMBDA'S SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOALS? WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO ACHIEVE?**

Short-term , really strong institutional and policy changes. We —me and my vice president— are working on getting a queer living learning community together through ResLife. We have started the proposal process to get that going, the first step to have better queer housing. Although we do have a process for Trans students who don't feel comfortable with the housing option they have been assigned, it is not publicized and the information is not easily accessible. The process is all about talking to the right person or you end up getting the run around. We want that information to be more accessible for students who identify as Trans through the university, so that the responsibility to help students who identify as Trans doesn't fall on Lambda.

Long-term , we want to see more quality and consistency in programming across the university from multiple departments and divisions on campus that have anything to do with inclusion is really important. Also an LGBT resource center, this is a big

goal of ours to have on UWG's campus.

### **WHO CAN JOIN LAMBDA? DESCRIBE YOUR CURRENT MEMBERSHIP?**

Anyone can join Lambda. We made the conscious decision to rebrand ourselves as a student organization for diverse genders and sexualities to be more inclusive of the queer community and allies. We are not a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA), or the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (LGB) group. We are for anyone who has a gender or sexuality. We are open to everyone. In the past we have had Carrollton community people, Move on When Ready students and academy students have also attended some of our meetings. If you would like to join us, find Lambda on OrgSync.

### **WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES STUDENTS WHO IDENTIFY AS LGBTQ OR QUEER FACE ON CAMPUS?**

I think it is a challenge coming to university in a rural Georgia area and adjusting to that culture, especially for incoming students who went to really progressive high schools. Many of the first year students join Lambda because they were really involved in their schools GSA and they wanted to continue that involvement. It is unsettling for them to go from a supportive environment and then to come to UWG where it is not so much, where the student body is not as outwardly accepting. Luckily, we are starting to get gender inclusive bathrooms on campus, which I am sure make Trans students and non-binary students feel more comfortable. Coming out to their families is a challenge, for fear of being disowned and then not being able to afford tuition because the family withdraws financial support.

### **WHAT DO YOU WANT THE UWG COMMUNITY TO KNOW ABOUT LAMBDA?**

We exist! I hear from many students that they had never heard of us before or that they wish they would have known about us when they first got here. I don't think people in Lambda should be the sole support system for queer students in that we don't represent the entire queer community. In fact, there are a lot more students who identify as queer who do not come to Lambda for whatever reason, so our smaller numbers don't reflect the campus population and should not justify the lack of resources LGBT students on this campus.

# VOICES OF UWG

by: Stephanie Hernandez, Ashlynn Thompson , and Zoya Jones

**KENNETH FIELDS**; Senior

## WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY?

My definition of diversity would be a mixture of different things that all come together to form one solid culmination of its many different parts.

## IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS? WHY OR WHY NOT?

I believe it is important to have diversity on campus because it allows for a different atmosphere. Also it fosters a creative environment where students can express their uniqueness. Lastly, it allows for everybody to come together with their own unique sets of skills and talents to make a more efficient area.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME CHALLENGES LGBT STUDENTS FACE ON THIS CAMPUS?

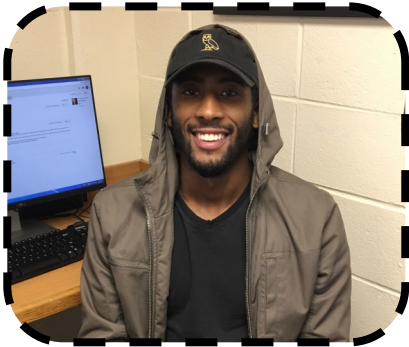
The main problem I think they find challenging is the closed mindedness of certain people. Certain people act as if people in the LGBT community are lesser than or should be outcasts in society but in reality they are people just like everybody else and should be given an equally fair shot at normalcy and respect.

## HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE STRESS OF BEING A COLLEGE STUDENT?

During my most stressful times I typically like to be around friends I know very well, that will push me to finish whatever causes me stress while at the same time relieving as much of it as they can.

## WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA STUDENT?

Personally I do not care too much for West Georgia. To me it's the people that make it worth while and not the school itself. But, then again I feel like that about everything.



**KENNETH**



**ALEX**



**VERNESSIA**



**COURTNEY**



**MEG**





**ALEX FERRE**; *Sophomore*

**WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY?**

A group filled with different people, and in that group we may have one or two similar kinds of people.

**IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

It's very important. You need different outlooks on life in general and stereotypes can emerge if diversity is not great enough.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME CHALLENGES LGBT STUDENTS FACE ON THIS CAMPUS?**

Maybe not being recognized as much as they should.

**HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE STRESS OF BEING A COLLEGE STUDENT?**

One step at a time. If not, cry, pride myself up, work, cry again, repeat until I get a diploma.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA STUDENT ?**

I love this school. It's people (students/faculty) are so diverse not just racially, but physically and mentally. It gives me the experience I need for when I talk to all groups of people in the future.



**VERMESSIA JOHNSON**; *Senior*

**WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY?**

Diversity is making sure everyone feels comfortable with their own identity so that we can all co-exist. It is an acceptance of what is not your norm.

**IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

Yes, because there are people who look different from or have different identities but they may share similar goals and aspirations. If there was not diversity you would never find that out. Also because it breaks down barriers between people.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME CHALLENGES LGBT STUDENTS FACE ON THIS CAMPUS?**

I think on this campus they face being judged by others because of their sexual orientation or gender. As a result, they do not fit in.

**HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE STRESS OF BEING A COLLEGE STUDENT?**

I manage my stress by praying. It also helps when I have a balance between work and play.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA STUDENT ?**

There are not too many people here; the university is just the right size for me and there is always something to do.





**COURTNEY, *Sophomore*****WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY?**

A variety of different cultures, ethnicities, races, genders, and religions that come together and try to understand each other's uniqueness.

**IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS? WHY OR WHY NOT?**

Yes, because if not we would all be one type of person. Being unique is something to strive for. We need mixes around campus.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME CHALLENGES LGBT STUDENTS FACE ON THIS CAMPUS?**

They face hatred the most. Only because people do not understand their feelings towards others. Common misconception.

**HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE STRESS OF BEING A COLLEGE STUDENT?**

I work out or go to a happy place, usually don't stress. Peace, love, and positivity is what I live by.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA STUDENT ?**

Most professors care about you as a student and understand that students have lives and jobs outside of their class. Sense of family.

**MEG FREEMAN, *Graduate Student*****WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF DIVERSITY?**

Diversity is about understanding that each person is a unique entity and accepting those differences whether it is based on race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.

**IS IT IMPORTANT TO HAVE DIVERSITY ON CAMPUS WHY OR WHY NOT?**

I believe it is important to have diversity on campus because it adds to the overall moral of an on campus environment and culture. This culture allows for students to develop interpersonal skills and social awareness.

**WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE SOME CHALLENGES LGBT STUDENTS FACE ON THIS CAMPUS?**

Looking at UWG, there seems to be a limited number of resources for the members of the LGBT community and the main organization is not ran through the Center of Diversity and Inclusion.

**HOW DO YOU MANAGE THE STRESS OF BEING A GRADUATE STUDENT?**

I deal with stress in a myriad of ways by turning to my friends, family, or significant other. I play with my dog or bake.

**WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE PART OF BEING A UNIVERSITY OF WEST GEORGIA STUDENT ?**

I think that UWG gives me a very different experience from that of my undergraduate. The classes allow me to grow in my ability to feel confident as I pursue my master's degree in a field I am passionate about.

### Mission:

The Center for Diversity and Inclusion (CDI) champions, facilitates and implements diversity and inclusion best practices that result in a more inclusive and culturally competent campus community.



**Center for Diversity  
& Inclusion**



[www.facebook.com/UWGdiversity](http://www.facebook.com/UWGdiversity)



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