



2019

## 2019 Summer Pride Alumni Community Newsletter

Illinois Wesleyan University

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# **PRIDE ALUMNI COMMUNITY**

## **NEWSLETTER**

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Summer 2019 | Issue 3

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*Connecting LGBTQ+ alumni, friends, and  
allies to Illinois Wesleyan University*

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## REFLECTIONS FROM LAVENDER GRADUATION

| Written by Paige Buschman '17 |

When Hannah Mesouani asked me to speak at Lavender Graduation this year I readily accepted, already having inquired about date, time, and location; the works. I thought, “It will be just like last year: low pressure, a few students, casual. Like it’s always been.” And I could not have been more delightfully wrong.

When I arrived at the Epiphany Farms restaurant on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, I immediately reflected on how the simple venue change made such a difference to me. Not that my ceremony in the Turfler Room only two years prior was anything short of special, but the way that the Office of Diversity and Inclusion had not only taken on responsibility for planning the event, but moved it to a beautiful and high-end space in the community really felt to me like a commitment on behalf of the university to celebrate our LGBTQ+ graduate properly.

In addition to the change in scenery and food, there was a dramatic increase in number of guests in attendance. While my 2017 Lavender Graduation attracted some 15 to 20 folks and 4 or 5 participants, and last year’s (2018) celebration brought in a similar amount (thought it was held at Anju Above), this year just about 47 people attended the celebration, 10 of which were (2 additional graduates were not in attendance). I know because at one point I was so overwhelmed by just how much the celebration had grown that I felt the need to count heads in the room. It really was an incredibly feeling to see the change that has occurred in only a few years: from not having a Lavender Graduation at all, to celebrating the very first one 2014\*, to what it has become today. The progression is inspiring.

We can only hope that this growth is a reflection of the changes in the social understanding and acceptance of LGBTQ+ people generally, but I truly believe it is also a legitimate recognition on the part of not only the university as a whole but many faculty, staff and administrators and alumni of the power and feelings of support that their attendance bring to the event. I wasn’t even graduating and I felt the love on a whole different level. The fact that I could also be present to show support on behalf of the Pride Alumni Community (PAC) was an honor on my part, and hopefully I was able to send a strong message to the students in my closing remarks.

In many ways, the address was a message in itself. As a person very closeted until my time at IWU, I fell so deeply in love with having a space to build community with my LGBTQ+ family on campus and beyond. I was so happy to get to keep that space after I left as part of PAC. Without my connecting to PAC I would not have had the opportunity to keep having valuable conversations about queerness, gender, sexuality, and community building and leadership in this community. To have that space has been truly invaluable to me. Year after year, one of the things that I have heard at the celebration is how wonderful it is to have Pride, but how LGBTQ+ students are able to find a place for  
(CONT.)



## REFLECTIONS FROM LAVENDER GRADUATION

| Written by Paige Buschman '17 |

(CONT.) for themselves all across the institution. And while I hope that continues to ring true wherever IWU graduates find themselves, I know that that may not always be the case, or at least it has not been for me. Without taking too much time away from the graduates, I tried to emphasize the fact that PAC is always a place for them, whenever and in whatever ways they need it to be. Hopefully, these Lavender Graduates also understand just what a feat they have taken on in making it through one of the best private liberal arts colleges in the country, and doing in as their whole selves, whatever that looked like. May they know that when they want to come home, to IWU, to their queer family, etc., that they always have a space.

So I must say congratulations to the class of 2019! And, as we celebrated at the ceremony in an incredibly touching address by Karla Carney-Hall, I would also like to congratulate Darcy Greder on her retirement and metaphorical graduation from IWU as well. Her service to the institution has been, in many ways, unmatched. Her particular contributions to upholding the rights of queer students, supporting them, and giving them space to exist freely has been a revolutionary act of love. Congratulations and deepest thanks to her as well.

### **Biography:**

*Paige Buschman '17 (she/her/hers) is from the south suburbs of Chicago (Lemont). She graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University in May of 2017 with a BA in Sociology. She was involved in SafeZone and the IWU Pride Alliance, she participated in the Eckley Summer Scholar program and the Titan Leadership program, and she worked in the Office of Residential Life as a sustainability educator. Shortly after graduating from IWU, she enrolled in Illinois State University's College Student Personnel Administration Master's program and has earned her M.S. in Educational Administration and Foundations. During her time in that program, she worked at the Center for Community Engagement and Service Learning as the Graduate Assistant for Community Service Projects and also served as a House Director for the Epsilon Omicron chapter for Sigma Sigma Sigma sorority. She is currently searching for her first post-graduate professional position and is passionate about social justice, sexual violence and abuse prevention and education, non-profit development, program planning and assessment, and training and education broadly.*

## POINTS OF PRIDE

| Written by Hannah Mesouani |

- Deonta Mitchell, who hails from NOLA, is the new student facilitator for the Safe Zone program. Deonta assisted Alanna Scoggins in a Safe Zone presentation for the entire School of Theatre Arts department this year. Among other groups, Alanna also lead Safe Zone training for the Acacia fraternity late this winter.
- The Muslim Student Association had a great discussion at their weekly meeting earlier this year on queer Muslims and issues surrounding representation and acceptance, and invited ISU's MSA students over to join in the conversation.
- The Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) shared that there is great support from Director Brandon Common for several initiatives, including making sure university systems have the capacity to reflect students' preferred names.
- Discussions about gender neutral restroom facilities on campus continue. Stay tuned for more news later this year!

