



Winter 2019

## 2019 Winter Pride Alumni Community Newsletter

Illinois Wesleyan University

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# PRIDE ALUMNI COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

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Winter 2019 | Issue 4

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

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PAC CO - CHAIR

Thank you for taking the time to review this iteration of the Pride Alumni Community Newsletter! I have recently been asked to serve as Co-President of the Pride Alumni Community alongside Jim Richter '93. It has been an absolute pleasure so far and I look forward to continuing to serve the organization.

The theme of this edition of the newsletter is on the recently passed homecoming. Homecoming is always a time of joy and for those who are able to participate - reflection, gratitude, and celebration. This edition is a reflection of that.

This year, the Pride Alumni Community held our first off-campus social on Friday evening at The Bistro which included a drag performance by current IWU student, Alexa Letourneau '20. She also penned a reflection included in this edition. We also announced the establishment of

the Darcy L. Greder Endowed Scholarship at our annual PAC Sunday Brunch. We are incredibly proud to announce that we have received over \$23,000 in gifts and pledge commitments in support of Darcy's scholarship and we will be continue to share upcoming events and opportunities for our community to give and support LGBTQIA+ students.

Enjoy!



Paige Buschman '17  
Pride Alumni Community Co-Chair

## HOMECOMING REFLECTIONS

| By Alexa Letourneau '20 |

Going into homecoming weekend of my senior year, I was expecting to be emotional. Friends from all three classes who graduated before me returning to campus hit especially hard, as it drives home that I'll be joining them next year as a guest in a place I called home for the four most formative years in my life. But this year, homecoming was more than just a chance to see friends and connect with alumni; it was a blur of different roles and experiences that blended together into a greatly fulfilling, truly exceptional weekend.

My homecoming celebrations began with playing principal flute at the orchestra concert; one of the best attended concerts we've had in recent memory. We played both classical standards and post-WWII experimentalism, much to the enjoyment of both audience and performers. We, as an orchestra, also had the opportunity to collaborate with Professor Kent Cook as a piano soloist, an experience made even more special by the fact that he is retiring from his time teaching at IWU at the end of this year. I had little time for reflection on the orchestra concert, however.

As soon as we hit the last chord, my focus was shifted entirely to hair, makeup, and dance: the call time for my first ever drag performance was less than 45 minutes after the end of the orches-

tra concert. After putting on my drag king persona in the church bathroom, I ran to The Bistro to dance my heart out on stage. The support I got there from friends, family, and members of the Pride Alumni Community, was absolutely unprecedented, and appreciated beyond words. Being able to participate in gender as theatrical per-



**Above :** Alexa Letourneau '20

formance in such an incredibly supportive environment ignited a passion for drag performances that has, in less than a month, grown into a semi-regular side gig for me, and continues to leave me feeling fulfilled in my identity, both as a queer person and a performer. **CONTINUED**

## HOMECOMING REFLECTIONS

| By Alexa Letourneau '20 |

Saturday, my day was swallowed by more flute playing, but this time, it was on the quad and in the stadium as a member of Titan Band. I added clown face paint overtop the drag makeup that had stubbornly cling to my face despite two showers and jammed with my friends on some classic pep band charts, only stopping to dash to choir rehearsal for the following morning's performance at the chapel. And immediately after singing with Collegiate Choir on Sunday morning, cheeks still stained with the green polka dots from my clown makeup, I headed to the last event of homecoming: the Pride brunch. Consistently one of my favorite events, and one of the only annual occurrences I have participated in over all four of my years here, the Pride brunch proved once again to be a soul-nourishing experience. Getting the chance to interact with students and alumni who are members of the LGBTQIA community or vehement allies is consistently inspira-

tional. For me, this brunch symbolizes queer involvement on campus and throughout the world after graduation, and is proof that the future of our Pride community will persist in good hands.

All in all, I wore a lot of hats over the few short days of homecoming, and even though I barely had time to think, I felt so many emotions. Despite the definite sense of melancholy, stemming from this being my final homecoming as an IWU student, I was overwhelmingly fulfilled and encouraged, both in my own identity and in knowing that even after graduation, IWU will always be a home to me.



