

Background on Commission

Three UT employees met with Chancellor Crabtree in December 2005 to express concern about the campus climate and the need for an official channel for LGBT students, staff, and faculty to work for equitable treatment on campus. Crabtree agreed that it was time to form a commission for LGBT issues that mirrored the long-standing Commissions for Blacks and Women. On Election Day, November 7, 2006, the same day as the contentious Amendment 1 state constitutional amendment barring same-sex marriages passed with 81% of the vote, the Commission was officially given the go-ahead to form.

The Commission's first meeting was held on December 12, 2006. George Hoemann, long-time administrator at UT was elected Chair, and Mehra and Braquet, who both joined the faculty in 2004, were elected Vice Chairs. The Commission had the following standing committees: Executive Committee (leadership and committee chairs), Communications Committee, Equity Committee, and two ad-hoc committees: Research Committee and Membership Committee.

Commission or staff composition

Voting Members

- **Joel Kramer**, Co-Chair, University Housing
- **Phyliss Shey**, Co-Chair, Student Success Administration
- **Wendy Bach**, College of Law
- **Melissa Bartsch**, Counseling Center
- **Penny Beasley**, Undergraduate Business Programs
- **Keith Becklin**, Student Activities
- **Tayler Brock**, Undergraduate Student
- **David Byrd**, Clarence Brown Theatre
- **Ole Carmel Chase-Greenwood**, Undergraduate Student
- **Pam Durban**, Undergraduate Business Programs
- **Leticia Flores**, Psychology
- **Luke Garton**, Arts & Sciences Advising
- **Jessica Hay**, Psychology
- **Allison Heming**, Graduate Student
- **Annazette Houston**, Disability Services
- **Juliet Meggs**, Graduate Student
- **Kelly Mihalik**, UT Police

- **Diana Moyer**, Center for the Study of Social Justice
- **Jenny Moshak**, Athletics
- **Elizabeth Owen**, Enrollment Services
- **Erin Read**, Community Liaison, Alumnus
- **Paige Rupe**, Undergraduate Student
- **Tracy Trentham**, Undergraduate Student

Ex-officio Voting Members

- **Melissa Ashburn**, Chair, Exempt Staff Council (Municipal Technical Advisory Service)
- **Jake Baker**, Student Government Association President
- **Donna Braquet**, Director, OUTreach LGBT&A Center (University Libraries)
- **Charlie Clifton**, Graduate Student Assistant, Commission for LGBT People
- **David Golden**, President, Faculty Senate (Food Science and Technology)
- **Karla McKanders**, Co-Chair, Commission for Blacks (Law)
- **Lilia Neville**, Co-Chair, Commission for Blacks (Creative Communications)
- **Mary Papke**, Chair, Commission for Women (English)
- **Michael Porter**, President, LAMBDA Student Union
- **Martin Walker**, Graduate Student Senate Representative

Ex-officio Nonvoting Members

- **Dan Berryman**, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Human Resources
- The Late **Marva Rudolph**, Associate Vice Chancellor, Office of Equity & Diversity
- **Maxine Thompson Davis**, Dean of Students
- **Pia Wood**, Director, Center for International Education

Immediate Past Chair

- **Keith Kirkland**, Clarence Brown Theatre

Priorities

The commission shall recommend changes in policy or procedure relative to the concerns of of lesbian, gay, Bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual people, make recommendations concerning new and existing academic, professional development, and extracurricular programs, recommend and encourage research to assess the status of LGBTQQIA people at the University of Tennessee and compare their status with that of LGBTQQIA people at other institutions and agencies, advise and consult with all university officials on the needs and status of LGBTQQIA people, and provide information and support to the campus and community on commission and university programs and activities related to LGBTQQIA people.

Progress made and impact on cultivating a welcoming and inclusive campus environment

The Commission has provided support to the OUTreach Center, Sex Week, Safe Zone, Lambda Student Union, and Outstanding Seminar. The Commission began a mentorship program for students, faculty, and staff and an alumni network. The Commission has also participated in tabling at admissions events, Welcome Week, and the OUTreach Center is pointed out in the

undergraduate campus tour. There is a Safe Zone map overlay on the campus map. The Commission is currently working on a letter to be sent to the Chancellor regarding gender neutral bathrooms. We are calling for family bathrooms to be included in all future new buildings and renovations.

Alignment with Vol Vision

The primary mission of UT includes outreach and engagement. Embedded in the three-part vision of UT is value creation through economic, social, and environmental development targeted to an increasingly global and multicultural world. At UT our values include broad diversity, including people of all races, creeds, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientations, gender identities, physical abilities, and socioeconomic groups; a culture that appreciates and respects faculty, staff, and students and that acknowledges their interdependence and the vital role of every member of the Volunteer family; engagement with our local and extended communities, embracing intercultural and global perspectives.

The Commission serves students, faculty, and staff at the University and seeks to improve the status of lesbian, gay, Bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual people at UT. Through the work of the Commission we endeavor to ensure that UT's mission, vision, and values include **everyone** who works and/or studies here.

Challenges

Our biggest challenge this year was the transition of moving the responsibilities and activities of the OUTreach Center off of the commission and under the VC for Diversity. A large part of our previous years commission work revolved around fund raising for the Center, activities, staffing, etc. In addition, the transition to working with the VC for Diversity began just prior to the start of the fall semester, not allowing us much time to re-think our action items for the year. We managed to work through these two challenges somewhat but were also hampered by the lack of interest of most commission members on assisting with committee work. We eventually restructured our meetings to be working meetings to get something accomplished, which worked better than relying on committees that did not meet. We plan to utilize this summer to structure the committees more formally and provide action items in advance so that they can have a clearer understanding of what is expected.

Another challenge was only having our GA time for the meetings since he was engaged at the OUTreach Center. We are looking forward to the new GRA structure that will allow us to have more use of our GRA.

Notable achievements that occurred during the academic year

Our achievements this year have been in the creation of the mentoring program and the alumni network. We have also completed the re-design of our website. We continue to support Outstanding, Lambda, Sex Week and Safe Zone. Our greatest achievement has been the revision in demographic questions that will be asked on the campus faculty/staff survey this year. The Commission is also represented on the Council for Diversity and Interculturalism which allows for some coalition building.

Looking towards the future

We will continue building the alumni network and mentor program, as well as continue support of Outstanding, Sex Week, the OUTreach Center, and Lambda. We anticipate that with more time available from our GRA we will be able to begin building an archive of LGBT related UT history – an LGBT archive. We plan to finalize and present the letter on gender neutral restrooms and follow that project through the process until we secure approval. We also plan to conduct research and continue pushing for partner benefits for the faculty and staff. Currently the responsibilities for Safe Zone resides with Student Activities (for faculty and staff) and Multicultural Student Life (for students). We would like to consider consolidating them and have the Commission manage Safe Zone under the auspices of the VC for Diversity. We would also like to begin the exploration of adding other options to the undergraduate and graduate admission application demographic questions and gender neutral housing options. We want to find ways to connect with GLSEN groups at high schools, and to connect with similar groups at other institutions of higher education in the state of Tennessee.

Conclusion

This past year has been one of transition. We anticipate that with the Commission and OUTreach Center aligned more realistically, this will afford us the opportunity to accomplish much more to ensure that our students, faculty, and staff are treated equally.