

Colby



Memo

Date: April 4, 2011

To: President William Adams, Dean Lori Kletzer, Dean James Terhune, SGA President Leslie Hutchings, SGA Vice-President Athul Ravunniarath, SGA Co-Presidents Elect Laura Maloney and Justin Rouse

From: The Multicultural Affairs Committee, the Committee on Race and Racism, and a coalition of students, faculty, staff and alumni¹

Re: A Proposal for a Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center at Colby

In the wake of recent events on campus related to issues of gender, sexuality, and power we—a broad coalition of students, faculty, staff, and alumni, with the institutional support of the Multicultural Affairs and Race and Racism Committees—submit this proposal for a Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center at Colby. The Resource Center would provide a safe space for discussion, programming, and education and would provide a much-needed layer of institutional and interpersonal support on campus, specifically in relation to sexual assault, homophobia, and gender/sex discrimination. The space we envision will serve as an inclusive and safe gathering place for students, staff, and faculty to celebrate sexual and gender diversity and to work together to make Colby a more welcoming place.

We acknowledge that the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Program, with the support of the wider Colby community, has long identified the need for a Resource Center. WS/WGSS students and faculty made similar requests in 1980, 1990, and 2003, and in 2002 the Queer Task Force made hiring a full-time professional staff member and establishing a Resource Center two of its top ten recommendations. This current proposal has overwhelming support, both on campus and with alumni around the country. On March 12th, we created an open Facebook group entitled "Colby Needs a Gender and Sexuality Diversity Resource Center" (http://www.facebook.com/home.php?sk=group_117245111684404). Within four hours, the group had over 500 members, and continues to grow; as we write this proposal, it has close to 750 members. In a March 9th MAC and RR Community Forum on Gender, Community, and Power the proposed establishment of a Resource Center was one of the few action steps mentioned by students in attendance, and received enthusiastic applause.

In this proposal we present "Why" such a Resource Center is important for Colby (an Overview), "What" such a Resource Center might look like (a Vision), and "How" to make our collaborative vision a reality (a Means).

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1. Overview

Recent events on campus have generated renewed attention to a long-standing fact: despite its many strengths, Colby is a place in which varied forms of sexism and homophobia create a climate for women and for LGBTQ people that is often hostile and intimidating. This campus climate interferes with students' ability to achieve their full potential as students, and with their right to pursue their intellectual and personal development freely, within a supportive community. Incidents of harassment, intimidation, and bias are troublingly common, and the College currently has no resources specifically committed to transforming these very pressing realities. Supportive responses after negative incidents occur are beneficial and important, but they do nothing to change the hostile environment that many students experience every day, as they pursue their academic, athletic, spiritual, and social goals. This is completely inconsistent with Colby's values and we must commit ourselves to working actively to change these destructive aspects of the campus climate.

We are confident that the administration shares our commitment to ensuring that *all* Colby students have equal access to the same opportunities, but current staffing levels do not enable us to undertake the kind of work that is necessary to change the campus climate and to strive to prevent the kinds of incidents that create a limiting environment for so many students. The Resource Center we envision would be charged with doing precisely this kind of work, by providing a range of programming and educational activities that raise awareness of the problem and generate effective solutions. In addition, the Center would provide a wide range of support services to students who are themselves working to make change or who have been negatively affected by the unwelcoming campus climate.

We recognize that the reality of our culture is that inequalities and injustices exist everywhere. Nevertheless, virtually all of our peer institutions have more welcoming and less hostile campus climates for women and LGBTQ people, and that is because they have committed financial resources and other forms of structural institutional support to creating fairer, more welcoming, and more egalitarian cultures on their campuses.

