

## Diversity and LGBTQ Issues at PLNU

PLNU is a church-affiliated school that exists in a rapidly changing world. Racial, ethnic, cultural and socio-economic diversity have been at the very core of our discussions and practices related to diversity. This is evident through a variety of student development activities; including [MOSAIC](#) (Multicultural Opportunities for Students Actively Involved in Community) which seeks to create opportunities for engagement and community for students across all backgrounds and academic centers like the [Center for Justice and Reconciliation](#) (CJR). For over a decade the CJR has studied fair trade and workers' rights, immigration and racial justice, and human trafficking through research, education, and advocacy. Among peer institutions, the university has also played a leading role in conversations about the roles of women and many years ago, this led to the establishment of the [Margaret Stevenson Women's Studies Center](#). The Center runs a collection of programs for students as well as supporting and highlighting faculty scholarship in the area of women's studies.

Institutional discourse around sexual orientation and gender identity has greatly increased in the last few years. Our Wesleyan theological tradition deeply values the care for and respect of all people. The tradition also has long-held beliefs about marriage and expectations for sexual behavior. As an institution, we are trying to carefully and thoughtfully navigate the tensions between these two strongly-held beliefs in order to authentically and respectfully care for all people.

Below are descriptions of some relevant work in this area:

Admissions: PLNU's admissions process for all students does not discriminate against any applicant on the basis of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Similarly, the PLNU [Community Living Agreement](#), which all traditional undergraduates affirm upon enrollment, is equally applicable to all such students regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Voices of Love (VOL): This is a university-sponsored affinity group under the Office of Community Life created in order to provide a sustained presence for VOL. After several years of ad-hoc discussion and campus groups, VOL was formally established in the fall semester of 2015. It is intended to provide support for LGBTQ students while promoting campus dialogue about issues of sexuality, gender identity, and faith in an inclusive community. VOL hosts weekly meetings to discuss a book chapter, relevant personal and social issues, as well as the culture of PLNU and the impact of PLNU's policies on students. The group has averaged about 15 students attending weekly meetings. To date, VOL has also hosted a gender identity forum and participated in the New Student Orientation resource fair to raise awareness. As with all student groups, this group has faculty and staff sponsors that include the Director of Community Life and a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and Social work.

This past year, VOL surveyed participants in order to establish the most significant perceived needs to be addressed for LGBTQ students. The following priorities emerged from the survey data:

- Facilitating affinity groups
- Chapels or special events related to sexuality
- Communicating compassion and care in institutional policy
- Developing trainings in order to increase sensitivity

While several of these areas have already been addressed, planning is underway to respond to each of these areas in the 2017-2018 academic year.

For the first time this coming academic year VOL will have a student leadership team helping to guide and direct the group. Five students will help to facilitate the affinity group, plan and implement campus-wide events, and raise awareness of LGBTQ issues at PLNU. They will also help to inform training sessions offered to Residential Life staff and student leaders, as well as Wellness Center

staff. Empowering student leaders to ensure that LGBTQ student needs are best addressed is an important aspect of the continued growth and success of VOL.

Student Handbook Changes: In 2016-17 Voices of Love spent an entire session discussing the Sexual Conduct and Gender Identity statements in the PLNU Student Handbook. Some students had never read the policies. Others understood the institution's need to align with the Church of the Nazarene, however they did not agree with the way LGBTQ individuals and issues were isolated in the policy statements. After examining the policy together, participants expressed concern that many LGBTQ students felt marginalized not by the stance taken, but by the particular language used in the Student Handbook.

To respond to student concerns, the Office of Student Development has changed language in the [2017-18 Student Handbook](#) (follow this link and then in the drop-down pick 2017-18 Main Campus Student Handbook). While PLNU's behavioral expectations for all students remain the same, the new policy includes two statements that were specifically added to communicate care for LGBTQ students:

*PLNU seeks to be a community where lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex persons are treated with dignity, grace, and holy love in the Spirit of Christ. We recognize the complexity of current issues related to same-sex attraction, same-sex marriage, and gender identity. The university desires to faithfully care for all students while engaging these conversations with respect, care, humility, courage, and discernment.*

*A student (or potential student) who needs assistance with matters related to gender identity (such as gender dysphoria, sexually ambiguous birth, legally altered birth documentation) is invited to discuss these concerns with the Associate Dean of Student Success and Wellness, who will provide support, care, and assistance in accessing university resources.*

Student input suggests that this new language represents a significant improvement in ensuring that PLNU's policies do not contribute to the marginalization of LGBTQ students but instead communicate care and compassion. These changes, as well as the continued efforts of the Voices of Love group, aim to ensure that PLNU is a welcoming and supportive place for LGBTQ students.

