Letter from the co-chairs

We are the President’s Commission on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation (GISO) and are celebrating our 10th year as a commission. Our mission is to address lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex issues while working to move Slippery Rock University towards a more inclusive and supportive campus climate that is free of discrimination, intolerance, and bigotry. As you can see, we have had a busy 2016-2017 year!

Along with our month-long celebration in October, we also work year-round to fulfill our mission. For example, as you will read in this issue, to kick off our 10th year, we held a workshop on how to be an LGBTQ+ ally. In addition, as in years past, we worked with the Pride Center to facilitate an experiential activity “Coming out Stars” where first semester students put themselves in the shoes of a member of the LGBT community to better understand the process of coming out. Also highlighted in this issue, is our time spent during the month of October offering educational and community building programming. We started off the month with our celebration of National Coming Out Day and finished with a thought provoking presentation about the biology of Intersex.

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In addition, GISO worked with RockOut, which is the student LGBTQAI group on campus, on their Annual Drag Show, which gathered an audience of 900 students. That is not a typo! The ballroom was filled to capacity! Then for the first time, the Pride Center (which is the resource center at SRU) and GISO broadcasted the live showing of the Rocky Horror Picture Show on a cold rainy day with props and trivia contests during commercials. It was such a success that we are planning to host a similar event this coming fall on Halloween (SAVE THE DATE!). Later in the semester, we participated in a panel discussion for Transgender awareness day with Gender Studies, where we highlighted the violence experienced by the Trans community—especially for transgender people of color. Another event (featured in this issue) was the panel discussion we cosponsored in response to the mass shooting at the Orlando LGBT+ Nightclub.

Although the vast majority of our programming took place in the fall semester, we sponsored (or co-sponsored) a number of successful events in the spring. For example, we had two movie events. We showed “Orchids: My Intersex Adventure” and “Pride.” Both films are well worth watching! We also hosted a visit from a high school allies group (similar to Gay-Straight Alliance groups) where we spent the day engaging in discussions and activities about how to be a good ally. For International Transgender Day of Visibility, we set up a table in the student center where students could stop by and learn about gender inclusive pronouns. We hope that bringing awareness to such issues helps our students understand the need to be compassionate and inclusive.

The main event for the Spring semester was our “Night Out.” At our Night Out Celebration, our founding members, Drs. Colleen Cooke and Catherine Massey, helped us celebrate our 10th year by telling the story of how GISO came to be. At the event Patrick Beswick (a former co-chair of GISO) gave a presentation highlighting the progress made on the LGBTQIA student scholarship. It seems that there will be even more reason to celebrate next year when we are projected to reach our initial goal and endowment of $25,000. Keep your eye out for information related to celebrating this achievement this fall (tentatively set for Oct. 20)! In addition to these presentations on our 10 years as a commission, we also enjoyed (and learned!) from the keynote presentation from PA’s Department of Health Physician General, Dr. Rachel Levine. Dr. Levine is one of only a few transgender officials serving in elected or appointed offices nationwide, and is the highest-ranking transgender official in Pennsylvania. Dr. Levine’s talk was so well received that we decided to invite her back for a public lecture on November 14th (SAVE THE DATE!). Of course, the main event was the celebration of graduating seniors with the Lavender Graduation Ceremony. In addition to the graduation celebration, we also recognized individuals who “Break the Silence” to improve campus climate by confronting discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity and expression at Slippery Rock University.

To celebrate Ally Week, the Pride Center staffed an information table on Tuesday, September 27 during common hour to promote the campaign “I’ll Go With You” in which they handed out buttons that said “I’ll go with you”.

The organizers of this campaign, are part of the queer community. And while some members of their community can “pass” for cisgender enough to avoid comment in gendered spaces, not all members can do so, want to do so, or are confident in their ability to do so. This threatens the safety of transgender, gender-queer, and other gender-nonconforming people. Additionally, the legal status of gender-nonconforming individuals accessing gendered spaces is inconsistent, and often challenged.

We say this sucks. No one should have to feel unsafe using a restroom or other gendered space that conforms with their gender identity.
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Those recognized are highlighted in this issue.

Although SRU’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities are thriving, we know there is much work to be done. As you can see in this issue, GISO is comprised of a dedicated group of individuals who work hard to celebrate LGBT History Month in October, but also to educate and advocate the entire year in order to improve the campus climate for the LGBTQ+ community.

By reading this issue, we hope you will see our commitment to our mission.

We are looking forward to continuing our efforts into the next year!

Sincerely,

Deb Schell and Emily Keener

2016-17 Awards

Breaking the Silence Awards:

- Ashton Smith
- Mark Shotwell

Student Leadership Award:

- Chris Luffy
- Maevon Gumble

On March 8, GISO sponsored a screening of the film Orchids: My Intersex Adventure by the Australian documentarian Phoebe Hart. Phoebe was born with complete androgen insensitivity syndrome (AIS), the most common form of XY sex reversal. She only discovered her intersex status at age 17, when her mother informed her of her AIS. She subsequently underwent an emotionally scarring operation to remove her internal testes.

To help come to terms with her intersex condition, Phoebe, accompanied by her sister (also AIS), undertook an extensive road trip across the Australian continent. Along the way, she met other intersex people, shared her experiences with them, and recorded their stories. In so doing, she learned valuable lessons in resilience and healing that allowed her to mend her own family relationships upon returning home.