## POEMS, ROSES, AND SCARS

### *Homecoming Chapel Remarks*

| By Isaac R. Simmons '20 |

Good morning everyone. Whether you've heard it a thousand times this weekend or if this is the first time you've heard it, let me welcome each and every one of you home. Welcome to Evelyn Chapel, a place for you: no matter your background, identity, orientation, alumni status, or age. Evelyn chapel is a place for your full authentic and unapologetic self. It is a place that you may always return to.

Over my years here, this chapel has been a place that I have learned to call my home. It is where I have grown deeper in my understanding of self, of society, and of the world. It is a place where my faith has been sharpened, where my intellect has been challenged, and where my heart has been made full.

My name is Isaac Simmons. I am a senior Religious Studies and Business Management double major here at IWU. I have also just begun the candidacy process of ordination within the United Methodist Church. And every breath that I breathe within the church is an act of civil disobedience. You see, I am seeking ordination within a denomination which has doctrine that says I am not worthy of marriage nor ministry. I am an out, loud and proud gay man. Illinois Wesleyan has given me the tools necessary to traverse this system which is acting against me.

And that is why I stand before you today. You see Elyse has asked me to speak to you all not just

because I love and adore this space. She has asked me to share a bit of my story. My story of how this space, this campus, and all of the wonderfully unique people in our Wesleyan Family, have shaped my call to ordained ministry.

For anyone who knows me, you know that I tend to jump at any opportunity that I am given to talk about myself. I mean my story. One of the chief lessons that I have learned throughout my undergraduate

education, is that we are all walking libraries. We are filled to the brim with stories we are yearning to share. We have popular comedic novels that are checked out often, the ironic rom-coms that are traded between friends, and then there are the hidden gems:

These are the poems that are hand written, scrawled across the shelves of within our stacks: the poems that are rarely seen and even more rarely heard. These poems are the moments in our life that have changed the very structure of our being.

They are our subconscious' reflection. They are the autobiographical portraits of our lives that we shove out of sight. When we are called on to share these poems, we are filled with anxiety, dread, and angst.

But in the beats after they are shared: when they are truly heard and fully celebrated: that anxiety turns into joy, that dread turns to relief, and that



## POEMS, ROSES, AND SCARS

### *Homecoming Chapel Remarks*

| By Isaac R. Simmons '20 |

angst turns into love.

Love for self and love for others.

When I first came to Wesleyan, I cannot even begin to tell you the pages and pages of life stories that I had squirreled away. I cannot tell you the amount of pain and sorrow that I had pressed into the pages of heavy books as if they were roses at the end of spring.

This process of pressing flat and hiding away my pain, is a process that was taught to me by the systems that we all live in. It is a process that each and every one of us has done at least once in our lives.

Illinois Wesleyan has allowed me the space to reclaim that pressed pain. It has allowed me the space to turn those wounds into scars, scars that I can speak life into. Scars that can become tails to be shared and morals to be learned.

Through my time at Wesleyan, I have learned the divine beauty of all moments in life. My time has taught me to honor all of my emotions, including negative ones, while still calling for an end to the systems that create them.

For we all desire a rose, knowing its piercing thorns, but ever more it's encaptivating beauty.

Our lives are filled with roses: stems, petals, thorns and all. The poems that we hide away may contain piercing thorns which have caused pain

in our past. But that is not what defines us.

I am called to ministry. I am called to the reconciliation of the scars of my past. I am called to working within systems that I do not fully agree with. I am called to work within a church that I absolutely love.

Illinois Wesleyan has given me the tools to pull out my rose, garnering strength in its beauty, heading the pain of its thorns, and upholding my dream for a garden in which all of our roses may be honored and celebrated.

For we all desire a rose, knowing its piercing thorns, but ever more, its encaptivating beauty.

Thank you for allowing me to share a bit of my story and wisdom with you all today.

May you find the time, energy, and ability to open your heavy books, pull out your pressed roses, and may you always breathe life into your poems.

Thank you.



