

UPCOMING EVENTS

**TRIANGLE RESOURCE FAIR**  
January 28, 4-6pm  
STONE CENTER, HITCHCOCK RM

**FIRST FRIDAYS**  
February 5th, March 4th,  
April 1st, 3-5pm  
LGBTQ CENTER

**LAVENDER GRADUATION**  
May 1st, 4-6pm  
UPENDO

**GAYLA**  
May 1st, 7-10pm  
TBD

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## Are We There Yet?

By Adrienne Gibilisco



PHOTO: STARTBUNE.COM

The White House lights up in rainbow colors in celebration of the Supreme Court's 5-4 ruling in favor of same sex marriage in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.

We've come a long way since the days when LGBTQ rights and issues were shrouded in secrecy and unwarranted shame. In the last few years alone, we've seen a precipitous increase in acceptance and embracing of individuals who are part of the LGBTQ population. For instance, in the courts, we saw numerous legal changes enacted that dealt the deathblow to DOMA (The Defense of Marriage Act). As a result, Same Sex Marriage was legalized on a national level, ushering in Benefits Equity. Non-discrimination policies have also been strengthened through the interpretation of Titles VII and IX.

The impact of these recent rulings has been enormous, at long last providing equal access to health insurance for same sex couples and their families. LGBTQ Center assistant director **Angel Collie** notes of this advance, "The biggest impact is in the immeasurable effects of having your love and lives validated as whole and equal. In terms of employment protection,

the interpretation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act is significant in that it bans employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression." Since LGBTQ+ people experience employment discrimination at very high rates – particularly transwomen of color – this is an especially powerful change for the better.

In part, these developments were fed by greater visibility of LGBTQ people in the media, sports, acting and politics. We also saw a marked increase of transgender characters on television, something previously unheard (or spoken) of: some authentically transgender, like actress **Laverne Cox** in *Orange is the New Black* (and featured on the cover of *Time* magazine); one who very publicly transitioned from male Olympian **Bruce Jenner** to female TV personality **Caitlyn Jenner**; and straight actor **Jeffrey Tambor** portraying family patriarch-turned-matriarch Maura Pfefferman in *Transparent*.

(Continued on page 6)

# Letter from the Director



PHOTO BY DAN SEARS

In many presentations that I've given since the Supreme Court ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges, someone has asked if heterosexism is still an issue since same sex marriage is now legal. It's a question indicative of a belief that with same sex marriage now legal there is no need for education about the LGBTQ+ communities or for activism to address issues faced by these communities. In my opinion, nothing could be further from the truth. Legalization of same sex marriage was a huge step forward to be sure, but so much remains to be addressed within the LGBTQ+ community and within society at large.

In this volume, **Adrienne Gibilisco** has written a piece, entitled "Are We There Yet?" that outlines the many issues still in need of being addressed. She presents statistics on homelessness, suicide, bullying, and employment discrimination that powerfully demonstrate this need. I know these statistics but what spurs me to action most are the stories of people with whom I work daily. These statistics also fail to demonstrate the ways in which people with multiple marginalized identities (e.g., transwomen of color, queer people with disabilities) are impacted by multiple systems of oppression not only in society at large but also within the communities of which they are a part (e.g., the LGBTQ+ community).

We all have a role to play in the undoing of systems of oppression even as we may simultaneously hold identities that carry both the benefits of privilege and the undue weight of marginalization. With respect to the privileged identities held, the solution is not to feel silently guilty for that privilege but rather to utilize that privilege in service to equality. We can take small but significant concrete actions to disrupt racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism and other systems of oppression and marginalization. For example we can:

- Challenge the roles and expectations of the gender binary
- Make room for others by asking and using the correct pronouns
- Seek racial reconciliation by centering the experiences of people of color
- Utilize the principles of universal design in the creation of space and programs
- Honor the wisdom of many beliefs and traditions
- Speak out against hate, injustice and exclusion in all of its forms.

Consistently taking these kinds of actions can help to create a world that honors the dignity and worth of each and every individual.

On a separate note, it is with best wishes but also sadness that I announce that Adrienne Gibilisco is leaving the LGBTQ Center at the end of November to take the position of Communications Specialist with the Office of Diversity and Multicultural Education. We wish Adrienne all the best in her new position and we will miss her greatly. *[Aw shucks...I'll miss all of you, too! - Ed.]*

**Terri Phoenix**

# Spring Events in Review

By Adrienne Gibilisco



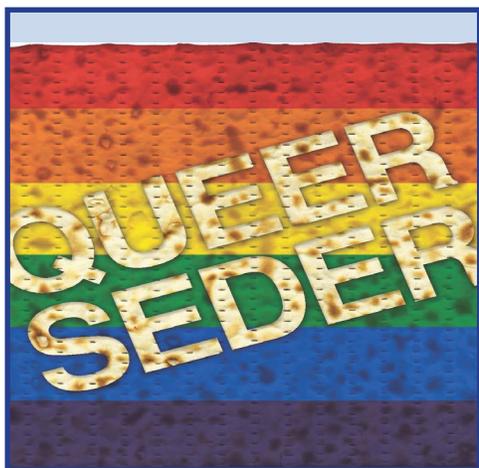
PHOTO: GINNY LEWIS

Representatives from Reth?nk gather at the Triangle Resource Fair, in the Great Hall. This was the largest Triangle Resource Fair held thus far. From left: Morgan McLaughlin, Kagan Griffin, Rowan Hunt, Ivana Chan.

Spring 2015 semester was jam-packed with programming and events:

## TRIANGLE RESOURCE FAIR (1/30)

Spring 2015 was a fast-moving semester, with a whirlwind of activities filling our calendars. First up was Ally Week at the end of January, which culminated in the [Triangle Resource Fair](#). This year's TRF was our biggest and most successful ever - 42 participants set up their tables inside the Student Union's Great Hall to provide resources and networking opportunities to visitors. As music played over the vast hall's speakers, folks mingled, laughed and noshed on the tasty spread of Carolina Catering treats. "This is wild!" exclaimed one attendee. "I've learned so much about what's available to me as a community member...and had so much fun!"



Hillel partnered with the LGBTQ Center to hold a decidedly original Queer Seder.

Punctuating the din every 15 minutes were LGBTQ Center director **Terri Phoenix's** happy announcements of the winners of prizes and gift certificates so generously provided by numerous area restaurants, shops and organizations (this support from our neighbor businesses was also reflected during the entirety of Ally Week, when Allies enjoyed discounts and special offers at a variety of venues). Community partners and students, alike, gleefully claimed their prizes and shared in the delightfully upbeat atmosphere.

## QUEER SEDER (4/9)

By early March, we held our [Queer Seder](#) at Hillel, with a decidedly LGBTQ spin on the traditional reading of the haggadah. A full house of celebrants of all denominations gathered at Hillel's dining room for the Seder and shared in the reading. We feasted on the delicious bounty prepared by Snap Pea Catering's **Jacob Boehm** as we learned about Jewish history and its intersectionality with LGBTQ issues. Many thanks to Hillel student leaders **Averyl**

**Edwards** and collaborators **Jayna Fishman** and **Meredith Blumberg** for their modern interpretation of the Haggadah...and to the phenomenal a capella vocal group **Sababa** for their entertaining performance of Jewish songs.

