

VCU LGBTQIA+ Historical Timeline

Excerpt from the LGBTQ Task Force Report

Fall 1974 VCU students form an organization, Gay Alliance of Students, and are denied registration by the Board of Visitors as an official student organization. The students sue the Board of Visitors and Student Life, citing violations of 1st and 14th amendments.

November 7, 1975 The first court decision (4th circuit) supports the Board of Visitors although requires that the students be given some (not all) of the benefits which student organizations receive. Both parties appeal the decision.

October 28, 1976 Court of Appeals (4th circuit) reverses decision and VCU is ordered to allow the organization to be formalized as a VCU student organization.

June 30, 1980 Stephen Lenton, Assistant Dean of Student Services, leaves VCU and writes in the April 22-28, 1980 Commonwealth Times, "For years my salary increased dramatically year after year and I was appointed to many important committees and tasks. VCU was good to me. Today I sit in my beautiful office, one discreetly removed from the regular student thoroughfares. I am more published than most of my colleagues. I get superior student reviews of my teaching and counselling ability My services as speaker and consultant are in greater demand than my colleagues, people who by and large have been courageously supportive of my concerns. Yet I have been told point blank that I can never be promoted. "My" programs have been cancelled or dumped, "my" staff of six reduced to a part-time secretary, and appointment to professionally and personally enriching committee has ended. My sphere of influence, responsibility and input seems destined to shrink to something smaller than a gnat's eye."

1993 At the request of William and Mary faculty, Chris Burnside, a VCU faculty member, approaches VCU Benefits to secure health care benefits for spouses of gay and lesbian employees. William and Mary leads the call for domestic partner benefits at state universities.

1998 Although its first official meeting will not be until 2001, the University Committee on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Issues begins to meet regularly. Hereafter, in this document, the committee is referred to as the LGBT Subcommittee until the summer of 2012 when it becomes Equality VCU.

1999 Safe Zone at VCU is launched by Social Work graduate student, Martha Ann Spruill, and becomes a university-wide outreach service of University Counseling Services. Safe Zone continues to play an integral role in making VCU more inclusive by reducing homophobia and heterosexism on the VCU campus.

Summer 1999 VCU adds sexual orientation to the non-discrimination policy.

1999 The LGBT Subcommittee establishes a Fall LGBT Welcome Reception for faculty, staff, and students, now referred to as the Welcome Back Ice Cream Social. Fall 2016 will be its 17th year.

December 2000 VCU's EEO/AA publication, Straight Talk, is entirely devoted to LGBT issues, edited by Velma Jackson-Williams, the Assistant to the Provost and Director, EEO/AAS. Velma Jackson-Williams works with staff and faculty to form an official committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues. In March the LGBT Subcommittee votes on a mission statement, developed to aid them in seeking status as a full university committee.

October 5, 2001 The LGBT Subcommittee is charged by the Provost, Rod McDavis, to review the status of GLBT people on the campuses of various peer institutions, to include the six doctoral schools in Virginia also. The report is to include activities, benefits, policies, services, and reporting structures at these peers. This report is created and delivered to the Provost and the President.

February 2002 There is documentation of two student groups related to LGBTQIA issues: The Sexual Minority Rights Forum and the Sexual Minority Student Alliance. No information on the official start or end date to these groups is found in the VCU archives.

2002 VCU faculty member Liz Cramer publishes the book Addressing Homophobia and Heterosexism on College Campuses.

2002 Rod McDavis, Provost, becomes the first university administrator to attend the LGBT Subcommittee's annual welcome LGBT reception.

September/October 2002 A violent altercation occurs in the Student Commons, and a forum is organized by SMSA, the Sexual Minority Student Association. This forum is attended by campus groups and numerous off-campus groups, plus the VCU police and VP of Student Affairs, Henry Rhone. VCU police assess the incident as un-premeditated hate crime. Those in attendance are concerned that

VCU LGBTQIA+ Historical Timeline

Excerpt from the LGBTQ Task Force Report

there is no official announcement to the campus at large about the incident.