Indeed, Women's, Gender, and/or Sexual Diversity Resource Centers are a staple at colleges and universities across the country. All ten of the top 10 liberal arts colleges, and 18 of the top 20 liberal arts colleges (excluding only the U.S. Military and Naval Academies), as listed by the current *U.S. New and World Report*, have Gender, Sexuality and/or Women's Resource Centers. Every NESCAC college, except Colby, has some form of Gender, Sexuality and/or Women's Resource Center. Bowdoin, Bates, Tufts, Trinity, and Middlebury all have Resource Centers with full or part-time directors. The remaining NESCAC schools—Williams, Amherst, Hamilton, Connecticut College, and Wesleyan—have Resource Centers that are student-run and have varying levels of programming and resources. These schools report that their centers are necessary, widely used, and greatly appreciated by students, faculty, and staff across campus.

Clearly, such resource centers are not luxuries adopted by a chosen few, but are integral to the best liberal arts colleges in the nation. By comparison, Colby proves itself decidedly below average. Such centers affirm to female and LGBTQ students attending the College that Colby takes their safety and well-being seriously.

On the other hand, the absence of a Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center sends quite the opposite message, especially to those affected by sexism, homophobia, harassment and sexual assault on campus. Given that all members of our community are affected by such behavior to one extent or another, at one time or another, and given that each abuse of power is a tear in the fabric of our community, it is a responsibility of the College to provide the much-needed space, resources, and leadership for a Resource Center, which can both work to change the climate and respond effectively to incidents when they occur.

Furthermore, the college has not achieved one of the Strategic Initiative Goals and Objectives put forth in the College's Strategic Plan (1999/ 2002), which is to "heighten awareness of personal safety issues,

including sexual assault and violence in relationships.” Certainly, the creation of a Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center would be a direct way to meet that stated goal. We declared that we could do better in 1999, and yet over a decade later we continue to lack a basic and essential resource. It is time.

Comments from recent alumni from the Facebook group highlight very powerfully why a Resource Center is needed, and what additional benefits it will have for the College:

I feel very strongly that we need a center and a permanent staff member who is dedicated to addressing ... sexual assault. I know we had someone when I was there who was supposed to focus on women's issues, but I never interacted with her and don't think the majority of campus knew we had someone like that. I think she mostly worked with faculty. We also have a harassment advisory board, but we want to be preventing these issues, and last I knew, the board focused mainly on passive response (i.e. waiting for someone to report, not making a whole lot of effort to let the community know about the resources available and the options for getting help). There's a huge gap in the area of prevention and active response. I think the college (as is true of the majority of schools I know), doesn't want to deal with the fact that sexual assault happens everywhere, not just perpetrated by strangers, but perpetrated by students as well, and those crimes are much harder for the student who survives the incident to report, especially when its a dorm mate, a partner, a friend, etc. [By] not addressing the issue, women (and in some cases, men) have nowhere to turn after an assault. The administration needs to realize that their current expectation that people will report to security is not good enough. Survivors need a safe space to discuss these issues. I think intimate partner violence is also an issue on campus that we don't know much about and do even less to address. Ashley Hunt, 2007

The major issue is that once students are at Colby, they are left to fend for themselves. Time and time again, I have heard the sentiment that students feel they were lied to during the admissions process; that Colby was spun in a different light than it actually is. Personally, I am of the belief that if you build it they will come. As long as we make it known that our LGBT community is committed to goals of acceptance (because I hate the word "tolerance"), education, and collaboration, LGBT students (and indeed students of all types of diversity) will be attracted to Colby. Andrew Cox, 2011J

2. Vision for a Colby Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center

Resource Centers on college campuses vary in size and scope. Bowdoin's Gender and Sexual Diversity Center occupies a house on campus that includes office space on the second floor and a large living room with resources and materials for student groups on the first floor, a Women's Resource Center Director's office, a kitchen and two bathrooms. A visit to Bowdoin's Resource Center reveals a warm and welcoming space that the community has come to rely on: a place that ignites positive change on the campus at large, supporting the reality that gender and sexual diversity intersect with a multiplicity of needs, experiences, and expectations.

