

OUTlines

What's IN for those who are OUT (or not) at Penn October 2006 ~ Vol. 17, No. 1

Coming ^{out} to College

Arriving this fall as a first year College undergraduate, I looked at Penn as the start to my new life, a clean slate. I came out my senior year of high school, which involved changing people's already established perceptions of me; sometimes I encountered hostility and others times I was faced with adamant disbelief. (What they were grappling with is still beyond my comprehension.) Thus, I looked at Penn as a way to be upfront and

honest about whom I was to everybody, and as a place without the confusion and chaos associated with coming out of the closet. When I arrived, much to my delight, I found just that.

The LGBT community at Penn, especially compared to the environment I came from, is extremely open, visible, and diverse. I come from a military background—my mother and my grandfather retired

from the Air Force and the Army, respectively, and my uncle attended and taught at West Point, a setting



notorious for its macho attitude and homophobic "Don't Ask Don't Tell" policy. For me to find a place so inviting and accepting of LGBT people and attitudes was invigorating. From the LGBT Center to advocacy groups, to simply the presence of openly LGBT students on campus, Penn has surprised me in a great way.

For a gay, Black male like me, the diversity of Penn's LGBT community is particularly appealing. Throughout my life, there have been innumerable moments where I felt out of place in one aspect or another. Some instances could be attributed to the "new kid" status I frequently donned from my days as a military brat, but most moments were due to my being a Black male in a non-Black setting, or a gay male in a non-gay, even homophobic, setting. At Penn, however, for the first time in my life, I can find a Black and gay setting within which I can feel absolutely comfortable, which at

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This is the **LAST** hardcopy edition of **OUTlines**. To be notified via e-mail of future editions as they are posted on our web site, please go to www.vpul.upenn.edu/lgbtc/outlines/.

Sparking a Movement

In a recent conversation with a young friend at Penn, we discussed the national events and dialogue I witnessed and encountered as a youth which constructed my racial consciousness. I remember the significance of Ronald McNair being selected for the Challenger Shuttle's fateful flight; watching the brutal beating of Rodney King by the Los Angeles police and the subsequent riots; the palpable racial tensions surrounding the O.J. Simpson trial; and the profound sense of empowerment and connection I felt at the Million Man and Million Women marches.

I had always considered myself a precocious youth. I had an elite educational experience and rare opportunities not afforded many, so I guess I subconsciously assumed my political ideas to be a natural byproduct of these factors. It wasn't until I had this conversation that I truly realized the impact these national events had on how I define myself as a Black person in America. My friend lamented at not having

experienced such profound national events in her lifetime, and wondered what would spark her enlightenment. As I reflected on the events of the last six years, I understand her feelings of disconnection, but realized she had experienced something greater in her youth than I did. The 2000's have been to queer politics what the 1990's had

been to racial politics.

While, with the exception of Hurricane Katrina, there have not been recent events drawing national attention to racial disparities in America, this decade has been ripe with national debate over gay and lesbian identities. It has been part of the current administration's obviously shady maneuvering to put LGBT people in the political cross-fire to detract from other areas where they are exploiting and mishandling our nation's best interest.

Locally, the Philadelphia community's energies have been charged by a debate over just the inclusion of "Gay & Lesbian History Month" on its school district cal-

to create a GSA or demand my school acknowledge Gay & Lesbian History Month the way I did for African-American History Month? Would I have showed up to a public debate to speak out for my right to exist in a safe environment?

Hindsight is always 20/20, but somehow I believe I would have. In the midst of understanding I was indeed *not straight*, I also would have understood what that meant to how I would negotiate the world. It would have resonated as more than demographic classification, or a sexual preference. I would have been primed for the political ramifications of identifying as part of the LGBT community. I am eager to see where the next generation leads our community. I am certain the profundity of current events has not been lost on them and will continue to shape their social awareness. And given her passion and drive to create a space for and fight for the rights of LGBT peoples, I believe my young friend proves my case.

~Ninah Harris



OUT & IN-FOCUS:

Eric Wilensky L'03

Eric Wilensky was born and raised on Long Island, New York. Eric attended Hofstra University where he majored in social sciences with a concentration in Political Science. Although he enjoyed being in New York for most of his undergraduate career, he decided he needed a break from Hofstra for his senior year and made the decision to attend St. Catherine's College at Oxford University. Eric loved his time in Oxford but decided to return to the United States to attend Penn Law School.

