First year experience at Fall Reception

By: Dominique Bryant

The preparation was hectic, the performance exciting, and the faces welcoming. I have never before experienced an event like this. In my opinion, this event allowed for people to let down their natural defenses and genuinely interact with new people.

Generally speaking, when individuals are in an environment where they don’t feel comfortable they’re afraid to be themselves. I truly believe that there was no level of discomfort at the Reception that night. No matter how anyone there identified themselves, I am confident that everyone felt welcomed. Bebe Zahara’s performance was phenomenal. The only other time I’ve ever experienced anything like her performance was through a television screen.

Obviously live performances are much different and the energy she brought exploded off of the stage. As a first time worker for the Center, and first year student, I am excited to see what awaits my future as I continue to work with the Center and being a part of these events at Rutgers.

Kickoff event, though the eyes of an veteran Liaison

By: AnnMarie Burg

When I began working here in 2010, I knew very little about the Center and the support and resources it provided to our LGBTQA students and allies – I learned quickly and it’s been an amazing journey.

One of my favorite responsibilities is to assist in the planning and preparation of the LGBTQA Fall Reception, scheduled at the start of each fall semester.

This year, the LGBTQA Fall Reception had a record high attendance of over 325 students, staff and liaisons.

We host a variety of performers each year – from acapella singers to sword swallowers to drag queen performer, Bebe Zahara Benet. Each year the guest list gets more exciting, the space more decorative and the thrill goes on and on.

The Fall Reception is not only a fun event for all, but it is a time where we update everyone about the Center’s new resources and upcoming programs. We formally introduce the student groups and our new and returning students mingle and new friendships begin.

I have seen much progress and growth over the past two years. Each year, the Fall Reception surpasses the former year’s attendance and events by leaps and bounds.

I’m excited to see how social media techniques have created a huge outreach to our students, Rutgers staff and the community. This outreach, in turn, raises the visibility, communication and connection to the Center.

I am happy to see the increase in students walking through our doors each day – it’s a place for the students to establish friendships, learn, commiserate, and feel affirmed. I am so pleased to be a part of it all.
Programming for community and traditions: Our feature of the Center for Latino Arts and Culture's own Silismar Suriel

By: Benito Nieves

Common in the Latino/a culture, preservation of family and tradition is essential; but, as students may experience during their developmental years, preservation can be complex. In her work with student groups and their programming initiatives, Silismar Suriel, Program Coordinator in the Center for Latino Arts and Culture (CLAC), faces two seemingly contrastive, prevalent values: foundation and intersection. While programs uniting students may be based on a core foundation, like civility or sisterhood, an individual experiences this in relation to their own identity. Suriel, in the past decade of advising student groups – culture, Greek, faith, letter, family, professional, and governance based – has witnessed the struggles and best practices of finding co-existence between foundation and intersection.

"A shift has occurred in the last four to five years," observes Suriel. "We understand more and more what it takes to be a community. Our language is changing, for respect. Our acceptance for who makes up our community is growing, and that acceptance is increasingly visible." Suriel currently advises the Latino Student Collaborative; Omega Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated; LAWO – Latin American Womyn’s Organization; and LLEGO – the LGBTQQIA People of Color Union at Rutgers. In her work with student group executive officers, the dialog on Latino/a identity formation is ongoing, and urgent.

"In the [Latino/a] community, there is a way of framing what some see as 'doing good by' others. Take for example being LGBTQ in the Latino community. There is this concern some have about whether that identity disrespects the family, even the extended family; or whether it represents religious compliance, demonstrates masculinity, or fits into one of the bubbles formed in urban communities. For some students, it's difficult to identify with the Latino community, when an LGBTQ identity intersects," regrets Suriel.

Even within LGBTQ communities, Suriel notices a pressing expectation of what students want from their peer leaders, such as being "out" about their queer identity. As she warns, some students cannot afford such spotlight, based on the consequence of family disapproval, disowning, and cessation of financial support.

To combat these conflicts, Suriel utilizes her professional focus on programming as a way to bridge communities and help foster cross-cultural education. Though, "she recognizes a growing pattern with inter-peer dependence. As issues shift to more serious and intimate identity focuses, students are relying on each other for advice."

"Our student communities are growing closet; and we want this," begos Suriel. "Our student leaders are on the front lines, and when serious issues arise in conversation, those students are the ones their peers turn to. Despite the programs, offices and resources our university offers. Rather than deter this, we started training students on the skills needed for these conversations. We also encourage them to seek collaboration with offices like CAPS and the VPWA office."

Responding to change in the community is a strength of the CLAC team, identifies Suriel. "As some intersections become increasingly visible in spaces where foundations are prevalent, the office helps to maintain resistance and foster solidarity.

