

“Queer Studies Theory and Practice: Toward Integration of Queer Issues into Hofstra Campus Life,” submitted by HCLAS faculty **David A. Powell**

Since 2006, when the Hofstra LGBT Studies Program, whose design I directed, was very warmly accepted by the faculty of HCLAS and subsequently by the Provost’s Office, we have had a successful series of events and accomplishments. With 10-12 students currently minoring in LGBT Studies, courses and attendant activities and events have by now taken hold. The introductory LGBT course has been offered every semester, most times with the full 35-student enrollment; an additional LGBT course has also been offered every semester as well as frequent offerings in summer sessions. A few courses a prefix other than LGBT have received credit toward the minor. We continue to develop new courses; in the design stage, with projects by faculty in REL, ENGL, MKTG, RLL, and SRPS, are “Queer Theory,” “Trans History and Issues,” “Gay History in the US,” “Masculinities Gay and Other,” “A Queer History of Camp,” “Queer Antiquity,” and “Bisexuality.”

Alongside course offerings, we have hosted annual LGBT symposia every year since 2006; 2 volumes of articles have been published to date (Cambridge Scholars Press) with a 3rd in process. In addition, we have sponsored an impressive series of speakers who have come to Hofstra to speak on various topics, including ex-gay movements, American gay Muslim issues, and the hearing-impaired gay community, as well as the famous “gasian” comic Alec Mapa. Moreover, in conjunction with Christian Fuscarino of the student Pride Network, we have co-sponsored on-campus events such as bullying workshop, orientation sessions for study-abroad program, LGBTQ month events, and are currently drawing up a proposal for an LGBTQ Resource Center at Hofstra.

The successful working relationship with the student organization is, however, an ad-hoc one and it needs to be institutionalized. Soon Christian will graduate and I am not that far away from retirement; we need to begin planning for an assured continuation of our hard work. The study I propose targets the continuation and the growth of the existing program as well as the establishment of a more solid and versatile articulation between students and faculty as well as between Hofstra and other campuses.

At Hofstra, we are on the cusp of significant, perhaps national, recognition in LGBT matters. In order to foster this image, there are two areas where I’m eager to see improvement: (1) better integration between student activities and academics, and (2) better training for potential LGBT instructors. Improving these two areas will greatly enhance the climate at Hofstra for LGBT students as well as for non-homosexual students – by far the majority of students currently enrolled in our courses. Herein lies one of the potentially sensitive and, thus, fertile areas for growth, as students who are exposed to the issues that many LGBT people face and embrace – to take both the negative and the positive – they become more interested and, consequently, more sensitized to aspects of the society they cohabit with gays and lesbians. It is necessary to foster the interaction of homosexual and non-homosexual students by cultivating many and innovative events of various kinds that would encourage dialogue and understanding. Student interest seems to be high, but the degree of ignorance in LGBT issues, which become evident in our courses, provides adequate proof of the need to cultivate more interaction. The variety of events should include an expansion of academics but also more on-campus speakers; more than this, I would like to see workshops and training sessions of diverse types aimed at bringing students, staff, faculty, and support staff into an awareness that would seriously better the climate at Hofstra University. It is in

bringing together the queer and heterosexual communities at Hofstra that we will be able to make a difference.

In the matter of encouraging instructors in LGBT courses, there is much to be done. We currently have 4 people on staff in Romance Languages (2) and English (2), who regularly teach LGBT courses (Anastasio, Powell, P. Smith, Sulcer); two others (S. Smith, Kaufman and Henton) having taught in the Program once. None of us has concentrated training in queer theory/studies (although 2 of us are well published and well known in the area). As queer theory is largely an outgrowth of feminist theory studies, instructors often come from disciplines that work in these areas. However, as LGBT studies are interdisciplinary by nature, incorporating faculty from cultural studies, performance, law, history, sociology, anthropology, biology, and psychology, would seem self-evident. There are many disciplines other than those which currently use professors to teach in LGBT Studies from which instructors interested in getting involved with LGBT Studies courses could easily become proficient in queer theory and related topics that would make them good instructors in the Program. We could certainly use instructors who come from the social sciences, as these fields also commonly contribute to queer theory and LGBT studies. As all of us who currently teach in the Program have more or less trained ourselves, we are in a good position to help others.

In addition to individual professors' training is the matter of administrative access to teaching in LGBT Studies. To date, there have been only a few hesitations in encouraging chairs to let professors teach in the Program – these usually have to do with covering the curriculum in various departments, usually an understandable reluctance. And even though LGBT Studies is housed in HCLAS, there are several people in Communication and Education who would make excellent LGBT teachers. The re-allotment of teaching hours needs to be facilitated in a way similar to the way the Honors College is able to co-opt professors from various colleges.

In this study, I plan to visit various campuses where LGBT courses and activities have grown together involving larger segments of the university population than just the students enrolled in particular courses. I am interested in observing how faculty on these campuses encourage a gay and straight student connection in activities and workshops that foster better relations and understanding of queer issues. The ways in which faculty learn from students what activities attract and work for them is an immensely valuable lesson to learn. While not all methods will work on all campuses, there is at the same time no need to reinvent processes that work. Talking with students in such situations will also allow me to better understand what questions to ask of Hofstra students in order to promote better relations between the two sides of campus.

In the matter of training new LGBT instructors, I will interview instructors of LGBT courses at other campuses who were not trained in queer theory: what are the best practices for mentoring? how do they handle coming out in class? how do they acquire expertise of the subject matter if queer studies is not their primary area of study. There is some, albeit limited, research on this area of concern; I feel it necessary to make a more pragmatic foray into the question to better foster such possibilities at Hofstra. Based on this empirical and scholarly research, I will then design a training workshop for Hofstra professors interested in getting involved but who feel they do not have the expertise. Professors currently teaching LGBT courses at Hofstra (see *supra*) would, I feel certain, willingly share their experiences – before, during, and after designing and/or teaching an LGBT course – and from that to share bibliography, syllabi, techniques, and “war stories” from the classroom that would both aid and encourage others to contribute to the Program.

With a few successful workshops at Hofstra, I will be able to develop a training workshop for professors from outside Hofstra to come to campus for a 4-day workshop. With the experience of current Hofstra professors as model and motivation, visiting professors would go back to their institutions better prepared to propose and teach LGBT courses and to promote queer activities on their own campuses. This is another excellent way to increase Hofstra's profile in LGBT matters.