Swarthmore and Middlebury have their own buildings, while Bates has three rooms in a college-owned house off campus. In some cases Gender and Sexual Diversity Centers and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies programs are closely connected; in other cases they remain separate entities but work closely together, co-sponsoring speakers, planning common events, and providing each other with general support. In all cases, though, Resource Centers are widely used by the student body and by the faculty and staff to support LGBT and Women's issues and to drive education and acceptance on the campus community.

A review of Gender and Sexuality Resource Centers from the top 10 liberal arts colleges in the country paints a picture of such centers as safe, community spaces that:

- house resource libraries full of books, movies, and informational materials, and thus serve as an informational, educational and cultural resources for students, staff and faculty.
- offer a quiet place to study, build community, or simply hang out with friends in a safe space.
- sponsor and organize programming, for example: student/faculty/staff events such as colloquia, coffee houses, movie nights, and dialogue/discussion sessions.
- offer informal counseling related to LGBTQQIA issues including, but not limited to, coming out to friends and family and dealing with homophobia; support for victims of sexual crimes and bias-based harassment.
- provide information about, resources for, and informal counseling to victims of sexual harassment, assault, and rape and program awareness initiatives that prevent sexual violence.
- work with other campus organizations, offices, and the college administration (including the Dean of Faculty, Student Affairs, the Admissions Office, the Career Planning Center, the President's Office and the Board of Trustees) to strengthen and sustain an inclusive and safe campus community that promotes gender equality and awareness of all sexual orientations and gender identities.
- contribute to understanding the diverse meanings and expressions of sexuality and gender, and the intersection of sexuality, gender, class, and race (as well as other social identities).
- provide training to student volunteers with whom those visiting the Resource Center can discuss questions, concerns, and problems.

The Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center at Colby will offer all these services and resources. It will serve the campus and larger community with the goal of enhancing safety, education, and quality of life for the Colby community. The Resource Center will be a safe and welcoming space for students and a material resource for the College community. It will embrace a diversity of racial, ethnic, religious, political, and cultural values while focusing on advocacy for the welfare of those who have historically been marginalized because of their sexual and/or gender identity. It will be an inviting, vibrant, and safe community place for students, staff, and faculty to gather for discussion, community meetings, and colloquia; to host support group meetings, gender safety trainings, and speakers; as well as watch movies, study, and use provided educational and reference resources. It will provide a lending library of books, DVDs, and CDs, emphasizing resources for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex (LGBTQQI) community and their allies, gender awareness, safety, and equality.

Ideally, Colby's Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center will exist in a homey and comfortable atmosphere. At minimum, a resource center will have three rooms: a common area with kitchen for larger events and meetings, a resource library for storage of educational and reference material, and a private room for conversation and smaller support group discussions.

The Resource Center will be staffed by at least one full time professional director, who will train and supervise a group of student workers. This person will have at least a bachelor's degree, and relevant experience in serving the needs of women and LGBTQ populations on college campuses. While this remains to be worked out, we suggest that the Director report to the Director of Campus Life. We also strongly recommend that the College create a Coordinating Committee for the Center, made up of students, staff, and faculty, which would be convened by the Director and support him/her in establishing and administering the Center's programming and activities.

The Director will be charged with developing the Center's activities and will work with other members of the Dean of Students' office staff and with varied campus constituencies to accomplish the center's goals and carry out its mission. The Center will both provide necessary support to students and institute new educational, social, and cultural programs to change the campus climate to make it more welcoming to all.

For the Center to truly reach its potential, it must have a full-time Director. Running the Resource Center cannot be the responsibility solely of students and a select number of faculty and staff volunteers. Although these groups have traditionally filled the role of organizing campus programming and support

groups for these issues, the purpose of the Center is shift the responsibility to an institutionally-supported Director, whose job it will be to ensure that the necessary work gets done. This will ensure that consistent, sustained work on the campus climate can be accomplished, and that support for students will be available in an established location, rather than in the *ad hoc* and informal way that so much of this work currently gets done.