Suriel invites, "We want more programming collaborations, especially those with intention! We don't want to tell students they can keep those Latino/a traditions and adopt new insight into who practices them; we want them to experience it."

"Calling all Knights, LLEGO invites you to their nights

By: Benito Nieves

The Queer People of Color (QPoC) are mobilizing! LLEGO – the LGBTQ+ People of Color Union at Rutgers – are back for another academic year and are inviting you to join their meetings. The group organizes every Thursday at 8 p.m. in the Center for Latino Arts and Culture, near the Rutgers Student Center.

LLEGO is governed by nine diverse executive board members, all of whom share an active role in engaging and facilitating the group. Group philosophy states, "If the ball's in your court, the floor is yours!" Student members of LLEGO toss around ideas – be they about safe sex, confidence in the self, tips on coming out, or understanding queer lingo – and they do so by tossing around a group football.

"We went back and forth between formats for our meetings," shares executive board member, Em Kay. "This one just seemed to stick." Kay, the liaison between LLEGO and the Asian American Student Council, joins team members Allison Kroeper, Brian Robles, Jade Carcamo, Jay Chepra, Nomin Ujiredin, Salan Chapman, Shantae Bedas-sie, and Shia Cutts in unifying the QPoC community and allies by utilizing collaborative programming and advocacy.

With so many events under their belt this academic year, the LLEGO leaders are keeping the momentum. Still to look forward to this semester is Gayme Night, discussions on being queer in prison, improve-style coming out skits, a Thanksgiving dinner for "chosen" family, and the upcoming QPoC Reception in the Red Lion Café at the Rut- gers Student Center, Tuesday, October 16, at 7:30 p.m.

LLEGO is proactive about supporting members of the community, especially those within other student groups. Chap- man, the executive board's most senior member, reflects on what she has observed over the years as crucial community point. "My message for everyone, everyone, is to come out and support LLEGO and its events; because we will surely do the same," affirms Chapman. "We shouldn't be competing – for space, members, resources; whatever – because we are a community, and we need camaraderie.

Film Series launches with Queer People of Color in mind

By: Zaneta Rago

On September 25th, the Rutgers Center for Social Justice Education and LGBT Communities, along with the Center for Latino Art and Culture, recognized the effects of Latinidad and LLEGO for LGBTQ students of color and allies, welcomed Dr. Celiany Rivera-Velazquez to campus for our first Reel Queer Film Series.

The Reel Queer Film series is a brand new monthly installment series of cutting edge films from queer and ally filmmakers which all focus on contemporary queer issues.

Those interested can watch Dr. Rivera-Velazquez’s screening, Diagnosing Difference, during Prisoner’s Day at the Center for Latino Arts and Culture, near the Rutgers Student Center. This film launches the Queer People of Color in mind Reel Queer Film Series as a brand new monthly film series.

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We were absolutely thrilled to have been able to co-sponsor this event with some of our amazing partner organizations around the campus.

September 15th to October 15th is Latino/a Heritage month at Rutgers, and creating forums for LGBTQ people of color to share their stories is absolutely central to the work that we do at SJE. We had almost 60 people attend the event, which shows us our community wants more of these re-sources as well.

Our second installment of RQFS, Criminal Queers, occurred last night and had a wonder- ful turnout which created an enriching dialogue around queer experiences in the Prison Industrial Complex.

We hope that you join us for our last film screening, Diagnosing Difference, during November’s TransWeek. If you have a film you would like to see from the center, please email us at sje@echo.rutgers.edu.

Introducing new liaison and the Criminal Justice Program’s most resourceful man, Administrative Asst. Matthew Bellof

By: Benito Nieves

New to Rutgers, Matthew Bellof enters the community with a plethora of experience: international academia and internship, program management in the areas of academic and student affairs, and a long-practiced commitment to aiding individuals with special needs. The latter of those hits home with a passion.

As a deaf individual, Bellof carries piquant, often humorous stories of constructing affirmations and overcoming challenges. Pedagogy is a profession, though, in his perspective, some of those teaching lessons ought to promote laughter.

“I genuinely believe that laughing makes you feel better. Like an apple a day, I think—it’s important to laugh—at least once a day,” suggests Bellof.

Bellof dedicated much of his undergraduate and graduate years to being an advocate for and educating others about the deaf and hard of hearing population. Some of that work included revising disability policies, creating platforms of support for the population, and teaching in-class sign language.

As a member of the LGBTQ staff at Rutgers, Bellof is able to recognize and engage in the coming-of-age dialog so crucial to queer youth and young adults. Like many LGBTQ individuals who indentity the intersections of identities, he recalls the embrace of his sexual orientation being a rather mute experience. His sexual identity was clear to him, though, as he puts it: “I never considered myself different [in that regard].”