Eric came to Philadelphia still in the closet and began his law career in 2000. He was very active in the University and during his third year he took on the tremendous task of being an executive editor of the *Law Review*. Around the time of his tax exam, a time Eric specifically remembers, he began to open himself up to meeting other men. Although not out to any friends or family, Eric began to communicate with some people through the Internet. Eric used a fake name to ensure his anonym-

ity; however when he sent his picture to the person with whom he was corresponding, the individual turned out to be a fellow Penn law

student who recognized the picture. With courage and strength Eric faced this situation, and decided to come out publicly. He found Penn to be a very supportive place, and chose his close friend, the Vice Dean of Student Affairs, to be the first person to whom he outed himself. Eric was also surrounded by a very supportive network of family and friends who embraced his decision to live his life true to himself.

Eric graduated from Penn Law in 2003. He decided to clerk at the Court of Chancery in Delaware, where he was surprisingly outed on his first day. Every-

one with whom he worked was extremely supportive and open, and Eric describes this outing at work a "very positive experience." While at the Court, Eric worked on many high profile cases and gained much experience working closely with judges. While working at the Court Eric met and began dating Kurt Klinger E'01. Kurt and Eric met in December 2003 and dated until Eric's de-

parture from Philadelphia in 2004. Once his year of clerking had finished, Eric decided to accept a position at a law firm where he had interned during the summer so in 2004 Eric returned to New York.

Although Eric thoroughly enjoyed his position in New York, he missed Philadelphia and Kurt, and made the decision to return in 2005. Eric began working at the firm Morris, Nichols, Arsht and Tunnell LLP in 2005 (www.mnat.com).

Eric's work is very specialized and it is difficult to find another firm in the United States that has a group dedicated to the same type of work in which Eric and his colleagues are involved. In a nutshell, the group he works with advises corporations on issues relating to the Delaware General Corporation Law and advises directors and controlling stockholders of corporations on how to act in compliance with their fiduciary responsibilities to the corporation and its stockholders. This often involves assisting directors in large transactions.



Eric loves his job. Although the hours can be long and intense, he feels he is gaining great experience and is interacting with very high profile individuals, whom he aids in advising on a regular basis. Eric has found his work environment to be very supportive and is very satisfied with his employment.

Despite his tremendous work schedule, Eric also finds time to be involved with numerous organizations. He sits on the Board of Directors of Gay and Lesbian Lawyers of Philadelphia (GALLOP). Eric has also been very vocal at his firm advocating for minority attorneys in Delaware. Recognizing the challenges gay lawyers face in Delaware, Eric brought it to the attention of one of his bosses and has become very active in the reconstitution of his firm's Diversity Committee. After organizing a GALLOP event in Wilmington with the Delaware chapter of the ACLU, Eric was asked to join the Board of Directors of that ACLU chapter. He also organizes, through PennGALA, an annual dinner bringing students and prominent LGBT attorneys together for a night of food and fun.

Eric and Kurt now reside in Philadelphia with

their dog, Gromit, and cat, Stitch. Beside working extremely hard as a lawyer and sitting on so many Boards, Eric also finds time for one of his favorite pastimes, cooking. He also loves the Mets and enjoys traveling, which can be difficult with his pets. He seems very happy and it was an honor to speak with him. At twenty-seven he has accomplished so much, and regardless of his extremely busy schedule, he always finds time to work on behalf of the LGBT community. Eric leads a tremendous life and we are honored to have him as a part of the Penn community.

-Katie Schoen

If you, or another Penn alumni you know, want to be featured in "Out & In Focus," or if you would like to suggest another Penn alumni to be highlighted, please contact the OUTlines staff at <center@dolphin.upenn.edu> or 215-898-5044.

Thank you!



Homecoming '06

Penn's homecoming is October 27-28, 2006. Join PennGALA (Penn's LGBT Alumni Association) for their programs:

PennGALA Brunch Reception & Video Premier

Sat, Oct 28, 10a-noon

The Carriage House [3907 Spruce St]

Gather for the premiere of a video documenting PennGALA's history. Student and alumni leaders will make brief remarks, and brunch will be served.

3rd Annual PennGALA Speed Mentoring

Sat, Oct 28, 4p

The Carriage House [3907 Spruce St]

After a short alumni panel presentation for current students, this program will break out into discussion groups to explore career-related topics including, but not limited to, issues of relevance to LGBT individuals. The more participation we have from LGBT alumni, the richer the experience will be for students, so please sign up to join us! Light refreshments will be served. For more information and to register, please contact Tom Hier, WG '85, at <hier@biddhier.com>.

