

## **Queer History on Campus**

The University of Alberta has a rich, vibrant, and storied history of nurturing and supporting sexual-minority and allied students, faculty, and staff, as well as members of the greater Edmonton community. In 1975, UofA students created GATE (Gay Alliance towards Equality). GATE was one of the first gay-affirming campus organizations in Canada. Its advocacy focused on addressing the needs of the sexual-minority campus community. GATE later developed into Edmonton's first gay-and-lesbian community centre, which also ranks as one of the oldest gay-and-lesbian advocacy and support centers in Canada. Today, abetted by the university's commitment to human rights and equity, several grassroots campus organizations exist, in the spirit of GATE, to address the unique health, safety, social, educational, and research needs of sexual-minority persons at the University of Alberta. In recent years, these grassroots organizations have existed: Agape, Inside/OUT, OUTreach, and SIDERITE.

### **Agape: A Faculty of Education Group Focused on Sex, Sexual, and Gender Differences in Education and Culture (2000-2008; replaced by iSMSS)**

Dr. André P. Grace founded Agape in 2000 with the support of a group of faculty and graduate students in the Faculty of Education. Over eight years, Agape offered a university-wide educational program and ran a resource centre. This focus group was primarily designed to help undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff as well as practicing teachers to address personal and professional issues in relation to sex, sexual, and gender differences in education and culture. It also provided educational outreach via meeting requests from various campus groups. One of Agape's main projects was the delivery of a Social Justice Video Series, which involved faculty-facilitated monthly video presentations on a key aspect of Canadian culture and youth.

Agape provided opportunities for pre-service (undergraduate education students) and practicing teachers, graduate students, and faculty to develop an enriched understanding of their legal, ethical, and professional responsibilities in regard to sexual-minority students, teachers, and their families. Every year members of Agape presented workshops to students registered in the elementary and secondary sections of the compulsory undergraduate education course EDPS 310, *Managing the Learning Environment*.

Each year Agape hosted a key event or a conference to create a space for university and community interest groups to build awareness, develop educational and support networks, and create resources to address sex, sexual, and gender differences within the province of Alberta and beyond. It also developed and delivered the *Out Is In Project*, which focused on building a university-community network in Edmonton to empower sexual-minority youth through socialization and informal educational initiatives.

### **Inside/OUT: A University-Community Group for Faculty, Graduate Students, and Staff at the University of Alberta (2003-2008; now part of iSMSS)**

Kristopher Wells, a Killam Fellow and SSHRC Canada Scholar in the Department of Educational Policy Studies, and Dr. Marjorie Wonham, a Killam Fellow and postdoctoral

researcher in the Centre for Mathematical Biology, founded Inside/OUT in 2003. Inside/OUT has functioned to provide a safe and confidential space on the University campus for sexual and gender minority faculty, postdoctoral students, graduate students, support staff, and allies to network, learn, and socialize in a supportive and welcoming environment. The 2004-05 Inside/OUT Speakers' Series was a groundbreaking event in the history of the University of Alberta. The Speakers' Series represented the first coordinated series—monthly throughout the academic year—of sexual and gender minority related research and teaching seminars to be held on the University campus. Over time, Inside/OUT has built a membership exceeding 150, and it has established a moderated listserv, now incorporated into the iSMSS listserv, to develop and support sexual and gender minority related university research and community events. The Inside/OUT Speakers' Series continues as a regular part of iSMSS supports and services.

### **OUTreach: A Social Support Group for Sexual-Minority Undergraduate Students at the University of Alberta**

OUTreach is currently the longest serving sexual and gender minority organization on campus. It is designed to meet the needs of undergraduate students. In addition to weekly meetings during the academic year, OUTreach also holds an annual campus awareness week of events, and frequently invites speakers from the greater Edmonton community to present to its membership. Due to the fluid nature of the undergraduate student population, it is a testament to the continuing value of OUTreach that it has had a visible and active presence on the University campus for more than 20 years.

### **SIDERITE: Lister Hall's Student Residence Organization for Sexual and Gender Minorities**

SIDERITE was founded in 1998 to raise awareness of the safety and security of UofA students following the murder of University of Wyoming student Matthew Shepard. SIDERITE helps to bring a voice to the unique needs and concerns of sexual and gender minority students living in residence at the University of Alberta. Historically, SIDERITE, with the support of the Students' Union and OUTreach, has organized two major events each year: The Drag Show and the Day of Silence. They also address issues of heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia in residence life that impact the safety and security of sexual and gender minority students who live on campus.

Collectively, these groups have constituted a growing sexual and gender minority campus network. They have emerged with limited (but incrementally increasing) financial support. These groups have thrived, energized by a groundswell of Canadian sexual and gender minority inclusive laws and legislation and sustained by the drive of volunteers committed to helping sexual and gender minority persons find acceptance, accommodation, and respect in the University environment.

The establishment of an Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services (iSMSS) is designed to enhance and continue the work of these grassroots organizations. The collective focus on inclusion and participation of sexual and gender minority students aligns neatly with the vision in *Dare to Discover*: “to inspire the human spirit through

outstanding achievements in learning, discovery, and citizenship in a creative community.” In living out this vision, the Institute emulates the principles articulated in *Dare to Discover*, emphasizing core values including “excellence in teaching that promotes learning,” “outstanding research and creative activity that fuel discovery and advance knowledge,” “the centrality of our students and our responsibility to provide an intellectually superior educational environment,” and “a diverse, yet inclusive, dynamic collegial community that welcomes change and seizes opportunity with passion and creativity.” The Institute strives to incorporate the values of *Dare to Discover* as principles that reflect the integrity of the UofA and its constituency. Moreover, through its studies and service functions, iSMSS helps to advance the kind of transformative and Just Society envisioned and guaranteed by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services opened in January 2008. It serves the entire University of Alberta community and the larger community from its home in the Faculty of Education. In carrying out its studies and services functions, iSMSS has replaced Agape and subsumed Inside/OUT within its borders, and it provides a system of supports to undergraduate sexual and gender minority groups (OUTreach and Siderite) as an integral part of UofA’s constituency.