**Above :** Isaac Simmons '20 speaking in Evelyn Chapel

## REMARKS FROM THE PAC BRUNCH

| By Darcy Greder |

Sadly, I lack the eloquence to adequately describe how wonderful it is to see everyone this morning, and how deeply I appreciate the establishment of this scholarship in my name. It is an honor and a gift I will treasure always—and to know that because of the generosity of so many instrumental in making this a reality—students will be supported as they pursue academic and personal dreams here at Illinois Wesleyan...is simply amazing to me. I am humbled by your kindness toward me—and I appreciate beyond words that you think well of my time at IWU, especially younger alums and students who may only remember me as the Dean of Men during the last third of my career as I handled conduct and Title IX issues on campus. But throughout my career, whether in housing or in the dean of students' office, my joy was in working with students, and to providing support and kindness along the way. I come from a catholic tradition and for me, this work was vocation, in its holiest of terms, and it was always an honor for me to serve this place and these people. These people, our people, have a special place in my heart.

At a time when students, faculty and staff felt varying degrees of isolation and disconnection from the whole of the Wesleyan community—as well as other threats to emotional and physical safety, knowing our own—friends, allies, advocates, family, and friends of family—was essential. Over my 42 years here, I certainly saw this community ex-

pand, the response of the administration improve and the contributions that you make, every day, to the whole of the community recognized. I hope that my friendship, advocacy and support helped during difficult days, and that you knew I celebrated you always. My work was my deep joy, and I am so grateful to you all for giving me the opportunity to do well and to do good, and to forgive me when my efforts fell short.

But this morning, my focus is not on my efforts, but on all of you—students and alumni—who found your way here, imperfect as we are...and as importantly, to each other. Your spirit, love, tenacity, savvy, sass and resilience has changed Illinois Wesleyan for the better, and for good. I will admit that often, all too often in my opinion, students have provided a necessary mirror and megaphone to illuminate needs and opportunities for Wesleyan to become more fully welcoming, sup-



**Above :** Jim Richter '93 and Darcy Greder celebrating at the Pride Alumni Community Brunch



## REMARKS FROM THE PAC BRUNCH

| By Darcy Greder |

portive and celebratory...not only of our LGBT-Q+ community, but for all. By your presence, and your work for social justice, you make this place more accessible and supportive for the next class, and the next class and the next. You have forged bonds that even the hardest days and nights cannot break. You are community. You are family. You are Titans in the truest sense, and I am so honored to be in your midst. We stand on the shoulders of giants—some who are in this room, others who are with us in spirit, and some for whom their struggle when here, makes it difficult to reengage...but if not for them, perhaps not you...or I. These gatherings and other outreach by the Pride Alumni Council brings more and more back to campus, strengthening and broadening our circle. Their love and loyalty to Wesleyan is deep, and their love and support for you is unwavering. Their efforts make possible scholarships to encourage and sustain student success, and I am so grateful and deeply honored by your generosity, and recognition today.

I cannot imagine my life without Illinois Wesleyan—every day I had the precious opportunity to work that was real, within a community that I love. I would be remiss not to thank Jim Richter who has been instrumental in creating this opportunity for students as well as countless others whose generosity is making this all a reality. Thanks, too, to Adriane Powell, the Cagney to my Lacey, who has provided her professional guidance to this effort, and more laughs and support than I can detail (or should detail) today. I'd also like to thank Dean Karla Carney-Hall for her wisdom and the opportunity to work with one of great student affairs practitioners, recognized on the national scene for her expertise. Students, and Illinois Wesleyan, are in good hands with these talented stewards. That a scholarship is established in my name to support student success is an honor beyond that which I could ever imagine. I am deeply touched, and so very grateful to you all.



## REMEMBERING A MEMBER OF THE PRIDE COMMUNITY

Earlier this week the Pride Alumni Community lost a friend. On December 10, Jason Dennis, class of 1999, was struck by another vehicle while commuting home. He passed away peacefully on December 18 in the company of family and friends.

Jason was a proud IWU titan, accomplished and well regarded in his personal and professional life, just as he was during his undergraduate years. His warm smile, gentle nature and strong sense of self made it easy to be in his company.