### GRADUATE SPEAKERS SERIES

Creating a big buzz with the graduate students on campus was the **Graduate Speaker Series**, helmed by graduate assistant, **Kristina Wharton**. There were three graduate students who presented this year: English & Comparative Literature student **Jen Stockwell**, who spoke on “Female Kinships: Reimagining the Potential of Lesbian-Feminism” from a theological and literary perspective; SILS student (and LGBTQ Center Resource Library organizer) **Kai Ewing**, who presented “Visibility in the Stacks: Academic Libraries and LGBTIQ Outreach;” and, **Summer Pennell** and **Brian Fede**, who presented “Math for a Cause: Queering Middle School Math.”



PHOTO: GINNY LEWIS

It was hard to keep an, ahem, straight face while playing LGBTQ Jeopardy! (Left to right: Angel Collie, Kristina Wharton and Adrienne Gibilisco)

Our **Final Fridays** highlight of the spring semester was held at the Union instead of the LGBTQ Center, where we held a raucous version of LGBTQ Jeopardy! Event creator **Adrienne Gibilisco** played hostess “Alexis Trainwreck,” assisted by **Angel Collie** (aka “Vinnie White”) and **Wharton** for the full house of participants.



Players formed teams to compete for prizes, remembering to answer in question format prompts that ranged from the factual...

Clue: This is the first Fortune 500 Company to have an openly gay CEO.

Question: What is Apple [Tim Cook, CEO]  
to the serious:

• • •

Clue: These two African countries signed anti-gay laws that punish same sex activity with prison or life in jail.

Question: What are Uganda and Nigeria?

to the absurd:

•••

Clue: Heinz makes a microwaveable version of this sponge pudding, popular in Britain.  
Question: What is spotted dick? (from the category “Dicks, Dykes and Fags”)

The laughs were long and loud, with requests for another game show-themed Final Friday for next year.



PHOTO: GINNY LEWIS

Graduates and staff gather under the 2015 balloons post-Lav Grad

### LAVENDER GRADUATION/GAYLA (5/3)

Wrapping up our year, as always, was [Lavender Graduation](#). There wasn't enough Kleenex® in the room to wipe our tears of joy as we proudly watched proudly our undergraduate and graduate students walk the aisle to receive their lavender roses, rainbow tassels, a commemorative DVD and the touching book, *Goodnight Carolina*.

LGBTQ Center Director **Terri Phoenix** introduced **Chancellor Carol L. Folt**, who opened by noting that “So many things I do because I have to do them, but this is one of the things that I want to do.” Folt then quoted activist author Terry Tempest Williams and noted, “Community is a shared history, it’s a shared experience, and it’s not always in agreement, but it’s a commitment to going the duration. Thank you for going the duration.”

Keynote speaker/alumnus (and creator of the Center’s initial Lavender Graduation a decade ago) **Alex Ferrando** had the audience in stitches with his upbeat and engaging delivery. Sexuality Studies Director **Richard Cante** presented the Graduate Research Award to PhD student **Shoshana Goldberg**, and the LGBTQ Center’s **Adrienne Gibilisco** gave Advocacy Awards to graduate student **Kristina Wharton** and undergraduate, **Sarah Katherine-Bryant**.



PHOTO: GINNY LEWIS

Keynote speaker Alex Ferrando had the rapt audience in stitches with his speech.

Although we wished all of our 2015 graduates a journey of joy, success and illumination, the celebration wasn't over just yet: This year, we started a new post-Lav Grad tradition - the [Gayla](#), a sort of “non-Prom” for new graduates to let loose for some dancing, laughter, fun and games amongst themselves. The brainchild of Wharton, the Center’s inaugural Gayla was held at The Library on Franklin Street to rousing success. “If this is any indication of how much fun one of our events can be,” said the Center’s Assistant Director, **Angel Collie**, “the Gayla is definitely a ‘keeper!’”

## Are We There Yet? (Con't.d)

This seemingly sudden shift in visibility of LGBTQ public personalities from a variety of fields (sports, performance, politics, the arts, etc.) proudly emerging from the closet has made it easier for others to come out. “The increased visibility at the societal level has a lot to do with the fact that youth are coming out as LGBTQ+ at an earlier age now than in the 1990s or early 2000s,” notes LGBTQ Center director, **Dr. Terri Phoenix**. “There are visible communities at least online that people can connect with or find resources, so they don’t feel like ‘the only one’ and they know there is an LGBTQ+ community.”

Ultimately, this increased visibility and acceptance has contributed to more constituent support for positive legal and civil change. We see this reflected on campuses nationwide, where the clamor for Gender Non-Specific Bathrooms and Gender Non-Specific housing has become part of the dialogue for prospective students. Increasingly, we see personal pronouns politely being asked – and properly used – not just on campuses, but everywhere from cocktail parties to places of business to surveys. We also see a definitive increase of GSAs forming at the middle and high school level, as well as a greater demand for Safe Zone training in schools and businesses.

With all these affirmative changes, what was once uncommon has become the usual. Based on this, one would think that for LGBTQ folks and their allies, the fight for respect and equality is just about over.

**E**xcept, it’s not.

For all the progress outlined above, there are still countless issues that need to be addressed. Yes, we have benefits equity, but people are still being threatened in their homes, their dorms, their workplaces, and on the streets.



Celebrity visibility in the media has brought awareness to LGBTQ+ issues.

Employment and housing discrimination still exists, as do health care discrimination against transgender, non-binary and intersex individuals.

Locally, one merely needs to look up the road at Duke University, where recent death threats were made toward the LGBTQ community when someone wrote the words “Death to all f\*\*\*s” across the dorm of a first-year student. A rally there to support the student led to the “Not Here, Not There, Not Anywhere” rally a week later on UNC’s campus to express the need for university-wide protections for LGBTQ students here, as well.

Nationally, the strong conservative backlash after the Supreme Court decision was evident in religious exemptions and bathroom laws emerging, including the defeat of HERO (City of Houston’s Equal Rights Ordinance).

“The progress that has been made is not immune to challenge,” notes Phoenix, who was directly impacted by the legal recognition of marriage because it meant that T would now have a legal

relationship with T's daughter. "I always worried before that if something happened to [my wife] **Kendra**, I would not be able to retain custody of [my daughter] **Duncan** because there was no legal relationship. That created inordinate amounts of stress."

As a result, Phoenix is hyper aware of pushback to this legislation. "The passing or attempts to pass 'Religious Freedom' Laws (like the one in Indiana or the NC Religious Freedom Restoration Act, HB348/SB550) is very concerning because those laws provide the opportunity for discrimination of LGBTQ+ people in public accommodations, housing, and employment," Phoenix says.

