

Inclusion and Diversity Report – 2015 LGBT Caucus

Co-Chairs: Chad Mandala and Amanda Morris

Purpose Statement: The LGBT Caucus at Virginia Tech is committed to advancing equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people and their families. The caucus seeks to improve the lives of LGBT individuals both at the University and in the New River Valley community through educational programming, social activities, public service, and outreach. Together with our allies, we strive to share information and initiate progressive community change as we visibly work for social justice and human rights.

Comment of Demographics: The caucus has long struggled with a lack of demographics for advocacy based on statistics. However, it is important to realize that the reason these statistics are not readily available is that the Virginia Tech climate is such that not all members of the LGBTQ community (faculty, staff, and students) feel comfortable self-identifying even on an anonymous survey. From the LGBTQ Climate Survey (vide infra), we had 12% of respondents self-identify as LGBTQ.

Initiatives 2014-2015

- Gender Identity and Gender Inclusion added to Principles of Community – With the addition of Gender Identity and Gender Expression to the university’s nondiscrimination statement in the spring 2014 semester, a push arose to add these categories to the Principles of Community. Thanks to a partnership with senior leadership at Virginia Tech, these items were added with the reaffirmation of the Principles of Community that occurred in September 2014.
- Gay in Appalachia – "Revelations," a live theatrical presentation written and produced by folklorist Carrie Nobel Kline, was performed by members of the community. The theatrical reading weaves a dozen oral histories into an artistic tapestry portraying the resiliency of the LGBT Appalachian community. Carrie and Michael Kline devoted six days in creative residency, discussing their oral history projects with several classes. The event dovetailed with Virginia Tech’s own oral history project. University Archivist Tamara Kennelly is teaming with David Cline, assistant professor of history, who is training graduate and undergraduate students this semester to conduct and collect oral histories “to document the history of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer life in the 20th century American South and specifically at Virginia Tech.”
- Lavender Graduation – Lavender graduation was held on Thursday, May 14th in the Squires Old Dominion Ballroom. This year we honored 9 graduates at the ceremony. The keynote address was given by Cordel Faulk, political science alumnus and former member of Virginia Tech’s Board of visitors. In addition, due to her long support and advocacy for the LGBTQ+ community at Virginia Tech, the Ally of the Year award was given to Jo Ann Underwood and renamed in her honor.
- Results of LGBTQ Climate Survey – The quantitative and qualitative responses from the 2014 LGBTQ Climate Survey have been analyzed. The Executive Summary, set to be released September 2015, is provided as an addendum to this report. It should be noted the survey was collected prior to marriage equality and a follow-up survey is needed (see 2015-2016 initiatives). In brief, 1475 individuals took the survey; of these, 177 individuals identified as LGBTQ. Overall, LGBTQ individuals are significantly less satisfied than heterosexuals with the overall climate at Virginia Tech. They feel more isolated, and are less likely than heterosexuals to agree that there are sufficient opportunities for socialization, or that they feel they belong at Virginia Tech. Key action items that resulted from the survey were (1) more educational opportunities that reach broader audiences, (2) greater leadership from upper administration, (3) the creation of a dedicated space

for LGBTQ faculty, staff, and students to feel comfortable, welcome, and supported is desperately needed.

- LGBTQ Resource Center – The Caucus leadership embarked on a campaign to secure support and funding for an LGBTQ Resource Center.
- InclusiveVT – Caucus leadership has been an active participant in InclusiveVT through the advisory committee and meetings with inclusion coordinators and members of PIDEAC.

Initiatives 2015-2016

- LGBTQ Resource Center – With the LGBTQ Climate survey results fully analyzed, the need for a dedicated LGBTQ resource center at VT is evident. Caucus leadership will continue efforts to gain support and funding for this endeavor through InclusiveVT and meetings with upper administration. A proposal outlining the vision for and services offered by such a center has been crafted and submitted in consideration for next steps with this process.
- Brown Bag Lunch Discussion Series – In partnership with the Office of Faculty Affairs, the caucus is planning a brown bag discussion series on the results from the climate survey. The discussion series will rotate between Colleges and be facilitated by allies within those academic units. This is one initiative formed to address the need for greater educational opportunities.
- Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion – The caucus leadership has taken an active role in the search process for the new position.
- LGBTQ Climate Survey #2 – With the first round survey results analyzed, the caucus is actively re-tooling the climate survey to gain more insight in areas of interest. We plan to launch the second iteration of the survey in spring 2016.
- Gay in Appalachia – This year will mark the last Gay in Appalachia to be organized by Jean Elliot. The event will take place on October 8th at the lyric and will feature a Broadway sing-a-long.