In October, Jason was back on campus during Homecoming to celebrate his 20 year reunion. We talked about the satisfaction and rewards that he still enjoyed after nearly two decades of working in education.

He also introduced me to the man he intended to marry, and their dog Pumpkin, the most beautiful goldendoodle I have ever laid eyes on. It was so

very clear that he was content, excited for the future, and enjoying the love and happiness and peace that came with living his best life. In retrospect, our conversation was a balm to my sadness, sharing with me as he did the people and things that brought him joy.

Although I am sorry to share such tragic news, it is a comfort to remember the life well-lived of another human being. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family, partner, and friends during this difficult time.



- Jim Richter '93  
PAC Co-Chair

### Points of Pride

- ◆ The Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) is planning a SafeZone training for the Campus Safety department.
- ◆ The Phoenix Drag Show was a success and the Spring Show is being planned for February 8, 2020.
- ◆ Pride Alliance and the Multifaith Ambassadors collaborated on SafeZone training and a discussion of queerness in communities of faith.
- ◆ Pride Alliance collaborated with various cultural RSOs on activities for the Trans Day of Remembrance (November 20).

*Provided by Hannah Mesouani, Interim Director, Office of Diversity and Inclusion and IWU Pride Alliance Advisor*

## IWU PRIDE ALLIANCE STUDENT UPDATE

| By Aja Grant '22 - Treasurer of IWU Pride Alliance |

*There have been several events Pride has held. Below are notable events:*

### **Rocky Horror Picture Show**

On October 31, Pride showed Rocky Picture Horror Show. This movie was shown because it was a notable moment in queer history. This was a fun movie night full of treats and laughter. This was my first time seeing the film and it was an experience. This show was hilarious, however there were several moments where my eyebrows were raised.

### **Pride Prom**

On November 1, the Rainbow Floor held their first Pride Prom. This event was open to anyone and was used as a night to let IWU's pride community shine. Everyone had a blast during the dance and had the time of their lives. One exciting moment that happened during the night was our Community Alumni Outreach Rep CJ teaching everyone how to swing dance. Shout out to Jasper Noecker and Anna Schultz-Breef for organizing this event.

### **Intersex Awareness**

On November 17, Pride held a discussion about the "I" in the LGBTQIA community: Intersex. In this meeting we discussed what being intersex means, stories of intersex individuals, and allyship for intersex individuals. I found this to be a good discussion because intersex people are barely talked about and it shed some light on the misconceptions that people may have and what we can be done to fight those misconceptions and stigma.

### **Queer Musings**

On November 14, Pride held their Queer Musing night. In this meeting, members brought in pieces by queer creators that they admired and to show to the rest of the community. In addition, there was a gallery full of various art forms (paintings, comics, poetry, etc) that members were able to browse that were also by queer creators, some of which are on our campus. This event was one of my favorites! There are so many creative individuals that we don't normally get to see from the community. I learned so much from this night and loved what everyone brought. Some of my favorite things included the song "Keep Up Wimmi" by Zilo presented by our Publicity Manager, Monisha and a comic "HSTHETE" by Melanie Gillman.

## OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE AN IMPACT

***Do you enjoy volunteering and have a strong passion for your alma mater?***

If so, we invite you to become a part of the Titan Alumni Ambassadors Program! The Titan Alumni Ambassadors Program is an exciting opportunity for a small and dedicated group of passionate alumni to serve as Illinois Wesleyan University's official alumni representatives both near and far from IWU.

Our Titan Alumni Ambassadors connect with prospective students and share their experiences as former students at Illinois Wesleyan. Their role as mentors during this critical time in students' decision-making process can be truly transformative!

If you are interested, submit this [form](#).

### Save the Date!

**IWU Pride Alliance Annual Drag Show**

Saturday, February 8  
Illinois Wesleyan University, Hansen Student Center

**IWU Women's Summit: Sharing Truths**

*Sponsored by the Council for IWU Women*

February 21 - 22  
Illinois Wesleyan University

**Spring Pride Connection**

Thursday, March 26th | 8 pm  
Illinois Wesleyan University, Turfler Room