Her journey of self-discovery behind her, Phoebe was determined to start a family in spite of her infertility. The film ends with the trials of Phoebe and her husband, James, as they apply to adopt a baby.
The Pulse Nightclub Shooting: Unpacking the Intersecting Issues

On Wednesday evening November 30th over 100 students attended “The Pulse Nightclub Mass Shooting: Unpacking the Intersecting Issues.” The event was co-sponsored by Psychology, Gender Studies (advocacy), The President’s Commission on Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation (GISO), Department of Housing and Residence Life, Philosophy, and Center for Public Humanities. Drs. Emily Keener & Cindy LaCom organized the event to provide multiple perspectives on the mass shooting that took place at the Orlando nightclub (Pulse) on Latin Night in the summer of 2016.

The event began with an overview via a video clip about the mass shooting with a focus on how it affected the LGBTQ+ Latina, Latino, and Latinx community. Next, Dr. Cindy Lacom from Gender Studies discussed the role of race and masculinity in mass shootings. She also discussed some of the social factors that foster the link between masculinity and violence as well as some background about gender guns and violence. From psychology, Dr. Jennifer McGraw asked whether mental illness makes people violent. She raised issues about whether we should restrict the rights of people because they have mental illness? Professor of psychology Dr. Catherine Massey and student Morgan Scott discussed how the LGBTQ+ community experienced this event and covered the debate as to whether the shooter was intentional in his targeting of the LGBTQ+ community and provided some history on some other incidences of violence toward those in the LGBTQ+ community. Morgan shared his story of learning about the event and how he attended PRIDE (the LGBTQ+ festival) in Pittsburgh the same day of the shooting. Dr. Andrew Winter from Philosophy discussed cosmopolitanism. This is the view that humans belong to a general community, regardless of political and geographic boundaries. As a result of having adopted this perspective, cosmopolitans encourage projects ensuring that each member of the community, regardless of race, religion, sex, or gender identity, is able to realize real opportunities to flourish. All panelists included an action step for the audience that might prevent future mass shootings or how to be an ally to the LGBTQ+ community. The event ended with a question and answer session where students asked thoughtful questions such as one’s about the role of nature vs. nurture in explaining violent and aggressive behaviors. In short, a multidisciplinary discussion of a complex issue helped those in attendance process the event in the context of information and varying viewpoints.

The Pulse Nightclub Shooting: Unpacking the Intersecting Issues

SRU has adopted a new preferred name policy, allowing students to choose a different first name than their legal name for their email. Students will complete a request form and all requests will be approved by the Associate Provost for Student Success. The student will be given one opportunity to change the preferred first name.

Thank you to everyone who worked hard to get this new policy adopted.

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The pledge of #IllGoWithYou, is that those of us with passing privilege offer to be a bathroom buddy, a watch-your-back person, a stand-up-for-your person. #IllGoWithYou says “I will have your back. I will be your witness.”

Another event for Ally Week was GISO facilitated its first ALLY 101 workshop to over twenty staff and faculty. The goals of this hour long workshop were to provided better and to encourage effective ally behavior.
National Coming Out Celebration:
“When I Knew”

In celebration of National Coming Out Day, October 11, RockOut and GISO sponsored a panel discussion during common hour in the Ballroom of the student center where individuals shared their Coming Out stories. The panel consisted of Chris Luffy, communications sophomore, Haley Crompton, English junior, Josh Batista, business senior, Tim Oldakowski, Associate Professor for English, and Kevin McCarthy, Senior Business Intelligence Analyst as the moderator. This was a very impactful discussion showing how everyone has a different story. Afterwards, there were questions and answers where the audience got the chance to ask on index cards for privacy.

To further celebrate National Coming Out Day there was a red door with a rainbow flag that individuals could walk through to show their support for the LGBTQI community. And lastly, individuals could sign a banner that was later hung in the Pride Center.

Spirit Day: Standing Up Against Bullying

Spirit Day began in 2010 as a way to show support for LGBTQ youth and take a stand against bullying. Following a string of high-profile suicide deaths of gay teens in 2010, GLAAD worked to involve millions of teachers, workplaces, celebrities, media outlets and student in going purple on social media or wearing purple, a color that symbolizes spirit on the rainbow flag.

On October 20 – GISO staffed a table outside of Starbucks to promote Spirit Day. Over forty students, staff and faculty stopped by the table to learn more about the day and to get their picture taken with a sign that read “I’m Against Bullying”. These pictures were then posted on our twitter account @SRUGISO with #spiritday. In addition, throughout SRU individuals were spotted wearing purple to take a stand against bullying.
GISO Does Rocky Horror

GISO, the Pride Center, and RockOUT teamed up to screen the 2016 remake of the 1975 film of the same name. Starring an ensemble cast led by Laverne Cox, the film premiered on the Fox network on October 20, 2016.

Over 100 students came out to the Student Center Ballroom to take part in the experience that is Rocky Horror. Props and popcorn were provided for all participants, along with fair trade chocolate, courtesy of the Project to End Human Trafficking (PEHT).

During commercial breaks, GISO members asked trivia questions; prizes included tee shirts bearing the Rocky Horror logo. Tee shirts were also available for sale for $10.

The event was a huge success with $210 raised to support the LGBTQI scholarship. There are plans to repeat the event in 2017, perhaps showing the original version.

Trans Day of Visibility

As part of Trans Day of Visibility, GISO members had a table in the Smith Center to raise awareness about issues facing transgender people, and handed out pins that communicate the wearer’s pronouns.
Upcoming Events — Fall 2017

October is GISO’s month!

Be on the look out for GISO-sponsored programs throughout October 2017!

LGBT+ Workshops

Schedules are still being finalized for Fall 2017. If you have any interest in the following educational programs or workshops, please contact Jodi Solito, director of the Pride Center, Jodi.solito@sru.edu.

- Safe Zone training (for staff, faculty, administrators, student leaders)
- LGBT 101/201 (for students, faculty, staff)
- Coming Out Stars (for FYRST Seminars and classes which include a focus on diversity)