

LGBT Campus Center History

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Beginnings 1992-1995

The Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Campus Center (LGBCC) was formed in 1991 by Alnisa Allgood, the first director and founder of the Center. She had arrived from Penn State University to Madison in the summer of 1991. The discussion of a campus center for the UW Madison community had been well underway for years, but conversation centered around a university sponsored center, in the same vein as the Multi-Cultural Center when it was located in the second floor of the Memorial Union. The UW Regents had rejected all attempts to gain a university funded LGB Campus Center. Alnisa approached the Dean of Students, the 10% Society, the Gay and Lesbian Ethnic Minority Association (GLEMA), and a number of other campus and community-based organizations, with the idea of bypassing the Board of Regents and using Segregated University Fee Allocation Commission (SUFAC) funding — a student center funded by student fees and outside funding sources.

In fall 1991, the paperwork for the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Campus Center was completed, and the application for student funds was submitted, as well as secondary grant applications to external sources. In the Spring of 1992, funding for the center was approved by SUFAC and the search for space began. The Center was located slightly off campus at the Capitol Center complex, and opened its doors in summer 1992. The physical location allowed the work of the Center to be cemented into the eyes and mind of the campus, as a resource where any student could come and learn about myriad issues relating to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities.

The Center had a small staff of three individuals: Alnisa Allgood, the director; Joe Buberger, the associate director, and an administrative assistant. The three hit the ground running, with the goal to make the center a valuable resource to the UW Madison, the Madison community, and beyond. A number of programs were initiated, including: Crossing Boundaries (an LGB People of Color Speaker Series); an LGB Lending Library; Curriculum Assistance for any instructor wanting to include accurate lesbian, gay and bisexual history and content in their classes; work with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) to target midwest lesbians and gays for their campus and conference projects; and so much more. The LGBCC's first year proved very successful, serving individuals in workshops, lectures, support groups, conferences, drop-bys, libraries, telephone support, and on-site programs like movie nights and more. The Center was also well on its way to forging strong relationships with other campus organizations such as the Multi-Cultural Center, the Campus Women's Center, etc.

The first move in insuring diverse interest in the survival of the Center and meeting the Center's vision and goals was the development of the 10-person board of directors that included representatives from a number of student organizations. Diversity was a founding principle of the center, so representatives from the 10% Society, GLEMA, the Campus Women Center, and a number of other organizations representing the queer community, people of color, women, the disabled, and the Madison community were included. The Dean of Students Office, under Dean Mary Rouse, assigned Janice Sheppard as a liaison; Jan advised the Center and sat on the board of directors as well. The Dean of Students, through Janice Shepherd, was incredibly helpful in keeping the Center focused and progress-oriented, making new headway into the campus community as a valuable resource for all.

Goals for the second year were even more ambitious, but with a lot of the ground work put in place during the first year, and the continual outreach of Joe and Alnisa, second year goals were met and surpassed. During the second year, professors started to approach the Center directly for curriculum assistance from a wide array of majors. The campus community found the space, which now had an expanded library (available for borrowing), a television set, radio, meeting tables, and couches and chairs for lounging; a perfect spot to hang out, study, or discuss interests and ideas. Services were expanded to providing telephone support for lesbians, gays, and bisexuals coming out on other UW Campuses, as well helping the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force write their Guide to Campus Organizing. Use of the Center space grew from a couple days a week, to multiple daily activities, including weekend use.

At the beginning of the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Campus Center's third year, the founder and director, Alnisa Allgood, announced she would be leaving the Center, and a search for a new director began. This search process then ran into the hiccup of having to be compressed from a full year into a semester, when the timeframe changed for the then director's next project working with providers on Adolescent and Young Adult HIV/AIDS issues. Out with the old and in with the new, a new director was hired in fall 1994.

Finding New Space 1995-1998

In the fall of 1995, the Center's new director, Kristin Davis, focused on finding adequate office space. Rouse now said that there would be no room in the Red Gym for the Center due to renovation changes. Davis made space requests within the Union, but eventually settled on a location on 306 N. Brooks Street in the Community Housing and Services Building. Davis left for Maine after one semester and Alice Leibowitz, who had served as assistant director, took the position of director in the Center's new office.

Leibowitz graduated that same semester and left Madison in the Spring of '96. Assistant Director Jack Kear moved up to the director's job. During the summer of 1996, the Center's staff acquired couches, a rug, and reassembled the Center's library, which had been stored in the

Ten Percent Society office. The Student Services Finance Committee also granted a second computer to the Center.