Collie, too, sees a huge disparity, listing an enormity of people whose interests are not addressed, even when progress has otherwise been made. "The economically disadvantaged; those who are unable to access health care often due to stipulations against gender confirming procedures from insurance companies or simply because they do not desire it; those who are fired, denied housing, detained, and abused...they are the often unheard, under-represented and forgotten voices."

Collie further notes that celebrity is often a misrepresentation of an entirety of a group's existence. "While Caitlyn Jenner has become a household name, few of us know that it has been deadliest year on record for transwomen, most of whom are women of color in the U.S. One was in our own backyard – **Elisha Walker**, a 20-year-old from Smithfield, NC, who was beaten to death. [Police found her remains buried behind a house after having found her car burned and abandoned]."

**Elisha Walker**

Remembering our fallen

Fighting for our lives

**About the Transgender Day of Remembrance**

The Transgender Day of Remembrance was set aside to memorialize those who were killed due to anti-transgender hatred. The event held in November to honor Rita Hester, whose murder on November 28th, 1998 kicked off the "Remembering Our Dead" web project and a San Francisco candlelight vigil in 1999. Rita Hester's murder— like most anti-transgender murder cases— has yet to be solved.

Although not every person represented during the Day of Remembrance self-identified as transgender each was a victim of violence based on bias against transgender people.

My name is Elisha and I am from Smithfield, North Carolina. I was beaten to death on August 13<sup>th</sup>. I was only 20 years old.

Elisha Walker, was a local victim to Transgender violence who was honored during the Transgender Day of Remembrance.

Even though more people are coming out an earlier age, they also desire engagement with a community in their daily life that often isn't available. "They are still living in systems that are very heteronormative and frequently unsupportive," Phoenix points out. "Families are often rejecting, schools are still places where an enormous amount of bullying and harassment occur, and far too many faith-based organizations still condemn LGBTQ+ people. These things result in youth feeling very isolated even though they know there are LGBTQ+ communities in the larger society."

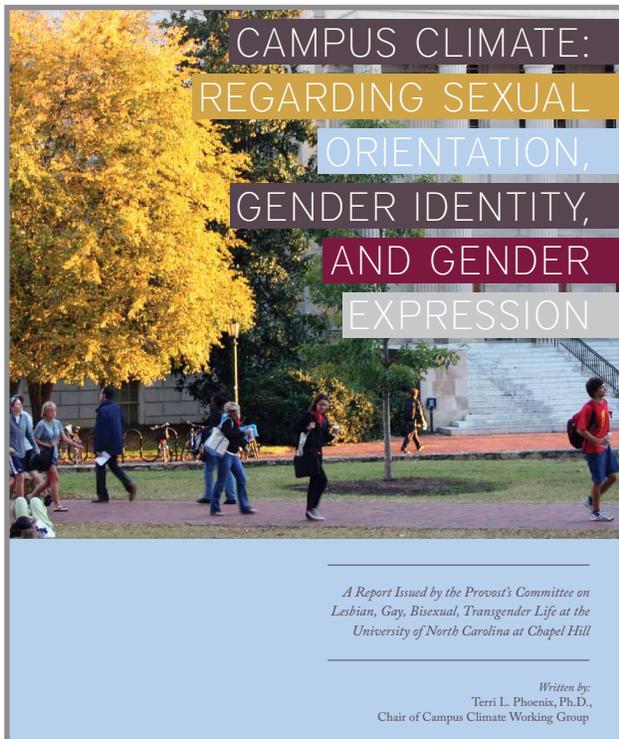
Current progress also doesn't change the shocking statistics regarding issues of health, safety, economic security and social stability:

- Over 20 percent of all LGBTQ youth are homeless and 40 percent of homeless youth are LGBTQ.
- 58 percent of queer homeless youth have been sexually assaulted.
- 64 percent of transgender people make less than \$25,000 per year.
- 41 percent of transgender people and 62 percent of queer homeless youth have attempted suicide.
- As of July 2015, 10 percent of transgender women had been murdered in the United States.

In the 2013 GLSEN School Climate Survey, 59.3% of LGBT students reported being sexually harassed at school and about 11% of trans-identified youth reported experiencing sexual assault by other students in K-12 schools. According to the 2011 National Transgender Discrimination Survey, about 3% of trans-identified youth reported experiencing sexual assault by teachers and staff in K-12 schools.

On a University level, recent statistics of sexual assault and misconduct against those identifying as transgender, genderqueer or questioning are staggering. According to the 2014 AAU Campus Climate Survey, "Acts involving penetration by force or incapacitation are considered the most serious types of sexual assault and misconduct and those identifying as Transgender, genderqueer or questioning had the highest rates (12.4% for undergraduates, 8.3% for graduate/professional students)."

Further exacerbating these statistics was that while most of the 150,072 students who participated in that survey felt that if they reported an incident, it was extremely likely that the university would conduct a fair investigation, the percentage was lower for those groups most likely to report victimization



The Campus Climate Survey of 2011 revealed that those who experienced harassment the most were most fearful of reporting it to the police or other authorities for fear of intimidation.

(such as females and those identifying as transgender, genderqueer or questioning). Those groups also felt that officials would not take the report seriously, protect the safety of the student, nor take action against the offender.

In fact, during the few weeks after the federal decisions for marriage equality and benefits equity came down, there were more reports of harassment at UNC-CH than there were in the entire year prior. The LGBTQ Center at UNC-CH swiftly responded, taking each report seriously and working with the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office to investigate the claims.

Phoenix is exceedingly familiar with protocol for dealing with reports of harassment, having been heavily involved in creating and/or enforcing policies that ensure each student, staff, and faculty member at UNC-CH is provided with equal safety, access to academic excellence and resources, no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. In the decade that Phoenix has been at UNC, T has seen a number of policy changes that have been beneficial, such as the addition in the UNC Building Standards that all new buildings or those with major renovations include the creation of at least one gender non-specific bathroom; the addition of gender identity and gender expression to the university's non-discrimination statement; and, the policy on inclusive language.

There have been other actions, such as the continued funding of the Provost's Committee on LGBTQ Life; ongoing funding of the LGBTQ Center; the continuation of the Sexuality Studies program; the attention to gender-based violence in the revision of the policy on harassment and discrimination; the inclusion of LGBTQ representation on pan university committees. "In general, there is much more attention to the existence of the LGBTQ+ community on campus," Phoenix says, adding, "The involvement of the LGBTQ Center in many major policy issues and pan university committees has resulted in more departments being aware of the community and more attentive to the needs of the community."

Making these changes occur took time, effort, persuasion and collaboration on a mammoth scale – something that Phoenix has great experience with in T's position. "My approach has always been to create systemic change at the institution through advocacy and education. I am very proactive in working with the UNC-CH administration as well as General Administration when issues such as the *Bostic v. Shaefer* ruling or the federal EEOC rulings have had implications for the university in terms of policy or practice. I have tried to educate and enlist others into being advocates and allies so that I am not the only voice at the table getting people to think about LGBTQ inclusion. We've had a lot of success in terms of policies but the overall campus climate is still in need of improvement."