Taste of Penn: A Celebration of Diversity

Sat, Oct 28, 6-9p

Penn Museum, Warden Garden [3260 South St]

Spend an evening surrounded by friends, food and music celebrating Penn's cultural diversity. Don't miss the beginner salsa/merengue lesson at 7p! Hosted by the Penn Alumni Diversity Alliance: Association of Latino Alumni, Black Alumni Society, James Brister Society, PennGALA, and University of Pennsylvania Asian Alumni Network.

To register for these programs, please go to <www.alumni.upenn.edu/homecoming2006> or call Nicole Maloy in Alumni Relations at 215-898-6168.



PennGALA
Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Alumni Association
UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

Trans Fund for Penn Students

Established a fund to support Penn students at making a gender transition. The fund is believed to be the first of its kind at a U.S. college or university.

Leslie's 2002 book, *Hidden in Plain Sight*, tells her story of growing up male in suburban Philadelphia, having sex reassignment surgery at age 23, and living in secrecy as a transgender woman. Following surgery, Leslie had successful careers as a model and performer, but also battled with drugs and was involved with sex work. She wrote the book both to tell her story and begin living

honestly and openly. This experience was important as living an unhidden life has been joyful. Recently, Leslie was seen in *Beautiful Daughters*, a moving documentary airing on the Logo cable channel. The film focuses on a production of *The Vagina Monologues* in California in which Leslie appeared. The standard script of the world-famous performance piece was rewritten by playwright Eve Ensler for a cast made up entirely male to female transsexuals.

Two years ago, Leslie decided to leave Texas, where she worked as a real estate

developer, to return to the Philadelphia area and her family here. She also decided to give back to the community, sharing some of the proceeds from her book with others encountering some of the same challenges she had faced. Conversations with Bob Schoenberg, LGBT Center Director, led to the establishment of the Leslie Townsend Fund.

The fund is administered by the LGBT Center to benefit Penn students making the transition from male to female or female to male. Grants from the fund, currently capped at \$500, are in-

tended to be used for, but not limited to, hormones, therapies, surgeries, legal matters, and school-related expenses.

It is hoped the initial gifts made by Leslie Townsend and a few family members and friends will be supplemented by contributions from others, allowing the fund to continue to support students in need far into the future.

For information about applying for a grant from Fund – or to make a gift to the Fund – please contact Bob Schoenberg.

~Bob Schoenberg

HONORING MATTHEW

As we anticipated National Coming Out Day (NCOD) events at Penn, we felt a part of a supportive community for LGBTQ students.

without a face: we immediately thought of our past, our mission, the reasons for the creation of Allies. Matthew Shepard was a 21-year-old man who, because of his sexual orientation, was attacked brutally by two assailants and abandoned to die on October 12, 1998. In honor and remembrance of Shepard, our members push for recognition and awareness of the still-prevalent LGBT-related hate crimes in the United States.

During the week of National Coming Out Day, Allies launched its activism campaign in honor of Matthew Shepard. Allies' aim for National Coming Out Day was to raise awareness about LGBT hate crime issues at Penn and to show visible support to the LGBT community as allies and members.

In addition to our public awareness campaign, Allies screened "The Laramie Project" for its constituent mem-

bers and other interested people. The film, detailing the events of people's reactions in Laramie, Wyoming to Matthew Shepard's death, brought forth a more concrete and real perspective on the brutality inflicted on one young man. The film encouraged Allies members to take a more defined stand on activism against LGBT hate crimes and empowered them to think beyond a film or a flyer.

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As an officer of Allies, Penn's Gay-Straight Alliance, NCOD meant more than a name

HONORING MATTHEW

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Matthew Shepard's death will not be forgotten as a part of Allies' founding and America's sad and brutal acknowledgement of the lack of sexual and gender identity awareness in today's society. We continue to move forward to educate the entire Penn community about these issues and provide members of the University with a visible avenue from which to demonstrate their support of LGBTQ issues, rights, and community in general.

~ Sheyla Medina

Coming ^{out} to College

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tests to the incredible diversity Penn has to offer.

There is no doubt Penn's LGBT community is more than I could ask for, but the Penn community as a whole is also extremely LGBT friendly in my opinion, again much to my great surprise. I have not experienced any hostility whatsoever and people have only been supportive. All I can say is that I have made the right choice.