### **Biography:**

*Born and raised in Morocco, Hannah came to the States to pursue her education in 2006, having since received her dual Bachelor of Arts in Film Studies and Media & Communications from Muhlenberg College in PA and her Master of Science in Communications from Illinois State University. Hannah is proud to serve as the Assistant Director position for the Office of Diversity and Inclusion as well as on the board of local and global nonprofit For a Better Tomorrow and give back to the community she now calls home. Hannah advises several campus groups and can be found drinking bougie coffee and chatting to her students in Holmes 103 on campus.*

## ON-CAMPUS ACTION AND ADVOCACY

| Written by CJ Capela '20 |

Members of the student Pride Alliance (PA) group made a presentation and facilitated a discussion on gender identity and human rights During the MLK Jr. Teach-in on January 21 this year. To begin the discussion, PA president Amanda Breeden and member CJ Capela discussed gender identity and the difference between sex and gender and presented estimates of the number of transgender and gender non-conforming (TGNC) people living in the United States as well as figures for the state of Illinois. They explained Title IX, part of a set of Educa-

tional Amendments enacted by Congress in 1972 which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, and how it has been implemented and interpreted, drawing distinctions between the former Obama administration and the current administration, particularly around the protection of TGNC. (CONT.)



## ON-CAMPUS ACTION AND ADVOCACY

| Written by CJ Capela '20 |

(CONT.) The discussion emphasized what rights trans students have under Title IX and how they are currently threatened (as recently as 2013, guidance formalized the Obama administration's previously stated view that Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity and clarified that transgender students should therefore be treated consistent with their gender identity at school). In practical terms, the administration instructed schools that Title IX's prohibition on discrimination means that schools generally must:

- Provide an environment free of sex-based harassment
- Honor transgender students' preferred names and pronouns
- Permit all students to participate in sex-segregated activities and use sex-segregated facilities (including bathrooms, locker rooms, and overnight accommodations) in accordance with their gender identity
- Protect transgender students' privacy by avoiding non-consensual disclosure of their gender status

The presenters also discussed how TGNC individuals interact with the government, using some individual cases as examples, including Strawberry Hampton, an imprisoned trans woman, and

Roxsana Rodriguez who died recently while being detained in an immigration containment camps. Also discussed were the rates of homelessness and poverty among TNGC, which are higher when compared to other groups, as well as the lack of rights in employment and barriers to healthcare.

There was discussion about the efforts at Illinois Wesleyan for trans students, including the existence and growth of the Rainbow Floor and having the Pride Alliance as an RSO. Some criticisms about IWU life included inconsistent name use across university databases, and the lack of experience at the Arnold Health Service, the on-campus health service, in treating trans students.

### **Biography:**

*CJ Capela (they/them) is rising sophomore at IWU. They are currently majoring in mathematics. Outside of the classroom, CJ is the community outreach liaison for the Pride Alliance.*

*Author's note: subsequent to this event, plans were announced to prevent trans student being dead-named with enhancements to university databases over the summer, and the Arnold Health Service now has a sharps disposable system for members of the TNGC community going through hormone replacement therapy (HRT).*

## FROM THE PAC CO-CHAIR

Alumni engagement is about creating opportunities to connect with the university and one another. Engagement might mean reading (and sharing) a social media post, attending a university or PAC-sponsored event, catching up with a classmate and having a walk down memory lane, or a philanthropic contribution to IWU. Our goal is to promote and facilitate all of these opportunities, and make sure you have a chance to hear about them.

On Saturday, June 15, we hosted our annual summer PRIDE social in Chicago. Like last year, the only thing better than the food was the company, and this year we had LOTS of company. We collaborated with leaders, emerging leaders, and engaged young alumni of the Council for IWU Women, The Network (formerly the Minority Action Network) and the recently formed International Alumni Network (IAN) for an evening of “Titans, Tacos and Trivia”.

This year’s philanthropic effort, the funding of the inaugural PAC Endowed scholarship, which I wrote about in the last newsletter, was an amazing success. We reached our goal during

[All In for Wesleyan](#), and will award our first scholarship in 2020.

For those who are able, please join us for [Homecoming](#) weekend this year, and don’t forget to register for our annual brunch on Sunday, October 6 at 11am on campus.

If you have not already, join our [Facebook group](#), shoot me an email, or just pick up the phone and call that fellow Titan to say hello. Connections, big and small, are still connections. Engagement is about making an effort, and this newsletter is our modest effort to share with you stories of some amazing Titans, and share you the Wesleyan PRIDE we have for students, alumni, and friends.