Indeed, the last Campus Climate Survey, spearheaded by Phoenix in 2009 and released in 2011, revealed a damaging portrait of an otherwise excellent institution of higher learning. These included:

- Concealed support for LGBTQ rights, particularly by trans-identified and intersex respondents, for fear of intimidation from supervisors (21.6%) or colleagues (15.2%)
- Verbal harassment due to sexual orientation (12.9%) or gender identity/gender expression (16.5%); Fear for physical safety due sexual orientation (12.6%) or gender identity/gender expression (16.0%)

In addition, over a third of respondents had witnessed multiple forms of harassment, including property destruction and discrimination and nearly 40% reported having experienced or witnessed these incidents in more than one location. The most frequently identified locations where these incidents took place were Franklin Street; The Pit; the respondent's office, department or place of employment

within the university; and residence halls.

This is, at the very least, unsettling. At the most, this is alarming, as it affects the daily sense of safety and security one should otherwise expect while pursuing one's education. The cumulative effects of repeated harassment and abuse often deter students from satisfactorily completing their coursework and being able to go on to a productive and happy life.

Increased concerns about how the campus climate has changed for ALL marginalized groups has led to the need for a new campus climate survey, in order to better address these issues. The Office of Diversity and Multicultural Affairs and the Office for Institutional

getting more trans-inclusive health care policies and practices on the books. "The proposed rules by Health and Human Services that would eliminate trans health exclusions would have direct impact on our campus as the current student and employee policies have trans health exclusions," notes Phoenix.

Phoenix also lists sexual assault and interpersonal violence within LGBTQ+ communities as issue that must be addressed. "The recent AAU Report highlighted the fact that IPV, stalking, and sexual assault occur within LGTBTQ communities at rates higher than those of heterosexuals. This is particularly true for transgender and non-binary identified people."



Research are in the process of designing the campus climate survey, which will be administered in February of 2016. That instrument will ask people about their perceptions of the campus climate and their experiences on campus, with the full report available in fall 2016. Results will be used to develop programs and services and assess allocation of campus resources. "This survey will give us a good picture of people's experiences," says Phoenix, "but I know there is still work to do. There are places on campus where people experience a very heteronormative and less than LGBTQ+ affirming environment."

### Work Still Left To Do

On a University level, we still need to create a visible LGBTQ+ community of faculty and staff on campus. Phoenix also says that getting the curriculum to be more inclusive of LGBTQ+ issues and communities is crucial. "This is especially true in the allied health sciences and other professions where graduates will be working directly with LGBTQ+ people and communities in a helping capacity."

Furthermore, addressing needs specific to the transgender community must be taken into account, including

As a society, we need an intersectional social justice framework which encompasses the needs of many marginalized groups both within and outside of LGBTQ communities. Ending employment discrimination and housing discrimination, and eradicating health disparities are paramount, as is better supporting LGBTQ+ youth and ending the violence they are experiencing. But that's only a start. "We need to see economic justice, racial justice, climate change, etc. all as queer issues," says Collie. He also lists comprehensive hate crimes legislation as a priority.

Collie further notes the need to focus on trans issues, in particular. "We need a repeal of bathroom laws that unjustly demonize and criminalize trans people for using the appropriate bathrooms and a need for housing non-discrimination legislation that is inclusive of trans folks. We also need to address the violence against trans women of color in addition to communities/people of color, in general."

So...are we there yet? The answer is a resounding "No"...but we have definitely traveled far on our journey. The amount of change we've seen in just the last five years has been enormous. Imagine what the next five years will bring!

# Featured Alumna Spotlight

By Adrienne Gibilisco



Solorio ensures her Language Arts middle school students know who's boss in the classroom. She leads with energetic inspiration and a strong passion for education.

In each edition of *Aluminate*, we feature an article highlighting the adventures and accomplishments of a randomly chosen graduate. In this edition, our featured alumna is Cheyenne Solorio (2013).

In the brief two years since **Cheyenne Solorio** walked with her peers in Lavender Graduation, she made the kind of major life changes that would send most people spinning: she earned her BA in Education for Middle Grades Education at the School of Education and began her job as a 7th grade Social Studies teacher (she now teaches 8th grade English) at a Title One public school in Durham; she married her college sweetheart, **Tish DuFault** shortly thereafter; she moved into new digs with Tish; and, she adopted a third dog to add to their growing menagerie of pups.

However, unlike most people, Solorio welcomes these pivotal stages as part of her well-deserved continued trajectory towards a successful career and a happy work/life balance. Life wasn't always so sunny. As a child, she endured familial shake-ups, poverty and itinerant early years with her mother, teaching Solorio to navigate such choppy waters with fortitude and grace. Of Native American, Latina and White roots, Solorio has faced biases against her intersecting identities and is sensitive to many of her marginalized students' needs to connect with someone who can relate to their personal struggles in a respectful and inspirational manner. Speaking in a rush of words over coffee at a nearby café (too much caffeine, perhaps?), Solorio shares her experiences with *Aluminate*:



Solorio, left, visiting with extended family as an itinerant teen.

### **What kind of activism did you get involved with while you were at UNC?**

When I first got to UNC, I actually did not identify as a feminist because I didn't want to be associated with the white women of privilege above everybody else. So when I was a work study student at the Carolina Women's Center, my friend Amanda – who also worked there - started teaching me about intersectionality and I thought, "Yes! I love this. Now I can proudly say that I'm a feminist." I worked very closely with issues [surrounding] that and I worked on a website for resources for [people who were also] parents at UNC -- students, faculty and staff. Before I started working at the Carolina Women's Center, I didn't know that there were actually breastfeeding rooms around campus. You can come in and bring your milk and there's a refrigerator. So [I ensured that people knew about] things like that and housing, especially for students and support groups.

I also got involved with the Amendment One stuff. I went to Raleigh and protested. I always have little things that I say to myself, but I like to tell Tish, "There's nothing that I like better than the smell of a protest in the morning." (laughs)

[Also,] this isn't really an advocacy/activism, thing, but I was big into "Gay Coffee." Every Wednesday, we would all meet at Caffé Driade with like-minded people. You could bring friends, you could bring allies... whoever just wants to come to the conversation. I met a lot of really awesome people through that.

Now, I'm a big advocate for Native American issues, like alcoholism and the issue of foster children being taken from Native American families and placed with white families, which is cultural genocide. My mother is Lakota. There ARE Lakota foster parents and Lakota grandmothers, but they're not being given the due process – they just take [the kids]. When you talk about different Native American communities, there are treaties signed by the US Government that guaranteed these things, but because there's not enough visibility about the issues, people don't care enough so these things are able to happen. Look at Mt. Rushmore. It's in the Black Hills, which is sacred to the Lakota people. There's a treaty that says, literally – and I quote – "You will have this land until there's no more grass on the earth," and then they found gold and then it was taken. So they're actively stealing land, actively not providing health

care, actively setting up systems for people to be poor, because you take a nomadic tribe and tell them to farm and they don't know how to do that. "Honor the Treaties" is a big movement that is super important.