During his time at Tufts University in the New England area, Bellof served as a member of Team Q—a speaking panel promoting gender and sexual awareness. Additionally, he managed the 2007 Safe Colleges Conference in a continuing effort to bridge allies to the LGBTQ community.

“Hook-up culture” in class. While I identify as queer and supportive in my experience as a FIGS mentor, shares her appreciation for Bailey’s guidance.

“Ms. Bailey has been nothing but helpful and supportive in my experience as a FIGS peer instructor, particularly when I needed advice on how to handle certain LGBTQ topics in class. While I identify as queer myself, [she] has been able to give me resources and tips on how to be a professional when handling the topic in relation toward my students.”

Students can locate Bailey in the Office of Academic Engagement and Programming in Bishop House, room 209 A—located on College Avenue Campus, right across from Au Bon Pain and the Center for Latino Arts and Culture (CLAC). Students may schedule an appointment with Bailey via calling 732-932-7442 or emailing sbbailey@echo.rutgers.edu; though drop-in visits are always welcome.

By: Benito Nieves

Though Sarah Beth Bailey, Assistant Director of New Student Programs, enters her third year both as liaison and Rutgers staff, her experience in advocating for and advising LGBTQA students sagas many more, and her colorful credentials are evidence of such. Students visiting Bailey will enter a space with LGBTQA supportive decor and visible credentials of her work with students throughout her career in education.

During her time at Rowan University, Bailey served as advisor for a gay-straight alliance student group; and it was this experience that laid the foundation of LGTQA advisory commitments. Additional higher education work for Bailey includes residence life in the University of Maryland and outreach programming for Seton Hall University.

“I want [students] to know that I have chosen to work with college students,” assures Bailey. “I am committed to working with them—helping them learn, grow, graduate, and feel safe during that entire time.”

Bailey—an Ohio-farm native from a rural family—is experienced with students’ “coming out narratives,” including those involving unsupportive interpersonal parties and conservative family dynamics. Some students seek counsel when those narratives seem “against the odds,” recognizes Bailey, and she is one liaison who wants to help students in that process.

As coordinator of the FIGS program—First Year Interest Groups Seminars—Bailey works closely with the upper-class student mentors and their facilitation of one-credit seminars focusing on transition to college and exploration of an academic interest.

Donna Martino, a history major and women and gender studies minor, and FIGS mentor, shares her appreciation for Bailey’s guidance.

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Red Arts Series Part 1: Literature as a learning institution for LGBTQ people

By: Benito Nieves

Dr. Rick H. Lee, an instructor of literature in the English department at Rutgers, observes, “When we are little boys and little girls, we have texts that teach how to be [such]. Even in our interactions – be it faith, race, or ethnicity – we have something that guides us; but when we’re queer, the narrative is missing. Sexual minorities lack these institutions of learning.”

Lee knows the pertinence of telling a narrative, especially when the intentionality is to help audiences understand history, journeys, and themselves. He joined the Rutgers community in 1997, and has continued to open the dialog (prominent in his classroom) surrounding what he coins “generational trouble” – a concept explored in-depth in his dissertation and publications. Partly in this concept, he acknowledges the rejection gay males of newer generations have with identifying with AIDS, though, in this disaffiliation, enters the prospect of harmful, generational disconnect.

Lee’s pedagogy frequents literature on AIDS and identity-intersections; though, as he explains, even when sex and identity are not the focus of class discussions, students find these threads crucial to the dialog, and sew them in.

“Students come with an existing repertoire about their own and others’ identities,” Lee remarks. “Sometimes, they use the classroom as an outlet... and it makes more sense to encourage them not to compartmentalize their understanding of identities.”

For those students seeking literature to explore their sexual identity, Lee is a valuable resource for recommending texts across genres and historical periods. In recitations of Oscar Wilde and allusions to the dramas of playwright, Chay Yew, Lee bends the conversation of identity and discovery to fit the mold of the individual.

Lee also recognizes the emergence of a new type of narrative serving as reconsideration for how AIDS is “remembered”: the ghost story. Less of October’s-end spectres and more genuine scripts of hauntings, bereavement, and reflection, the LGBTQ ghost stories surfacing are a testament to the need for bridging generations. Lee offers the example of Ben Francisc’s “Tio Gilberto and the Twenty-Seven Ghosts,” which tells the story of a young gay male protagonist, James, who is rather indifferent to the specters that haunt his uncle’s home, mainly because they are GRID/AIDS victims and “relics of a past era, a sadder time not worth remembering”, as critic David Grossman details.

