

UW Oshkosh making strides with LGBTQ community on campus and beyond

by Kristin Stockheimer - Thursday, February 27, 2014

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/32109/uw-oshkosh-making-strides-lgbtq-community-campus-beyond/>

Even with recent positive strides, the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is working hard to improve its Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer (LGBTQ) profile on campus.

In 2013, UW Oshkosh earned four out of five stars on the LGBT-Friendly Campus Climate Index, which is an ongoing measurement to improve campus LGBT policies, programs and practices, put out by [Campus Pride](#). Campus Pride is a national nonprofit organization for student leaders and campus groups who are working to create safer, more LGBT-friendly learning environments for colleges and universities.

A four-star rating acknowledges UW Oshkosh's commitment to the LGBT population and its allies. The Campus Pride Index Task Force has worked closely with faculty, staff, students and alumni to create campus initiatives and policies that have helped UW Oshkosh raise its three-star ranking in 2009 to its current ranking.

Liz Cannon, LGBTQ Resource Center director and senior lecturer, works closely with faculty, staff and students across campus to encourage inclusivity of all populations. Recently, a new LGBTQ Studies Certificate, which is housed in the Women's and Gender Studies program, was approved.

Additionally, the UW Oshkosh Alumni Board recently approved a new LGBTQ+ Alumni Chapter. The goal of the chapter is to "serve the needs of LGBTQ+ alumni and future alumni through personal and professional development, continuing education and facilitating support, nurturing and mentoring young alumni, faculty, staff and students to promote the advancement of the LGBTQ Resource Center at UW Oshkosh."

"It is crucial to have a LGBTQ Resource Center for LGBTQ+ students to feel more comfortable, even with the existing resistance. We need it to prepare other students for life after college in order to have them work effectively with different diverse categories," said Cannon, who after serving as the long-time interim director of the LGBTQ Resource Center formally accepted the position last August.

With a mission of providing high-quality support services and a safe, supportive and welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ students, faculty, staff and their allies, the LGBTQ Resource Center is a vital part of the UW Oshkosh campus.

"The Center gives individuals a sense of community and a broad education to the other parts of the community. It provides education, co-sponsorships and opens up a door to discussions to make it a more equal place," said Nat Unger, STEP intern and president of Rainbow Alliance for H.O.P.E (Helping Others Perceive Equality),

Unger said she loves working in the LGBTQ Resource Center because of the feeling of making a

difference and being a part of something bigger on campus. Senior student Stephanie Rodriguez feels the same way; she worked hard to earn the 2014 Voice & Action leadership award, which is given by Campus Pride, because of her involvement with LGBTQ+ students and Greek life.

Individuals who earned the recognition are acknowledged as those who are creating positive change on their campus when it comes to social justice, activism and leadership.

“I think it just shows that we’re doing awesome things and we’re encouraging our students to stand up for what they believe in,” said Rodriguez, of Riverside, Calif., who, [last year, became one of 15 university and college students from around the nation to serve on the newly-created Campus Pride advisory board](#). “I feel as though a lot of students don’t realize that they’re making a big change, but they are.”

UW Oshkosh Professor Amney Harper also encourages positive change on campus. She immerses herself in her involvement with LGBTQ initiatives and programming. She is one of the senior trainers for S.A.F.E training (Students, Staff, and Faculty for Equality), co-facilitator for the LGBTQ Support Group, serves on the Campus Pride Index Taskforce, LGBTQ Council and the LGBTQ Resource Center Advisory Board.

“There are still major social issues and oppressions facing LGBTQ individuals. The rates of bullying towards LGBTQ youth, and the many LGBTQ suicides, rates of homelessness and other issues and concerns faced by queer youth today make it imperative that something be done,” Harper said.

Already, the LGBTQ Resource Center's support from the alumni and the recent LGBTQ+ Alumni Chapter is making a difference. The chapter was put into action last fall and had ample support from Thomas Wolf '10 and Rich Marshall '95 and '11 MSE.

“The purpose of this group is to connect student alumni (who identify as) LGBTQ+ after graduation and have them network with groups post graduation. I see a great need in that,” said Marshall, who now works as a career adviser with UW Oshkosh Career Services.

Campus programming and the alumni chapter, along with the approval for the LGBTQ certificate, has made Cannon proud. She said her hope is to eventually see UW Oshkosh earn the highest ranking—five stars—from the Campus Pride organization.

“The purpose of this tool is to help transfer and high school students to determine what school to go to and decide if it is LGBTQ friendly and a welcoming climate,” Cannon said.

Cannon’s next goal, she said, is to increase the amount of space LGBTQ students have to hang out, have informational meetings and have more of the activities in the same building. She also working with Residential Life to create a rainbow floor within the residence halls specifically for students who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies.

“Other centers have space and it is exciting to see ours expanding. We desperately need the space. We love visitors and want everyone to attend our programs. We want to have it develop its own identity,” Unger said.

Learn more:

- [LGBTQ Resource Center](#)
- [UW Oshkosh Alumni LGBTQA+](#)