### **Your journey to UNC was a long and difficult one. Can you share it with us?**

I was born in El Paso, Texas and lived there when I was a baby for a little while, then lived in Ciudad Juarez in Mexico, where my father's family is from. It's a really rough city, but El Paso is rough in its own way, too. When I was in kindergarten, my mom and I fled an abusive situation and went to live with her best friend in northern California. When I was eight, we moved to Upland, in southern California and lived with my mom's side of the family until I was 16. My mom's part Native American and part White and there's other family dynamics so she was always kinda the black sheep. She had a great relationship with my grandmother, but when [my grandmother] died, we were just kinda pushed out. That's when we moved to Fayetteville, North Carolina, where my half siblings from her previous marriage live. They're Costa Rican and, in the Latino community, [there's an attitude of] that extended family idea, that you're always gonna be family.

### **Was it hard for you to adjust to the move to North Carolina?**

Oh, it was devastating! I loved my high school in California. I had very close friends, I was in the marching band – playing trombone – and had this really big community of friends because I had been [there] for so long. I was so naïve – Even though California has its own issues, I didn't

realize when I was growing up there that there still is this rampant, aggressive racism in the South. We knew there were KKK pockets in southern California, but they're not out and proud about it – to use that phrase in a weird way! (laughs)

[Also,] in my first week in Fayetteville, the house was shaking and there were bombs going off, so I thought we were being attacked. I went running downstairs and my mom is calmly drinking a cup of coffee and she says, "Oh, it's just the training practice at Fort Bragg." (laughs) That whole first week, I would just lay in my bed and listen to the Red Hot Chili Peppers on my iPod because I was so upset about the move. It was a massive effort to fit in at school. I was wearing skinny jeans and an Urban Outfitters top and I had black nails and people would come up to me and ask, "Are you emo?" And I'm like, "Do you even know what that means?" Girls were really terrible because I got a lot of attention from boys when I moved there.

#### How did you adapt?

I just kinda fit into the mold of what [was acceptable]...which

is what I did a lot of my life – just fit to make people happy, just to avoid conflict. The neighborhood that I was in wasn't very safe, but we all looked out for each other. We kinda fudged the address so I could go to this really nice new school where I was sheltered from a lot of the stuff that goes on [where I live]. I had some AMAZING teachers.

#### Is that where you became inspired to become an educator?

[Yes,] one of my favorite teachers, in AP Lit, on the first day, she said, "We're not going to read a bunch of books done by old, dead, white men." (laughs) Those teachers really fostered that diverse element, which really opened my mind. I really didn't think I was going to college and then this teacher [from when I lived in California], **Mr. Hawk**, stepped in, and he was instrumental. At first, I thought I was going to teach high school world history, like him. Later, it was **Coach Dague**, who was my AP European History

teacher in Fayetteville, and **Ms. Hawk** and **Mrs. Van Belo**, who were my English teachers – who were all instrumental in my life as well as shaping me into the teacher I am – and am still becoming today.

[But,] when I went to my counselor for financial aid waivers, he said, "You shouldn't apply to UNC. You won't get in with your credentials," because I was behind the other kids, [even though] I had been busting my tail the final two and a half years of high school. I was busy helping my mom raise my niece and nephew because my older sister lost custody of them. I was

coming home, taking care of babies, doing my homework, and sleeping next to a two-year-old, so getting up early because we didn't have a crib at the time. I didn't have the accolades and I didn't have any community service. I didn't have time for that other stuff.

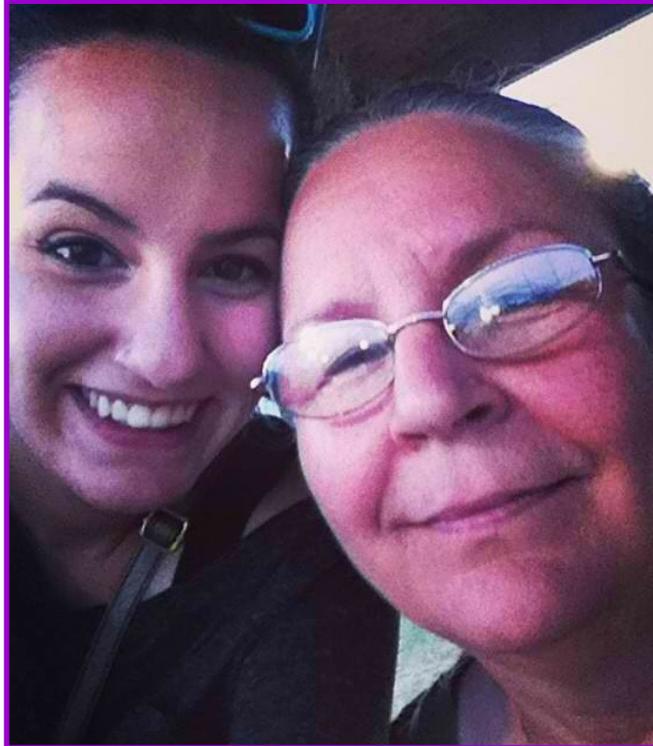
#### But you did wind up matriculating at UNC in 2009.

Yes, I wound up with the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program. I'm also a Carolina Covenant Scholar – they found a way to turn my work study into a

partial grant. Carolina Covenant will always be the reason I graduated college. I wouldn't have been able to do it without that program and all the support I got from it. I was having a horrible time at school and I could not do college. Sitting at a lecture, I could not take notes, I had to take courses over...then I was formally diagnosed with ADHD and also PTSD and a non-specific math disorder. It was **Fred Clark**, who is now passed away, and **Michael Highland** at Carolina Covenant who really saved me. They were the ones who [figured out that I had disorders] and them offering education about it was really powerful because if you can find out why your brain works the way it does, you can maximize it or minimize it [as needed].

#### Still, that time must have been incredibly difficult for you.

[Yes,] I don't want to knock UNC, but just sitting



Solorio (left) with her Mom, Jolen DuBois



Solorio, center, celebrates Coming Out Day with colleagues at Phillips Middle School.

in on classes that were full of the faces and backgrounds that were so unlike mine and [with students who] were so unwilling to broaden themselves was very difficult for me. It became really hard to fight that fight every day.

But with the NC Teaching Fellows Program, you have mandatory classroom experience and experience in the community before you got into the School of Ed. They placed me at Phillips Middle School with the AVID program, [which] works primarily with kids who they deem “at risk” – whatever that means – or they’re first generation college students...so kids with similar backgrounds as me. I just fell in love with those kids. I loved the middle school dynamic, [so much that I wound up] switching my major from high school history to middle school education and actually ended up doing my student teaching back at Phillips, so it was like ending where I began.

