Crookston Students Attend Leadership Retreat

The annual GLBTA Student Leadership Retreat, hosted by the GLBTA Programs Office, is intended for students from any of the five University campuses (Crookston, Duluth, Morris, Rochester, Twin Cities) who are dedicated to working toward a more positive campus atmosphere and experience for GLBTA students.

The retreat emphasizes leadership development, small group facilitation skills, action planning, and exploration of intersecting identities and oppressions through a social justice lens. Students began the weekend by telling their coming out stories. They participated in several hours of training and practice facilitation as well as leadership skill-building activities. The weekend concluded with campus action planning strategies.

Three students from UMC attended the retreat and returned to campus reenergized with new plans for the Queer and Ally student group and Equality Room.

“We learned new leadership skills, how to facilitate meetings, and information about word choice.” –Stef Rude, UMC Student

Above: Students and facilitators enjoy a campfire ceremony – burning artwork representing their leadership fears.

Below: 22 Students and 5 facilitators
Crookston GLBTA Programs Coordinator, Kim Jorgensen, presented three Ally Awards and overall recognition for UMC community members who dedicated many service hours and other resources to advocacy and campus climate improvement for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender students, staff, faculty, community members, and their Allies.

John Zak was recognized for his dedication to promotion of GLBTA Programs and Q&A student events through his photography and Today Page announcements. John has consistently verbalized his support for members of GLBTA communities on this campus.

The UMC Admissions Office, through the support of Director Amber Evans-Dailey, has consistently participated in GLBTA Ally Trainings and regularly attended events in support of the community. The staff has committed to providing appropriate support mechanisms for students of diverse cultural identities above and beyond their recruitment duties.

Kristie Jacobsen, Assistant Director of Residential Life, was honored for her support of both individual students and all residents of the UMC campus across race, class, ability, gender, and sexual identities. Kristie participates actively with her staff and with students on campus to provide safer living and learning spaces.

After the awards ceremony, campus community members were invited to attend on open meeting to learn more about GLBTA Programs at Crookston and contribute to planning the future of services for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender people and their allies on the Crookston campus and systemwide. Attendees identified current climate concerns and action items to address these during the Spring 2010 semester and beyond.

Left to Right: Anne Phibbs, Kristie Jacobsen, John Zak, Paige Eskelson, Kim Jorgensen. Front: Shawyn Lee
On October 21, 2009 the UMC community gathered to honor Yvonne Valgren who was selected as a recipient of the Breaking the Silence Award. This award recognizes people and organizations that improve campus climate by confronting discrimination based on gender and sexuality at the University of Minnesota. Any person or organization from any University of Minnesota campus may be nominated to receive this award. (http://glbta.umn.edu/awards/bts/)

Shawyn Lee, Assistant Director of GLBTA Programs (Twin Cities), traveled to Crookston to present the award along with Anne Phibbs, Director of GLBTA Programs (Twin Cities).

On a campus with very few out GLBT people, Yvonne speaks openly from her heart in defense of equality and social justice. In a geographical location where GLBTA people often feel isolated and live in fear of both direct and indirect hostility, Yvonne dedicates her time to carving out supports and initiatives for queer identified people and the many Allies of the Crookston campus. During much of her time at UMC, Yvonne has been the only out GLBT student. In response to her service to the campus community, several other students have now found an ally in Yvonne, a space to self-express, and the ability to be prideful in their identities.

Many administration, faculty, staff and students know Yvonne and speak highly of her. On a university campus, this is a unique experience and a demonstration of silence being broken by an individual student. Yvonne has created a position of influence for herself in helping others to vision Crookston as a campus making important forward movement toward improved climate for GLBTA
and other marginalized people.

Yvonne was instrumental in securing a physical location on the Crookston campus for students and other community members to gather, known as the Equality Room. The purpose of this room is the intentional creation of safer spaces on campus for self-expression without fear of discrimination, harm or exposure for being different. The continued conceptualization for this room is most directly targeted at reserving a space for GLBTA students on campus; though this room is to be used for self-expression of all cultural and social identities: a place to bring our whole selves.

Impacting the physical nature of the climate and increasing visibility of GLBTA Programs, Yvonne lead the effort to paint a Safe Space mural on the wall of the Equality Room. She has also been highly involved in creating large-scale displays and other advertisements that highlight program events, such as Coming Out Week and Black History Month. Yvonne has been an important initiator and current president of a new student organization on campus called Queer and Ally (Q&A). She speaks with peers and friends openly about use of the space and joining the student group. Across peer groups, Yvonne has been known to carve out spaces for open discussions about sexual and gender identities from her personal and co-curricular experiences. She has actively pursued training and education by attending workshops on campus and statewide conferences about GLBT advocacy and activism. Yvonne also serves on the University of Minnesota Systemwide Commission on GLBT Concerns.

Many people contribute to the silence surrounding marginalized sexual, gender, and other cultural and social identities. Yvonne Valgren deserves an award for Breaking the Silence on a campus and surrounding community that has been silent for far too long.

