

Old Dominion University Gay Cultural Studies: A Profile



In the spring of 2010, faculty from Old Dominion University (ODU) and nearby academic institutions, in collaboration with community leaders from the Hampton Roads area, came together to launch ODU Gay Cultural Studies: an endowment campaign aimed at establishing an interdisciplinary LGBTQ Program to be housed within the Institute of Humanities at ODU. This program would be unique to Virginia's higher education landscape in that no other college or university in the Commonwealth has a program dedicated to research and instruction focusing on the histories, contributions, concerns, and challenges associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) cultures. These leaders envisioned the transformation of a curriculum that was under-represented by LGBT courses and an expansion of university outreach in a region that has yet to embrace the diversity and vibrancy of its LGBTQ communities. With this mission in mind, the Old Dominion University Gay Cultural Studies (ODU GCS) initiative was born.

Consisting of a full executive and advisory board, each member of Old Dominion University's Gay Cultural Studies initiative is working to contribute to a fund-raising effort that will enable, among other things, the establishment of Post-Doctoral Fellowship in LGBTQ Studies that will bring cutting edge research and instruction to the College of Arts & Letters, thus contributing to program development and the expansion of educational opportunities in the field of LGBTQ studies.



Since its inception in 2010, ODU GCS Board Members have been working diligently to keep the project moving forward, starting with a celebration Launch Party at the elegant home of Tim Bostic and Tony London in July of 2010. Since then, the group has come together to engage with local non-profit organizations such as ACCESS AIDS and Hampton Roads Business OutReach (HRBOR). In addition, the campaign works closely with academic as well as service-oriented units across Old Dominion University such as the Departments of English, Art, History, Women's Studies, Communication & Theater Arts, the

ODU Humanities Institute, the ODU Office of Intercultural Relations, Student Engagement, Housing & Residence Life, ODU Safe Space, and ODU Out The cooperation of ODU GCS also reaches across to other regional institutions of higher education, enlisting board members from Norfolk State University, Christopher Newport University, and Tidewater Community College.

To show the importance of promoting awareness and education in LGBTQ studies, ODU GCS has organized numerous public events and lectures. In the two years since the project began, scholars, artists, community leaders and advocates have lectured and shared their experience and knowledge of LGBTQ issues. These events, along with discussion panels and other programming, have successfully paved the project's path toward establishing the foundations of ODU Gay Cultural Studies mission of inclusivity.

Filmmakers John Walters and Dustin Lance Black invigorated GCS efforts with their respective LGBTQ perspectives on filmmaking and popular culture. In his engaging lecture, "Caster Semenya and the Gender of Silence," Vanderbilt University's John Sloop discussed the constraints and enabling potentials of silence as explored through the case of South African Olympian runner Caster Semenya and the difficulty she faced in defending her gender as a high-performing professional female athlete.



Army Lt. Dan Choi, who was in the national spotlight for challenging his discharge under the military's former "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy, came to ODU to tell his own compelling story and to discuss the ongoing importance of activism and the struggle for social justice. In addition to his lecture, Lt. Choi, like many other guests invited through the initiative, enjoyed the camaraderie of students, faculty, and area guests during casual receptions and roundtable discussions that allowed these speakers to get to know our Monarch community on a more personal basis. The creation of opportunities outside of formal

lectures to engage in open dialogue is a signature feature of the endowment campaign's efforts not only to inform and to educate, but also to foster environments of mutual respect and understanding.



These are just a few of the many events that ODU GCS has sponsored in order to establish a Gay Cultural Studies Program at Old Dominion. It is amazing what a group of dedicated individuals can accomplish, and we invite others to join with ODU GCS and learn more about ways to assist in the effort to make Old Dominion University and Hampton Roads the most forward-looking campus and region for LGBTQ Virginians and allies.