### **Are you seeing more acceptance of the LGBTQ community at the middle school level?**

In my generation, most of us came out during college or right before college and it was scary then. Now we have 13- and 14-year-olds coming out. There’s this paradigm shift where they’re more open to things and finding out who they are. I didn’t have that freedom and I didn’t even know what that freedom felt like, so I didn’t feel comfortable with it until I had a strong support system at UNC [in case my family didn’t accept me]. I really wish that I had been

comfortable coming out sooner. It wouldn’t have changed who I am now, but to not have to go through all the depression of that prevailing feeling of “There’s something wrong,” or “You just haven’t found the right boy yet” or “You just need to keep dating.” To finally [realize], “Wait! There’s nothing wrong with me. This is who I am!” -- that was really big.

### **What led to your coming out?**

I came out when I was 19, so I was a sophomore. I always felt like something was wrong with me, but I didn’t know what that was. My friends were really centered in GBLTSA at the time, so I was always at GBLTSA functions, like drags shows and all that stuff. I remember one defining moment where I went to a Women Loving

Women group on “V for Vendetta Day” and they were holding a showing of it. I went there at first for the free pizza, but then it was to be around people who identified as women, who were just so comfortable with everything...with themselves. Women weren’t silenced. It was a really amazing atmosphere. Also, there were the summers that I spent hanging out with friends that were in the community. My friends **Lauren Ianotte** and **Aleshia Parker** and **Zachary Fields** all lived in this house and I basically lived there and had fun with like-minded people. It was all about being comfortable to try things and push boundaries and not get any pushback. That’s where I learned a lot, actually, about the history behind the LGBTQ rights movement. That was really powerful.

### **How did your family react when you came out to them?**

When I came out to members of my family, they said, “Okay. We already knew.” (laughs) My mom, because she was raised Southern Baptist, she did that whole “I’m always going to love and support you, [although] I might not like what you’re doing. You know what the bible says.” But then a week later, she called me and said, “I think people should be married to whoever they want. It’s nobody’s business.” She loves Tish, she calls her “daughter” and all of my siblings call Tish their sister. She was immediately a part of the family when she was just my girlfriend.

### **Did you and Tish meet at UNC?**

Yes, well...it was a complicated story. (laughs) We



Solorio and bestie Jacqui Batts promote literacy at school.

met for the first time when we were involved with other people. We met at Linda's [restaurant on Franklin] and we didn't really like each other. She's a more reserved person when you first meet her and I'm a more "life of the party" type. So we weren't very close. And then we ended up breaking up with our significant others around the same time and then we started dating. It kinda just started at a party and then it just sort of blossomed from there. I was going to summer school and I graduated, got my teaching position.

Being a partner of a teacher is not easy, especially a teacher that teaches in a school like mine – Neal Middle School in East Durham, which is a Title One school. There are so many other factors and there's so much more work and there's so much more emotional [aspects of the job]. It's been a long road and it was hard at first, but she's always been the support system I need when I come home crying because – I call them "my babies" or "my kids" – [are having a rough time]. There's a bond that is established with students, especially in Title One schools, and once they know that you're a safe person that's always going to show up, and always going to be there for them. I even have a couple of kids who call me "Mom," which is really weird.

### Are you able to demonstrate activism through your work?

It's more of a "quiet activism." The way I do that is by being as open and honest with my kids as possible. I always said when I first started teaching that I

was never going to lie. If a kid straight up asked me [if I were gay], I was going to tell them...but I wasn't going to come right out [and announce it]. So one day after we got engaged, I was wearing my ring and one of my students grabs my hand and says, "What's this?" and I said, "What do you think it is?" and she says, "It's a getting married ring." So I said, "uh-huh!" and she says, "What's his name?" and I looked into her eyes and said, "She's a girl!" and she says "What's HER name?" and then the other kids started finding out so I just told them and said, "What I really want you to get from this is that I was very, very scared to tell you any of this in the beginning. And I want you to think about the other teachers that you have and how they talked about their families and their husbands and their kids. I felt like I couldn't do that because I didn't know how anyone would react. It's not really a matter of your viewpoint versus my viewpoint. It's not about that. It's that we can believe in different things but still respect each other."

### What a beautiful lesson. Have they met Tish?

Yes, Tish comes to the school functions. She was at our little 8th grade formal, she comes to games... she's there, they adore her, they're always asking "How's Tish?" or "I'm going to tell Tish you're acting up!" (laughs) I was Safe Zone trained [at UNC] and I create a Safe Zone in my classroom. So many of my kids have had horrible experiences with teachers and with education that they're so disillusioned by the time they get to me. So, it's important that every single one of my kids can come in and express their viewpoint and feel safe with finding themselves and their sexuality or gender identity and feel safe in the school.

### Can you share a highlight from your UNC days?

My all-time favorite memory was graduating because, at many points during college, I didn't think I was going to graduate. But I did graduate – a semester late and in summer – but I walked! Being able to have my family there [was great] because I'm the only one to really set that example [of graduating]. There were only 45 of us that graduated from the Middle Grades program. I was not the only minority when it comes to race or ethnicity, but I was definitely the only one that grew up poor, I guess.

There were all these refined families who were like (mimes clapping politely), and then as soon as they called my name, my godbrother, **Niko House**, gets up and yells "two-six!" which is a Fayetteville call. It was so loud! When I sat down, the person next to me



Solorio with her Godbrother, Niko House, post-Graduation

asked, “Was that your family?” It was embarrassing, but it was also so awesome. I thought, “Y’all don’t understand what this moment is for me and my family!” (laughs) It was the best feeling ever.

**How do you spend your time when you’re not at work? What is fun for you?**

[Tish and I] are big wanderlust, adventure-type people...which is very hard on our fixed income, but we’ve been to New Orleans twice. We just love experiences versus materialistic things, so we go on trips and have adventures. Even day adventures – Tish is forever looking for concert tickets. I was at school in the morning and she said, “So, I know you like to go to bed early, but...” and she surprised me by taking me to a **Janelle Monae** concert. It was in Charlotte, but still being young enough and without kids, we were able to do it.

**So...no kids, what about pets?**

We have three dogs – Harley, Daisy and Prince. Harley and Daisy came from one of Tish’s previous relationships. Harley is this weird chow-beagle-rottweiler mix and is after Harley Quinn from Batman, Daisy is a pitbull and is named after Daisy from “The Great Gatsby,” and Prince is this chocolate, red-nosed pitbull who is the cuddliest dog you would ever meet and was named Prince Toulouse after Toulouse Street in New Orleans. He’s also very much like a therapy dog for me and when I’m having an anxiety attack, he’ll do the whole “lay on my chest” thing that they

teach anxiety dogs to do.