Queer & Ally Student Org. Report

In September, 3 members from the Q&A Club attended the GLBTA Student Leadership Retreat (see page 1). In October the Q&A Club designed and constructed a window display about diversity around the world, including pictures of various cultural groups in the United States and internationally. Members offered support to the Crookston High School GSA in November. They discussed how to expand the club, what events they can sponsor in their school, and what resources are available for GLBT individuals. The Club also hosted a display with information about GLBTA around the world at the UMC International Showcase, which was sponsored by the Multi International Club. Also in November, a movie night took place in the Equality Room. Members watched the movie Milk and had a group discussion on dealing with adversity. The community service projects in the fall semester included walking dogs at the Humane Society and a hosting a craft table event where children made candy cane ornaments at the Winter Wonderland event.

Black History Month

The month of February is recognized as Black History Month across the United States. This year the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC) honored African American persons who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender in a month-long web series of biographies. (http://www.nbjc.org/) UMC Queer & Ally Club displayed a large-scale February calendar (photo: left) representing famous Black GLBT persons from the NBJC website.
2009 GLTBA Trainings on Campus

February 12: “That’s NOT So Gay” – Facilitated by Kim Jorgensen
March 12: Train the Trainer Ally Training and (Trans)Gender 101 – Co-Facilitated by Anne Phibbs & Kim Jorgensen, Minnesota GLBTA Campus Alliance
April 22: Challenging Homophobia – Workshop by Robyn Ochs
April 22: Crossing Lines: Identity and the Sexuality Spectrum – Keynote by Robyn Ochs
August 11: Community Advisors – GLBTA Ally Training for Residence Life
August 19: Student Orientation Staff – GLBTA Ally Training

Off-Campus Adventures...

Creating Change (Jan 28 – Feb 1) - Crookston GLBTA Programs Coordinator, Kim Jorgensen, attended the Creating Change conference, hosted by the National Gay and Lesbian Taskforce, with staff and students from other Minnesota institutions. Kim co-facilitated a workshop, “Making our Organizations as Inclusive as our Mission Statements Claim,” with other University of Minnesota and Metro State University staff. Attendees enjoyed keynote presentations, trainings, and Denver culture. The pre-conference institute trainings allowed Kim and others to increase knowledge, awareness, and skills for working in anti-racism movements by recognizing white privilege and power dynamics.

Bisexual Empowerment Conference: A Uniting Supportive Experience (April 17-19) - Two Crookston students attended the BECAUSE conference and gained exposure to information about bisexuality, an often silenced or invisible identity community. These students reflected that they learned much about the unique concerns of bisexual communities and struggles in “GLBT” spaces. The BECAUSE conference will be hosted again on April 16-18, 2010; providing UMC students with ongoing opportunities for learning and networking.

Minnesota OUT! Campus Conference

Uniting Through Music, In Love and Without Boundaries

Two UMC students attended the 4th annual Minnesota OUT! Campus Conference (MOCC) on November 14-15, 2009. Students enjoyed conference programming including keynote workshops by Sebastian Margaret and Eli Clare who spoke about the intersections of queerness and (dis)ability. Saturday workshop topics spanned topics of gender identity, sexuality, community/social justice organizing, and featured workshops addressing the conference theme of music, art, and technology. Midday caucuses allowed interactive participation and community building.

The Poetic Assassins and Killer B’s Karaoke provided Saturday evening substance-free entertainment. On Sunday, Sarah Greer performed Songtaneous (spontaneous singing) to begin the day, followed by a closing keynote by Eli Clare (www.eliclare.com) empowering us to reclaim our bodies from systems of oppression.
Spring Presenter: Robyn Ochs

Speaker, teacher, writer, and activist Robyn Ochs, traveled to the University of Minnesota, Crookston to present a workshop and interactive presentation on Wednesday, April 22, 2009. Students, faculty, staff and community members from both UMC and the University of North Dakota attended the afternoon workshop, “Challenging Homophobia,” and the evening presentation entitled “Crossing Lines: Identity and the Sexuality Spectrum.” Participants enjoyed these interactive presentations, noting that there is still much work to be done to educate rural campuses about creating more welcoming learning and living spaces.

The event was co-Sponsored by the GLBTA Programs at the U of M, Crookston and the University of North Dakota Ten Percent Society. It was co-hosted the Queer and Ally Student Group at the U of M, Crookston.

Left to Right: Chris Stoner (UND Ten Percent Society), Robyn Ochs, Kim Jorgensen (GLBTA Programs – Crookston), Anne Phibbs (GLBTA Programs – Twin Cities)

“...conditional acceptance is not really acceptance at all.” –Robyn Ochs

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Open Position: 2010-2011 GLBTA Programs Coordinator (University of Minnesota, Crookston)

The role of the Coordinator is to provide information, resources, and referral information for students, faculty, and staff regarding gender identity and expression and sexual orientation identities. This includes development and implementation of activities such as programming, ally training, community building, and consultation. Contact Kim Jorgensen (jorge382@umn.edu) if interested. Further details and application requirements will be forthcoming.