“There are many ways we have for remembering the AIDS epidemic. We have AIDS memoirs, the AIDS Quilt, obituaries; but these ghost stories engage a necessary dialogue between who is remembering and who is being remembered,” notes Lee.

Bridging generations into a “social whole” is Lee’s foremost solution for generational disconnect. In his article, “Generation Trouble: Reflections on Gay Male Identity, Generational Consciousness, and Social Belonging,” Lee urges gay readers to recognize the place of the AIDS epidemic not only in gay history but also in their own lives.

“The AIDS epidemic is significant not only as [a historical marker], but also because [it has] transformed, in different and profound ways, gay men’s relations to the generation concept – especially in the context of the concept’s definition as a stage or phase in the trajectory of the life course.”

To learn more about Lee, visit rick-lee.com.

The Red Arts series spotlights Rutgers faculty whose professional and personal research opens the dialog on AIDS in the LGBT community.

Advocacy has many faces, and the features in this series will have one thing in common: AIDS, as told through the arts: the page, the stage, and conversation on canvas.

For over three decades, a stigma has plagued the LGBT community: queer being synonymous with HIV and AIDS.

The work of the faculty members introduced here responds to AIDS with messages pertinent to our campus and larger community.

New perspectives: Coming out as a freshman at Rutgers

By: Josh Siegel

I was able to come out to myself at around the end of August, right before [this] semester began.

I knew... the only way I was able to be truly accepting of others [in the Rutgers community], I would have to start with myself -- that was my ‘aha’ moment.

I was able to start a new chapter in my life as openly gay. I never identified as gay or straight, but as I began to feel more comfortable with my housemates, I began to tell them that I was gay by saying things like “Wow that guy is cute” or “Yes, I’d date him.”

Eventually, everyone got the idea. This is the first time in my life that I was able to be open and honest with people in a public setting.

My parents are the greatest people alive and my biggest support system. I have two moms and I love them both.

They are the most loving and accepting people I have ever met, and because of this, I knew that I had to tell them that I was gay. But, [as their son] it was still difficult to admit.

[At the end of this September], we were watching television together, and a commercial came on. I asked if they could pause the television, because I had to tell them something. My step-mom immediately jumped to the conclusion that I had some medical issue that was life threatening, and my birth mom asked if I was going to drop out of school.

I laughed and said no I’m not sick and I’m not dropping out of school... I’m gay!

There was a second pause and my step mom said “I am so happy you feel safe and comfortable with yourself to be able to tell us.”

My birth mom didn’t say much, but what she said -- “Welcome to the club” -- meant so much to me. It meant acceptance and love.

For information on how to be supportive to a friend that is in the process of coming out please check out our link:

RU Friend Comes Out
By: Lyanne Ventura

As a proud ally working at the Center, I feel that it is important for me and other students to take the Ally Pledge and support those students around campus who may feel like they are alone, don’t belong and/or those facing difficulties with coming out.

Over the past year working at the Center I have seen many students come in for issues that are often very unique and for that very reason they may feel like there is no one on campus who cares about or shares similar problems.

Everyone deserves to feel included and should be aware that there are people on campus who are there to support their struggle.

I am pledging to stand for change and I encourage other allies on campus to come out to RU Ally Week to take the pledge and get their pictures taken. Let’s change the world allies!!

By: Zaneta Rago

From October 15th to October 19th SJE will be hosting a pledge station at the Livingston Student Center. RU Ally Week highlights how we can all work towards being allies through action, advocacy and awareness.

While the traditional narrative of “being an ally” focuses on how heterosexuals can be better allies to those who are LGBTQ, RU Ally Week is meant to raise awareness to the incredibly diverse world and campus we live in along the lines of multiple identities. We can not be LGBTQ allies without also examining systems of racism, classism and ableism because the LGBTQ community includes people of color, folks of the working class, and those with disabilities. This means folks within the LGBTQ community need to work towards different forms of allyship as well.

Our pledge station will consist of a social justice resource fair, pledge signing and professional photo shoot for the “I am an Ally because...” photo campaign. A sample photos can be seen above as an example of what the campaign will look like.

We would like to thank our co-sponsors for making this week possible: the Asian American Cultural Center, the Center for Latino Art & Culture, B.R.I.D.G.E, Rutgers Love, the Queer Student Alliance (QSA), the Institute for Research on Women, the Department of Anthropology, Student Life, Career Services, the Educational Opportunity Fund Program, the School of Arts and Sciences, Academic Services, Student Involvement – Community Service Initiatives, the Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance, the office of the Dean of Students, Health Outreach Promotion & Education, and Rutgers University Health Services.