**What about the future – do you have a plan?**

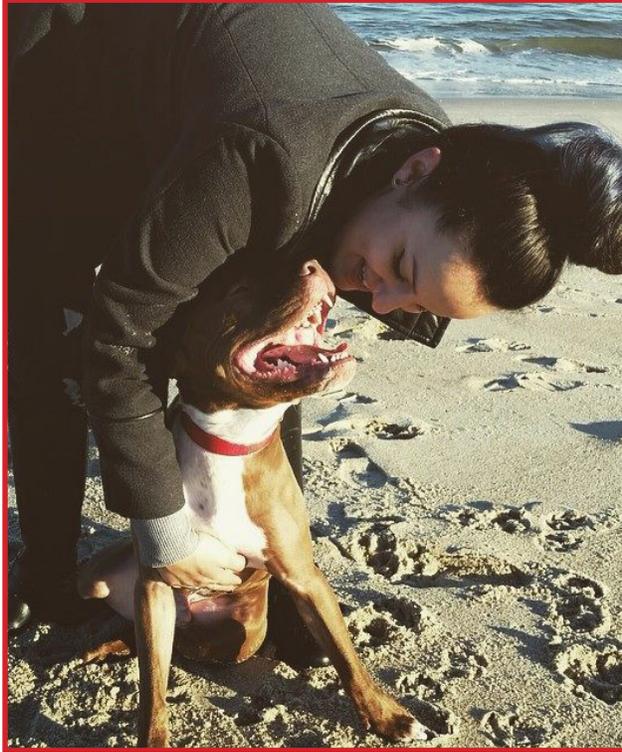
I have a tentative plan. I’m going into my third year teaching at Neal. Hopefully, I’ll be teaching 8th grade English Language Arts. And then in two years, I will have finished my commitment to North Carolina Teaching Fellows. Also, Durham Public Schools has this deal with Duke that if a DPS teacher gets accepted into this program for AIG Certification to teach academically and gifted students, they pay for it and the teacher pledges to work with DPS for two years. So I’m taking that course at Duke – I know, I feel like a traitor! (laughs) - and I’ve timed those two commitments perfectly.

**What happens after you complete your commitments? Will you stay in North Carolina?**

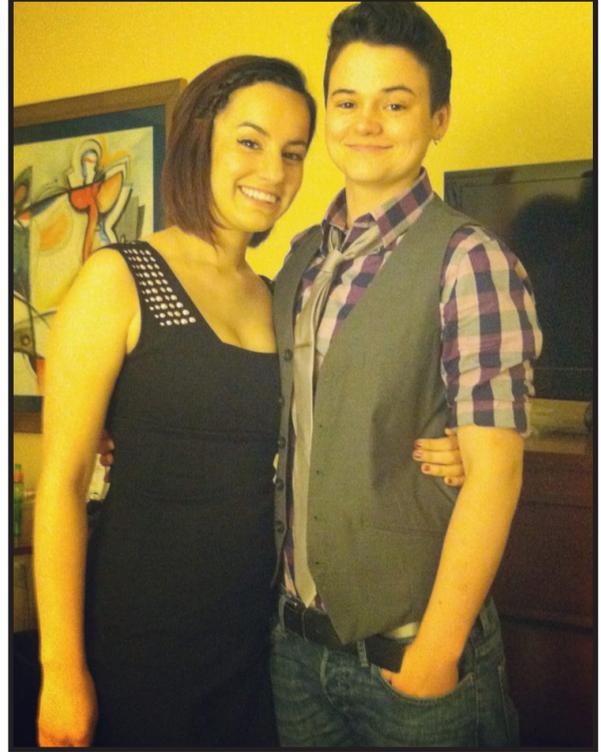
[Ironically,] I hated Carolina when I moved here because it wasn’t California. But I’ve fallen in love with this state. Down the road, we want to raise a family. But right now, with the climate [the way it is], I’d rather move somewhere more progressive and commute to somewhere else for work. I’d like to move to a community that has more precedence or equality so that I’m not risking the chance of not being allowed to adopt my child. So we want to move to New Orleans. Louisiana is in the south, but it’s different. They have history there and they have lots of failing schools there – Title One schools, which is right up my alley! We’ve also talked about possibly living abroad because there are lots of programs that will pay me to go over there and teach English. To be able to do that while we’re young, before we have babies [would be terrific].



Solorio and Tish share a celebratory post-wedding kiss.



Frolicking with Prince at the beach.



With Tish, enjoying one of their New Orleans adventures

**Looking back over your UNC years, what makes you proud?**

(long pause) I mean, I didn't think I was going to make it out alive, right? (laughs) There were lots of trips to Counseling and Wellness, there were lots of traumatic things that happened to me while I was at UNC, especially during the freshman and sophomore years. I always pride myself on being a resilient person. My mom always told me from when I was very young, "We don't really have an option. There's no man that's gonna help you out. You gotta learn to do it by yourself." That was one of the most important lessons I learned, to always take pride in being resilient.

But what I am most proud about and what really formulated at UNC is to be out and loud about all facets of my identity and all of my personal experiences. I'm proud of all the trauma and the struggles and the triumphs that I went through, so I'm going to tell you about all of them because something's going to connect and resonate. To go from the "victim/things happening to me" mentality versus taking ownership of what happened to me is really important.



At her brother's wedding, sharing a romantic moment with Tish.

# Staff Transitions

By Adrienne Gibilisco



Full-time staffers (L-R) Adrienne Gibilisco, Angel Collie and Terri Phoenix greet participants at the rainbow door on Coming Out Day at the Pit.

This was a whirlwind year, with seven program assistants, a graduate assistant, a social work intern and a library intern joining forces with the trio of full-time LGBTQ Center staffers (**Terri Phoenix**, **Angel Collie** and **Adrienne Gibilisco**) to bring all the best programming and resources to the UNC campus and community. Sadly, we had to bid goodbye to most of these hard-working folks (among them, **Aleah Helms**, **Christina Perkins**, and **Matthew Fenner III**) as they moved on to their next phase in their education or the workforce. Some other notable transitions include:

**Kim Brummell**, who served with us for the second year in a row as a program assistant (and Safe Zone processing expert!), was awarded her BA in Women's & Gender Studies and Biology and is currently enrolled in a one-year Master's program at Drexel University College of Medicine prior to her entry into medical school in Fall of 2016.

Journalism major **Danny Nett**, who has left his program assistant position with us, will still be on campus as he pursues a degree from the School of Media and Journalism, specializing in online media and digital narratives.

After a summer of interning at Reese News Lab (a media entrepreneurial incubator in the J-School) and copy editing for *Southern Neighbor*, he returned to Carolina as *The Daily Tar Heel's* community manager.

**Charlotte Eure**, our Program Assistant, who will be continuing to study toward degrees in Women's and Gender Studies and Communication Studies, anticipates walking in Lavender Graduation in spring of 2016.

Our Graduate Assistant, **Kristina Wharton**, who earned her Master's in Public Health, Maternal and Child Health (with a public health informatics concentration), has moved to the west coast to work at the San Francisco Department of Public Health. Her fellowship in public health informatics with the Centers of Disease Control and Council for State and Territorial Epidemiologists working on HIV and STD surveillance will contribute to a healthier society (as will her ready smile!).