~Terrence Green

Identity & Dislocation

"To talk about identity now may seem astoundingly superficial, yet who we are and how we see ourselves, how we are seen, and

of Americanness that it derives its sense of righteousness and manifest destiny. It is because it is American that it can declare itself a liberat-

other 'hyphen Americans,' saw herself, as others do, as not really American. Yet further in the conversation the student was quick to

"...who we are and how we see ourselves, how we are seen, and how we see others is essential to the complex challenges in which we find ourselves now in the world."



how we see others is essential to the complex challenges in which we find ourselves now in the world; it is also essential to the stories that we tell."

This was the starting point and basis behind the "Identity and Dislocation" lecture given by writer Achy Obejas on October 10. The discussion revolved around American involvement with the Middle East — specifically the war in Iraq — understanding the history and culture behind it, and coming to terms with our personal identities as 'hyphen Americans.'

Obejas described the implications behind America as a nation declaring war on Iraq as "...from this identity

ing force that the values it brings to this strategic corner of the Middle East are pushed as transformative and true." That same identity is neglected constantly by 'hyphen Americans' whose countries and ethnic groups may have experienced such American acts of righteous intrusion.

Obejas cited an example of a Puerto Rican-American student in one of her classes who repetitively denied her American status in a discussion about the war, despite being born and raised in the States. It was as if she did not want to claim her "new" nation despite being very distant from her "old" one. The woman, like many

claim her so-called 'American Values.' To all of this Obejas posed the question: "where do I fit in?"

As a Cuban born, Jew by choice, American citizen who is a lesbian, where *does* she fit? Her answer: "I have never been anything but who I am...and it doesn't change." Exactly how she belongs may change depending on where she is and with whom she is associating, however. Even in the United States, a country of diverse immigrants and a supposed melting pot, the status quo allows the government to have intrusive powers to enforce its values, the answer to where Obejas, and indeed all of us, fit in is not definite.

~KeAndra Dodds

MAKING THE CHOICE

I recently completed an assignment asking students to identify a

Yet, all too often, queer people are first defined not by their roles in an

being over-aware of his sexuality, yet pressured to quell it. He also found similar struggles by individuals of other identities: female employees who don't speak of their children lest they be thought of mothers first and workers second, actors and other notable people who changed names to lose ethnic characteristics, and disabled persons who position themselves so their disabilities are of lesser focus. Covering, he argues, exists everywhere in society, not just in the LGBT community.

effective leaders know when to table their personal agendas for the group's sake. This does not mean abandoning all hopes of progress or change, but instead knowing when to prioritize the group's focus to achieve the greatest impact. Leaders in the queer community have been good at this, but they need to become better.

Finally, there needs to be a new emphasis on squashing the archaic notion of only "one queerness." Holding others, and more importantly ourselves, to a predisposed set of standards is wrong. The queer community has fought too long to submit to heterosexist ideas of queer identity. We should not expect each other to conform to any rigid definition. That is what makes the queer community so welcoming and accepting: that it welcomes and accepts. Overly expressing your queerness to fit an expectation is just as foolish as suppressing it to fit a standard.

Queer professional or professional queer? Make the choice for yourself, but not for others.

~Jennifer Kaminski

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"...THERE NEEDS TO BE A NEW EMPHASIS ON SQUASHING THE ARCHAIC NOTION OF ONLY 'ONE QUEERNESS.' HOLDING OTHERS, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY OURSELVES, TO A PREDISPOSED SET OF STANDARDS IS WRONG."
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community leader, interview them, and dissect their path to success. The assignment was vague and left me with a plethora of questions: a community leader defined how, by whom, and by what merits? As an intern at the LGBT Center, an even trickier question posed itself: should I select a queer leader or a leader who happens to be queer?

Why is it different for the queer community? Why is one title always appended to the other? You never hear someone say, "That's the new employee, Susan. And, by the way, she sleeps with men."

organization, but by their sexual orientation.

A little agitated by this dilemma, I did a Google search for "queer professional identity" and I found a January 2006 *New York Times* article by Yale Law professor Kenji Yoshino. Yoshino recently published the book, *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* and spoke last spring at Penn.

In the *NY Times* article, Yoshino talks about his internal struggle regarding the expression of his sexual orientation at work. Years after coming out of the closet, he found himself

I return to my earlier question: what qualifies somebody as a queer community leader? Do we hold them to a higher standard than to those we hold ourselves? I hope so, since every group should hold its leaders to high standards. But I do not understand why those standards include an expectation of extreme queerness.