The most successful and most useful Women's Resource Centers include a variety of services in one central place. While Colby does have many organizations and services for students and faculty interested in issues pertinent to women, gender, and sexuality such as the Feminist Alliance, The BRIDGE, Male Athletes Against Violence, and rape crisis counseling in the Health Center, the College does not offer a central safe location where students feel they can seek advocacy and support, raise awareness, discuss research, and address issues pertinent to women, gender, and sexuality. Currently there is no central location for Women's Services and the Health Center struggles to find space for student discussion groups. In addition, many of the student groups listed above would benefit greatly from having more institutional support as they pursue their goals.

This proposal is initiated by students with the support of faculty and staff, and many students work tireless hours every week to bring positive changes to fruition at Colby. However, it must not be forgotten that students have an obligation, first and foremost, to their academic work, and they cannot be expected to serve as the primary resources for LGBTQ and women's support. Colby justly prides itself on enabling student action, but the College has reached a tipping point: it is time for the administration and the Board of Trustees to respond more substantively to the needs of the students, faculty, and staff.

3. How to Make this Vision a Reality

Funding for Resource Centers comes from a variety of sources. Many of the centers, including those at Wesleyan, Trinity, and Bowdoin, are funded by student government organizations. Williams' WRC is funded through their Minority Coalition, which receives money every year to distribute to organizations, and Middlebury's Center is funded partially from a trustee. However, the colleges provide the space for the Resource Center in nearly all cases.

Practicality would suggest that Colby utilize existing space on campus. Given the desire for an inviting space, we propose that the College re-purpose an existing and vacant faculty apartment, such as the ones in West Quad or Mary Low.

The appeal of a faculty apartment lies in its centrality, size, privacy, and immediate availability. Most faculty apartments are in proximity to the hub of student life on campus, Cotter Union. Using an existing space on campus addresses financial concerns; it is not essential that a new space be built when we can utilize what we already have. A faculty apartment, with multiple rooms, a kitchen, bathroom, and other amenities, is functional enough for a center to actually carry out its mission. In other words, it could offer what Bowdoin's Resource Center does in house form, but on a scale Colby can presently support.

At present, eleven faculty and/or staff and their families live free of charge in on-campus apartments, in exchange for their active participation in the lives of the students and contributions to a sense of community. Faculty residents come and go, and there appears to be some flexibility in the number of apartments used for this purpose in any given year. We argue that converting one faculty residence into a Resource Center that has, as its central mission, creating a safer and more inclusive environment for students would more than make up for the loss of one faculty resident; indeed, this space would be home to a staff and office whose sole purpose was entirely dedicated to community involvement.

A Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center, like the issues it seeks to address, must be made central, both physically and politically, at Colby. In order for sexism and homophobia, and their myriad analogous forms, to be brought to the forefront of attention by the students, the administration, and the Colby community at large, the space that the Center inhabits must be legitimate and centrally located on

campus in order to establish its importance and to ensure resources can be easily accessible to the entire community. If this space is not funded properly or not established in a substantive manner, that would send a message to the community that the goals of the Resource Center are not worthy of Colby's time and space, and thus are not worthy of the students' attention. Re-purposing a faculty apartment would meet these requirements in a cost-effective manner.

On a basic level, the needed funding can be broken into two categories: start up costs and operating costs. Below is a comparison between Bowdoin's initial outline of their funding request for their LGBTQ/Trans Resource Center and our proposed budget for the GSD Resource Center. Because our center would also serve as a Women's Resource Center, our annual operating costs would be slightly elevated (we believe that our center requires a full time director).²

Bowdoin's initial budget: (\$88,000 in first year)

Start up costs: \$30,000

Space:

\$10,000 Renovation costs to update existing structure from single-family home to multi-use facility, in full compliance with ADA

Furnishings, equipment, and supplies:

\$15,000 Furniture for living room, kitchen supplies, office furniture and equipment

Resource library:

\$5,000 One-time start-up cost to purchase books, videos, magazine subscriptions, CD's and technology (television, DVD and CD players, computer) for Resource Library