Office space remained an issue. Options like Gordon Commons were considered. The Center decided to stay at CHAS in hopes of getting the Interim Multi Cultural Center space in the Memorial Union once it moved into the Red Gym. The staff drafted many letters to Union officials and the student government to gain support for such a proposal.

In the fall of 1997, the Center was informed that CHAS would be terminating its lease in order to allow an organization more germane to CHAS's mission to lease the Center's office space. With the leadership of Jack Kear and Erin Matas, a new location was found above Cornbloom's shoe store on State Street (406 W. Gilman). Erin Matas was hired as the director for the spring semester of 1998 after Jack Kear graduated in December. Matas was instrumental in following through on securing space in the Memorial Union.

Unfortunately, Matas graduated that May, and the Center needed to hire another director. A search was made, but the hiring committee was not able to find an applicant who they felt confident could do the job. Therefore, that spring they asked former employee Rob Buchanan to serve as an Interim director for the fall of 1998 in order to oversee the transition from the State Street location to the second floor of the Memorial Union. A new computer (iMac) was purchased as well as new office furniture.

Space had long been a challenge for the LGBTCC and students felt that in order to establish some visible legitimacy for the Center as a service to students, it was essential to move to a space that was officially "on-campus." Students negotiated and lobbied the Wisconsin Union Directorate for months, and during the summer of 1998, WUD agreed to allow the LGBTCC to rent space in the Memorial Union across from the Student Travel Center. The Center moved into the current space late in the fall of 1998.

LGBTCC & SSFC

Brian Juchems was recruited to apply for the director position. Brian J. had an undergraduate degree from Luther College, and had prior professional experience in student affairs (residence life). Brian J. agreed to come aboard as director and as a special student at UW.

It was at this time that the Southworth case ruling came down and reaffirmed a free-market place of ideas. The board of directors decided that the CC should give up its 501c3 status, thus dissolving the board.

The staffing structure at the LGBTCC was realigned from serving specific identity-based communities to operation-based positions. Sex Out Loud, which had been utilizing a small cubicle in CC space, was asked to find housing elsewhere so that CC space use could be maximized. At the same time, we began discussions with the Dean of Student's office to explore

becoming a function of that office and continued building a close relationship with DoS LGBT Liaison Sarah Hinkel. A staff retreat and training was held, which opened student staff up to the possibility of the Center becoming a function of the Dean of Students office.

The LGBTCC had steady and moderate budget growth in the face of budget cuts for other orgs from SSFC. Several new computers were purchased (thanks to Joe Laskowski, who was on staff at the time), and the Transmasculine film festival (started by Sarah Fowles, finished by Amy Basque) was created.

Unable to maintain his status as a special student, Brian J. was asked to leave his position in Feb 02.

A note from Brian: The other thing that I always viewed as an important (yet often forgotten piece) of CC past is that in many of the original documents, the CC was envisioned as being part of UW services and not a student org. This was very clear in one or two historical documents produced by Alnissa. My understanding is that having it as a student org with student fee money was a compromise when faced with the reality that it would be difficult to get the college to take it on as a project.

Kris Johnson was the student staff member who stepped up to fill the void, in collaboration with Sarah Hinkel.

Home at the Memorial Union 1998-1999

Rob Buchanan stayed on as interim director until another candidate had been found, and in January 1999, then Chadbourne Residential College House Fellow Dave O'Brien was hired. Dave had a strong history as a student leader in residence life, working particularly closely with LGBT issues, but had little activism experience. As the Center at the time was interested in distinguishing itself as a student service, allowing groups like the Ten Percent Society to focus more on advocacy work, he seemed a strong choice.

The new office space was set up. Rent in the new space was higher than it had been in the old location, and Sex Out Loud would be using a cubicle in the Center to help offset costs. The Center's relationship with the Dean of Students Office at this time was strong, and during the spring of 1999, DOS LGBT Liaison Sarah Hinkel was hired. She built a strong relationship with Center staff.

Diversity and inclusiveness were the major mandate from students and the board of directors when O'Brien came on board. Students felt that bisexual and transgender students, as well as students of color, were underrepresented in the Center's programming. In an effort to alleviate the disparity, the board of directors restructured the staff from an organizational model to one that included a Mens' Programmer (Josh Royce), Womens' Programmer (Heather Hazelwood),

Students of Color Programmer (Bryant Brownlee) and Bisexual/Transgender Programmer (Sarah Fowles). Each staff member also shared various administrative duties.