Our Social Work intern, **Ginny Lewis**, who earned her Master's in Social Work, is now a research specialist in the TraCS Institute on campus. Her work varies, depending on the research needs. She is a community engagement

**We bade farewell to...**



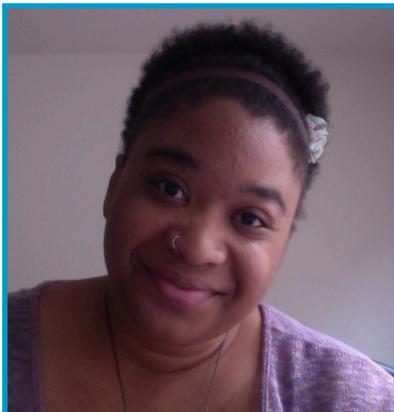
**Matthew Fenner III**



**Aleah Helms**



**Charlotte Eure**



**Kim Brummell**



**Danny Nett**



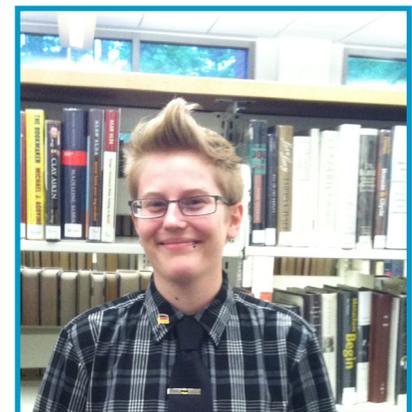
**Kristina Wharton**



**Ginny Lewis**



**Taimur "TK" Khan**



**Kai Ewing**

...and we welcomed...



Amanda Howell



Morgan McLaughlin



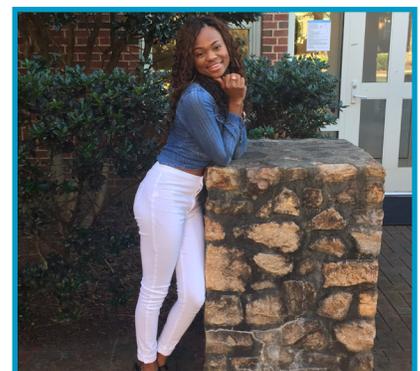
Rebecca Hoffman



Savannah Peters



Stacey Parker



Tora Collins

**Camera Shy:** Christina Perkins, Davis Hodge, Kyle Underhill, Kaitlin Duren, Kendell Silveira

coordinator with the Community and Academic Resources for Engaged Scholarship (CARES), providing consultations to researchers on designing studies that aim to include Latino populations. She is also working on a qualitative analysis of focus groups for a cancer transitions curriculum project. Ever devoted to helping the underserved, Ginny's abundant kindness and energy will certainly have a positive impact.

Q Group facilitator **Taimur "TK" Khan** left for Juneau, Alaska, where he'll bring his counseling skills to a hospital facility there. Library Specialist **Kai Ewing** earned their Master of Science in Library Science continued to work at the LGBTQ Center to organize our resource library and continue the linking process with the UNC Library system until the end of July 2015. Ewing will be bringing their phenomenal organizational skills to another library soon!

Returning to his duties as Trans Talk Tuesday facilitator, **Davis Hodge** is heading up meetings with trans folks at Caribou Coffee twice monthly. Also back on board is program assistant **Morgan McLaughlin**, who summered as an intern at the U.S. House of Representatives in D.C. with the Victory Institute, an organization that empowers young LGBTQ leaders to take an active role in government. The experience solidified her desire to "get into the system and turn it upside down!"

Some fresh faces who have joined us this semester are new Graduate Assistant, **Amanda Howell**, who has planned GSHAHs and Graduate Speaker Series events for the Graduate and Professional students on campus; and, new Program Assistants **Kyle Underhill**, **Savannah Peters**, **Rebecca Hoffman**, **Tora Collins** and **Kaitlin Duren**, who bring their enthusiasm, energy and skills to the Center.

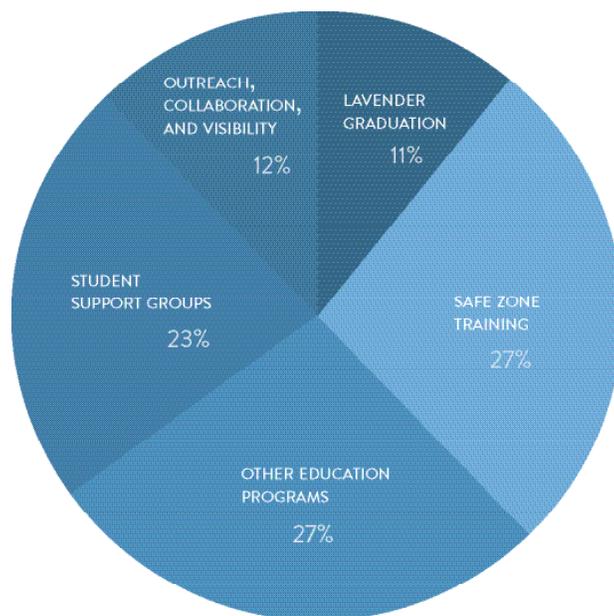
Other new faces include our new Q Group Facilitator, **Kendell Silveira** and, joining us to facilitate our new program, QPOC (Queer People of Color) is **Stacey Parker**. Parker is also Asst. Director of Academic Initiatives in Residential Education and Clinical Assistant Professor at the School of Education.

## SUPPORT THE LGBTQ CENTER

### Make a Donation

Our programming budget comes from private donations. The work of the LGBTQ Center to create a safe and inclusive campus environment would not be possible without our donors. Your generosity and support is greatly appreciated. The chart to the right represents the allocation of program funds by category. Your contributions of time, knowledge, money, and resources allow us to continue our efforts to ensure that all people at UNC-CH are treated equitably.

**To make a donation to the LGBTQ Center, go to:**  
[www.lgbtq.unc.edu](http://www.lgbtq.unc.edu) and select “donate.”  
**School/Unit/Program:** Division of Student Affairs  
**Fund:** LGBTQ Program Office (6250)



The **LGBTQ Center** at UNC works tirelessly to foster a welcoming and inclusive environment for UNC-Chapel Hill community members of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. We do this by allocating our resources across three broad areas: educational programs, direct services and resources, and advocacy. Throughout the years, the demand for our popular Safe Zone trainings has grown, as has the number of students, faculty, and staff seeking to access our services...yet our budget hasn't. We are seeking support in able to expand our capacity to better serve the future leaders on our campus and in the community.

A donation of...

- ...\$5 provides the material resources for one individual going through our Safe Zone training.
- ...\$10 buys 20 promotional brochures for the Center.
- ...\$15 covers the cost of a book to add to our resource library.
- ...\$25 secures the space for our support groups to meet for one night.
- ...\$50 covers the publicity, planning, and implementation of an educational program on campus.
- ...\$75 supports the cost of a month of services from trained, skilled facilitators for support groups.
- ...\$100 enables 35 students, faculty, and staff members to get Safe Zone trained and be provided with visible Ally placards to display in their office or on their dorm room doors.



“Teamwork Makes the Dream Work!”