#### Participation in the NCAA's Common Ground

In the past two years, PLNU's Athletic Director has participated in NCAA national and regional conversations about how LGBTQ and faith-based communities can work together more effectively. In November of 2016 there was a formal gathering at NCAA headquarters to continue this conversation. This event drew a diverse group of participants who had connections to the LGBTQ and/or faith community. The theme and title of these meetings was "Common Ground."

PLNU's Athletic Director Ethan Hamilton summarizes the common ground conversation saying "[T]here are areas where there is ground that is common. First and foremost, we deeply care about the lives of students; I think this has and will continue to be a great opportunity to re-communicate such and focus on that point." There was deep and open dialog among participants at the gathering and a growing mutual respect for individual organizations' and schools' distinct missions and points of view.

This is what the NCAA says on [their website](#) about Common Ground. "The NCAA Office of Inclusion hosted Common Ground II in November 2016. Common Ground II continued this important conversation on how representatives of the LGBTQ and faith-based communities can work more cohesively in college sports and higher education, in support of the NCAA's mission to serve its campuses and student-athletes representing the many diverse missions and philosophies of higher education." The questions asked at the event and the participants can be found in the [Common Ground II Report](#). It is important to PLNU that our Athletic Director is engaged in these important and

broad-ranging conversations that have the ultimate goal of better serving all athletes at all NCAA institutions while preserving institutional distinctives.

Extending this conversation, PLNU's President along with a group of presidents from faith-based universities will meet with NCAA Common Group participants for extended dialog in September 2017.

#### The Colossian Forum Partnership: Divisive Issue Engagement as Opportunity

The Colossian Forum (TCF) is committed to helping Christian faith communities learn how to address potentially divisive challenges in ways that are consistent with our shared belief that "all things hold together in Christ" (Colossians 1:17). The Colossian Forum has designed a curriculum for small groups that seeks to model productive engagement in two current "hot button" issues within the Christian community, Evolution and Human Sexuality (more issues are being developed under a new grant that they have received from the Templeton Foundation). The approach used in these curricula is called "The Colossian Way" (TCW) and while it does not seek to provide specific answers, it seeks to model productive engagement that will equip participants to work towards potential solutions and in the process help the participants to develop new insights.

While this approach was initially designed for implementation within local churches, TCF is interested in adapting it to Christian college and university campus settings. PLNU worked with the TCF to help them develop their early efforts to promote science and faith discussions. Due to this previous experience, TCF asked PLNU to participate in a pilot project to adapt their Human Sexuality curriculum for university small group settings. PLNU sent a team of four faculty and staff members (including the Provost and the Director of Community Life) to a TCF leader training workshop in the summer of 2017. In the fall of 2017, PLNU will run a pilot test with a single small group comprised of 12 students, faculty and staff with diverse views on the topic of human sexuality. The goal is to evaluate the efficacy of the TCF methods for modeling civil and respectful engagement on potentially divisive issues within PLNU.

PLNU has also agreed to participate in conversations between TCF, The Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, and a few interested schools to explore ways that the TCF curriculum might be successfully adapted for use in Christian higher education. Future engagement with the TCW Human Sexuality curriculum will depend on the outcome of the fall pilot.

#### Political and Legislative Engagement

In PLNU's work to engage with the State Legislature, we have seen increased attention to the status of LGBTQ students at faith-based universities in California. In the 2016/17 legislative session it was apparent that there was a lack of understanding of, and relationship between, faith-based universities and members of the LGBT Caucus in Sacramento. As a result, PLNU has collaborated with other faith-based universities to open dialog and build stronger relationships with local and state-wide legislators including members of the LGBT Caucus.

In May of 2017, at the invitation of Caucus Chair, Evan Low (CA-28), PLNU's President traveled to Sacramento with the presidents of Azusa Pacific University and Biola University. Included in this meeting were trustees from all three institutions. The goal of this meeting was to expand dialog and seek areas of common interest and cooperation.