And the system had its benefits. Placing the emphasis on programming, the LGBTCC saw a surge in the quality and diversity of programs. For the first time, the Center took over responsibility for coordinating Coming Out Week in the fall and Out and About Week in the spring, bringing a wide range of nationally recognized speakers, films and performers to campus and giving these events a sense of cohesiveness they had lacked in recent years.

Discussion groups flourished. Students began using the Center as a space to hang out between classes, volunteer numbers increased and the reputation of the LGBTCC as a valid student service grew. Students attended the NGLTF Creating Change Conference and the NOW Lesbian Rights Summit. However, the change in staffing structure was not without its challenges. It placed a great deal more pressure on the director position (then officially a 20 hour per week student job) to deal with all things administrative, from budgeting, to relations with other campus entities, to public relations.

As the Southworth Case heated up over the summer of 1999, it seemed the only thing the campus media could talk about in the fall was student fees. The LGBTCC, along with the Campus Womens' Center, ASM and the Multicultural Student Center became one of the epicenters for this debate. A great deal of Dave's time as director was spent doing interviews for local and national media relating to the case. It became clear that it was time for the LGBTCC to have a full-time director, and having a student who was already working 20 hours a week take on responsibility for such an important student service, regardless of how capable that student might be, was a tough-sell.

The LGBTCC Becomes an Office of the Dean of Students

As a student organization, the LGBT CC had created functionally-specialized student job positions, generally focusing on identities - with such titles as "Bisexual Issues Coordinator". Each of these positions reported to a student director. Since then, the CC has changed position descriptions to focus on organizational functions, such as "Information Specialist". The integration of the LGBT CC with the Dean of Students Office (DOS) happened due to a specific event - the LGBT CC, as a student org, participated in Shadow Day, planned for Nov. 2002. This program encouraged recruitment of diverse students by inviting LGBT students and students of color from high schools to campus in order to "shadow" a UW student. Shortly before Shadow Day in 2002, certain university officials met in a closed-door meeting and terminated Shadow Day without consulting the students who had organized the event (including LGBTCC staff). University officials announced that Shadow Day was intended for people of color and that the invitation of LGBT high school students to participate was not acceptable under the terms of funding for the event. Many queer people of color and their allies were outraged at this, and protests and sit-ins were organized. Prominent LGBT leaders on campus submitted a series of demands to DOS, and ultimately the administration backed down.

An LGBT issues coordinator position existed in the DOS, but students argued that there needed to be a greater connection with the student body, prompting a proposal to create a fulltime professional DOS staff position to serve as director of the LGBTCC. The intent was that the professional staff member would work in collaboration with the student director position (now the student coordinator/budget specialist position) to manage the CC and provide a professional staff member as advocate for student concerns and issues. Eric Trekell was hired in August of 2003 as the first professional director, under the new Dean of Students, LuoLuo Hong. During the spring of 2005, Dean Hong attempted to reorganize several departments in the newly-renamed Offices of the Dean of Students (ODOS). This reorganization would have placed the LGBTCC structurally under the management of the Multicultural Student Center (MSC); the position of the professional director of the LGBTCC would have been re-organized into a staff position in the MSC, and the director of the MSC would have taken full control of the LGBTCC budget. Other departments in ODOS were also affected by this proposed plan. Students served by those departments, in collaboration with LGBT students, objected to the fact that, once again, administrators had made a decision that affected students without consulting students, and organized yet again. Faculty, staff and alumni joined students in challenging Dean Hong's reorganization proposal, and Chancellor Wiley and Dean Hong were forced to abandon the reorganization plan, which they had scheduled to be completed by July 1 of 2005. Dean Hong left for another position, and in the aftermath of a second struggle between students and administrators, one positive thing happened: the Chancellor authorized funding for a second professional staff position within the LGBTCC. That position, the student support specialist, was charged specifically with the duties of student leadership development and student organization advising. Nathan Figueroa was hired as the first SSS in Sept. 2005.

The next real "milestone" event in the life of the LGBTCC came in the spring of 2006, when, after months of meetings and laying of groundwork, the Library Services Council of the UW authorized the LGBTCC as an official UW library. This resulted in all of the holdings in the LGBTCC's resource library being catalogued in MadCat, giving the CC a much more visible presence on campus and enabling students to check out works from the CC holdings, just as they would from any other UW library.