The focus should not be on passing or transparency but instead on excellent leadership skills. A leader should first and foremost lead; in other words, the emphasis is on the task at hand and not on personal business. The most

Inaugural Mark D. Gordon Lecture

Chris Bartlett, long-time gay and health activist, delivered the inaugural Mark D. Gordon Annual Lectureship entitled, "Promoting Gay Men's Health Through Mentorships" on October 16 at Penn's LGBT Center.

The annual lectureship was established with a gift from Mark D. Gordon W'65, L'68, a generous LGBT Center supporter. Gordon, of Washington, DC and Fort Lauderdale, FL, an attorney who recently retired after long service at the United States Environmental Protection Agency, was present at the lecture.

Bartlett directed the SafeGuards Gay Men's Health Project in Philadelphia for ten years and is currently the lead consultant for the LGBT Community Assessment, a project gathering data about LGBT communities to make recommendations regarding community organizing, health, housing, and economic development. Bartlett, who holds degrees from Brown and Oxford Universities, also co-facilitates the Gay Men's Health Leadership Academy, a national meeting of leaders in the field of gay men's

health and wellness sponsored by the White Crane Institute. In addition, he is a consultant to the Information Services Unit of the Philadelphia Department of Health's AIDS Activities Coordinating Office.

In his talk, Bartlett addressed approaches for building connections between generations of gay men to heal trauma while fostering trust and support. He introduced the audience to the innovative concept of "unspoken mentorships." Such relationships involve an individual deciding to mentor another (or several others) with no explicit agreement or contract (such as is the case with a Big Brother/Little Brother arrangement through an agency). **M e n t o r s** "watch out" for their mentees and provide tips, resources, or personal connections from time to time, without labeling them as mentorship **a s s i s -**

tance. Bartlett dedicated his remarks to the late Eric Rofes, community activist, scholar, and prolific writer, whom Bartlett learned after many years, had chosen to act as his own "secret" mentor.

Bartlett indicated that shortcomings of more formal mentorships are assumptions that the mentor must be older than the individual mentored – and that the wisdom and life experienced exchange flows only from the mentor to the mentee. In counteracting those assumptions, Bartlett described several individuals he has chosen to mentor, some younger, some older than himself, men, women, and transpeople, from whom he

learns as much as he teaches.

Health concerns particularly onerous in the gay male community may lend themselves to mentor intervention, Bartlett asserted. Among such health concerns, he included cigarette-smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, use of drugs, and "barebacking" and other unsafe sexual activities. Mentors can broach such problems with understanding as to how they arise and without judgment. Bartlett expressed dismay that gay men do not have public forums, present in some other communities, in which significant problems and ethical dilemmas can be vetted in honest yet safe ways.

-Bob Schoenberg



Play On!

Cool. Fun. Hilarious. Those are a few words describing the Dan Fishback and Gina Young concert early in October that kicked off a series of events celebrating National Coming Out Day this year. The concert started off with near late arrival of the work study student who was opening the LGBT Center. Thankfully, it wasn't long before things were up and rolling.

Punk, rock, queer, and everyone in-between came out to hear the musical styling of the two singers and they definitely weren't disappointed. Gina Young began the concert with the soft strumming of her guitar, finding a balance between punk, rock, and activism. I couldn't help reflecting on my own experiences with straight men when I heard Young's unique and amazing voice singing about a 'So-called str8 girl.' The

song is one most LGBT people would be able to understand. Of course, Young's monologues on Bush's America, and the violence faced by lesbian and bisexual women also left the audience with more than enough to reflect on. After hearing this, it

released in 2005, the audience heard the songs music of Dan Fishback. A Penn graduate, Fishback took over with his playful voice and undeniably funny lyrics. He graced the audience with songs from his debut solo album, 'Chastity,'

history in New York. Fishback has become a permanent fixture in this genre, and his songs have spoken to the fear and frustration with which many LGBT youth deal. All I know is that, I for one definitely will be checking out his new album, 'Mammal' to be released in 2007.



easy to see how Young combines her activism with LGBT youth and her music.

After about an hour of Young's music from her album 'She's So Androgynous,'

hailed by many to be a slice of "anti-folk genius."

What is anti-folk you ask? Anti-folk is a combination of punk rock and American folk music that has its

If I were you, I would rush to check out both of these up-and-coming artists at their websites located at <danfishback.com> for Dan and <ginayoung.com> for Gina.

-Malek H. Lewis

The editorial staff of *OUTlines* seeks submissions from all members of the Penn community. Poetry, stories, essays, artwork, and articles are welcome. Inquiries and/or submissions should be sent to:

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