Annual operating costs: \$58,000

\$1,000 Annual budget for resource materials

\$7,000 Annual budget for speakers, receptions, and retreats

\$39,900 Director's salary (\$30k @ .5FTE, with 30% for benefits)

\$8,000 Course release for faculty to teach Introduction to Gay and Lesbian Studies each year

\$3,000 Student workers (2) @ \$7/hour x 6 hours/week x 36 weeks

² We recognize that a comparison with Bowdoin might raise the point that Bowdoin's superior resources are made possible by their larger endowment; however, Bates (a college whose endowment per student is less than half that of Colby's) also allocates significantly more resources for gender and sexual diversity than Colby. Bates boasts a Multicultural Center that initiates, coordinates, and implements programs to promote racial, cultural, class, gender, sexual orientation, religious, and ethnic understanding (headed by a director and several assistants) and a Women's Resource Center. Considering what Bates provides their student body, given their endowment, demonstrates that gender and sexual diversity-related issues are a high priority of the college. Given that all members of the Colby community are intrinsically connected to gender and sexual diversity issues, it is troubling that Colby does not allocate resources to these issues as generously as Bowdoin and Bates do to their respective student populations.

Colby's proposed budget: (\$77,000 in first year)

Start up costs: \$15,000

Space:

\$0 Cost for space—the GSD Center will be located in a faculty apartment in a Colby residence hall; no renovations will be required.

Furnishings, equipment, and supplies:

\$10,000 Furniture and equipment (office furniture, computer, printer, supplies)

Resource library:

\$5,000 One-time start-up cost to purchase books, videos, magazine subscriptions, CDs and technology (television, DVD and CD players) for Resource Library

Annual operating costs: \$61,500

\$1,000 Annual budget for resource materials

\$7,000 Annual budget for speakers, receptions, and retreats

\$50,500 Director's salary (\$35K full time salary plus 44% for benefits)

\$3,000 Student workers (2) @ \$7/hour x 6 hours/week x 36 weeks

Taking these projected costs into account, a conservative estimate for a Gender and Sexual Diversity Resource Center at Colby could range somewhere between \$70,000-\$80,000, with start up costs varying slightly, depending on the location of the Center. This may seem like a large commitment of money, but considering the immediate and long-term benefits to the College, this price tag seems more than reasonable—especially considering that the College is funding an \$80,000 concert this spring.

We propose, therefore, that the College commit to funding the Gender and Sexuality Resource Center for an initial two-year period, beginning in the fall of 2011-2012. For those two years we propose that funding be shared between the President's Discretionary Fund and SGA/SPB/Campus Life programming funds.³ At the end of the two-year trial period the effectiveness of the Resource Center will be evaluated, and a decision about its long-term viability will be made. If that decision is positive, we envision that the College will raise an endowment from interested alumni and donors to support the ongoing operation of the Resource Center.

Conclusion

Upon examination, Colby is safer for some students than others. At the heart of this proposal are the very real issues of sexism and homophobia that underpin this inequality. Gender and Sexual Diversity issues on campus pervade nearly every aspect of student academic and social life. Establishing a Gender and

³ We already know that funds for resource materials, programming, and student workers will be available through the budget allocation processes of the Student Government Association, and through re-allocation of funds to support students that already exist within Campus Life.

Sexual Diversity Resource Center at Colby will make Colby a more comfortable place for nearly all students, but having a Resource Center is a matter of survival for some students. It is necessary to make Colby a safe space in which every student can thrive.

We submit this proposal in a spirit of positive energy and hope, but our motivation and passion derives from knowing the distress the student body feels, and has felt, for many years. Colby is *not* living up to the standards and values promoted in the College's Mission Statement and Strategic Plan. We are also out of synch with our peer colleges. Incremental solutions will not work in this case; we have a real problem that we must address and we simply want what every other NESCAC college and the top ten liberal arts colleges in the nation consider standard best practice.