With TITAN PRIDE,

Jim Richter ’93  
Co-Chairperson  
*Pronouns: he/him*

*Jim Richter is a member of the Alumni Association Board of Directors (AABD), and outgoing Co-Chairperson of the Pride Alumni Community. He lives in Minneapolis, MN with his partner Drew and their schnauzer family: Charlie 1, Charlie 2 and Buddy, along with Lily, their German Shepard, who keeps everyone in line.*

## RAINBOW PRIDE AND PERSEVERANCE AT IWU: CREATING CHANGE

| Written by Amelia von Gremmingen '15 |

On Illinois Wesleyan University's website, you can read about the gender inclusive living space established in Pfeiffer Hall—a “living-learning community committed to counter space, education and activism around social justice for LGBTQ+ and transgender-gender non-conforming (TGNC) people.” Prospective students are certainly reading about it.

“I had been worried from the beginning about how it was going to work out having a roommate in college and if they would be accepting or not. And not wanting to get into any negative situations,” one of the first-year students that chose to live on the floor told me as he described his process in choosing a university. He read about the Rainbow Floor online and cited it as one reason IWU was listed as one of the best places in Illinois for TGNC people. This had a deep influence on his choice to apply to IWU at a time when he was still early in his transition and had concerns about his safety and comfort living in a dorm situation.

The Rainbow Floor was established in 2015, during my time at Wesleyan, but I didn't know the backstory- one that speaks of grass roots community empowerment. Its establishment as a structural support for members of the LGBTQ+ community at Wesleyan that will exist into the future reflects an administration willing to change when students showed that change was necessary.

[CONTINUE READING “RAINBOW PRIDE AND PERSEVERANCE AT IWU: CREATING CHANGE”](#)

**Biography:** *Amelia von Gemmingen is a graduate student at Carnegie Mellon University where she is currently pursuing her MA in philosophy. She graduated IWU in 2015 with a BA in psychology and minor in German. Amelia is one of several alumni volunteers who makes this newsletter possible!*



**Above :** *Pride Alliance Executive Board - Fall 2014: Donald Brown '17, CC Schifano, Paige Buschman '17, Avery Amerson '17, Rainie Tezak '16, Tiara Smith*

**Below:** *Pride Alliance Executive Board - Fall 2015: Avery Amerson '17, Jackson Garrett, Paige Buschman '17, Casey Williams '17, Tiara Smith, Cadyn Williamson '18)*





## CREATING COMMUNITY

| Written by Isaac R. Simmons '20 |

At the risk of sounding cliché, serving as the Residential Advisor (RA) of the Rainbow Floor during the 2017-18 school year changed my entire perspective on life. I come from small town Illinois where there were exactly three openly gay individuals in my high school. I had never been to a Pride Parade, never learned about queer history, and I certainly was never offered an institutionalized support system, much less, even dreamed of being a part of a community filled with people like me. For these reasons and more, I was hesitant when the Office of Residential Life first offered me the position. “I’m still learning who I am,” a part of me thought, “How am I supposed to be an anchor for others, when I’m not even sure if I’m an anchor for myself.”

Nonetheless, I accepted the position and began my journey as the RA. During the seemingly endless hours of the RA training leading up to move in day, I was determined to memorize protocols, procedures, and policy. I wanted to be as knowledgeable as possible for my residents. I researched programs that would best fit the floor and I even studied famous LGBTQIA+ leaders and historical events.

When it came time for move in day, I was ready... or so I thought.

The whole time leading up to actually meeting my residents, I thought that I would be their anchor: a leader who would be steadfast and charismatic.

It wasn’t until they all arrived that I realized that this floor was different. Indeed, it was different from all the other living arrangements on campus. On this floor, the Rainbow Floor, it wasn’t just individual residents making their way through an undergraduate education. On the Rainbow floor there is a symbiotic system of neighbors supporting neighbors. This system was in place long before I stepped foot on the floor and I believe it will exist long after I leave Illinois Wesleyan.

My community taught me what it means to lead by walking side by side. My neighbors showed me what it means to unconditionally care for those around you. The Rainbow Floor inspired me to change every community I join, and to make each community a little more like it.

**Biography:** *Isaac Simmons is an openly gay senior who double majors in Religious Studies and Business Management. He was the 2018 recipient of the Westside Entrepreneurial Summer Research Fellowship, a 2019 recipient of the H.R.E.S.S.J. Fellowship, and has interned with six different nonprofit agencies throughout his undergraduate experience. On campus, Isaac is employed as a Multifaith Ambassador and as a Residential Community Advisor. Isaac believes that life is meant to be lived at the edge of comfort and is determined to do all that he can to seek out, stand with, and empower the voices that society has silenced and forced into the margins.*

**Jim Richter** '93, (he/him), Editor

**Jerry Lee** '97 (he/him) and Chris Papic (he/him), Copyediting and Design

**Amelia Smith** '15, (she/her), Writer

**Caroline Marchi** (she/her), Pride Alliance, Alumni Liaison

Please send comments, suggestions, and ideas to Adriane Powell, Director of Alumni Engagement at [apowell@iwu.edu](mailto:apowell@iwu.edu)