2003 The LGBT Subcommittee provides Human Resource Sensitivity Training on both campuses.

March 2003 The LGBT Subcommittee is informed that it is not an official stand-alone committee of the university. It pursues the same classification as VCU's Black Education Association (BEA) as a subcommittee of the university's Equity and Diversity Committee, later Inclusive Excellence.

May 2003 President Eugene Trani denies the LGBT Subcommittee proposal to be officially recognized as a university committee. Thus, the LGBT Subcommittee becomes an official subcommittee of VCU's Equity and Diversity Committee.

April 2004 Domestic Partners Benefits proposals for gym memberships and library benefits are approved in Faculty Senate; in October, Monroe Park Recreation Sports Advisory Committee approves domestic partner recreational sports membership. Liz Cramer, Martha Moon, Chris Burnside, Marianne Miller work on these proposals.

Summer 2004 HB 751 goes into effect, making Virginia one of the most oppressive states for LGBT people. This legislation prohibits the state from recognizing civil unions and even strips contractual rights from same-sex couples.

October 26 and November 16, 2004 The LGBT Subcommittee designs and facilitates EEO training, "Understanding and Eliminating Sexual Orientation Bias in the Workplace: An Issue of Productivity" on each campus.

April 16, 2005 VCU LGBT Subcommittee introduces Mike Fuller, VCU alum, who earmarks his VCU donations (matched by IBM) for LGBT initiatives.

May 13, 2005 The LGBT Subcommittee develops a Domestic Partner Benefits Proposal (John David Benson, Chris Burnside, Marianne Miller, Sarah Watstein, and Donna Coghil, authors). Equity and Diversity approves the LGBT Subcommittee's Domestic Partner Benefits proposal, which is forwarded to the Provost, VPs and the President.

June 7, 2005 and December 9, 2005 The LGBT Subcommittee co-chairs meet with Provost (Gottfredson) to advance domestic partners benefits proposal, to discuss the LGBT Resource Center Proposal developed by students, to request the addition of gender identity to VCU's non-discrimination policy, and to inform him about the creation of an LGBT annual award.

September 9, 2005 Jeremy Kidd, President, Queer Action, announces focus groups to explore the development of an LGBT alumni chapter.

October 17, 2005 VCU's LGBTQ community is excluded from VCU Athletics' "1st Ever, You Think You Can Dance Contest" to be held during half-time during a men's basketball game in a university-wide e-mail promoting "co-ed" (repeated at least three times in the e-mail) dance contest. E-mails, telephone calls are made. A student protest is planned. Ultimately, the event is cancelled. The LGBT Subcommittee sends the Provost a statement about the heterosexism and homophobia implicit in the event and in the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics' response and asks that the Provost require education, increased awareness and sensitivity.

October 25, 2005 VCU's Human Resources conveys that Palmer VCU has been advised against forming a statewide consortium to provide domestic partner benefits.

November 2005 The LGBT Subcommittee receives the first draft of LGBT resource center from Jeremy Kidd, President, Queer Action, which includes a request for a full-time LGBT Coordinator. Jeremy Kidd, President, Queer Action, meets with the LGBT Subcommittee to ask for a letter of support for a stand-alone LGBT Resource Center. Full proposal is sent to the President in December 2005.

November 11, 2005 The LGBT Subcommittee establishes VCU's first LGBT award, the Burnside Watstein LGBT Award to recognize the contributions of students, faculty, staff, and community members to making VCU more inclusive for LGBTQ people. This award is named after two of the leaders in equality at VCU, Chris Burnside, retired Dance Chair, and Sarah Watstein, former Associate University Librarian for Public Services.

2006 The LGBT Subcommittee is asked by students (Jeremy Kidd) to advocate for adding "gender identity and its expression" to VCU's

VCU LGBTQIA+ Historical Timeline

Excerpt from the LGBTQ Task Force Report

non-discrimination policy. The Subcommittee gladly accepts. Gender identity and expression is added to the university's non discrimination policy in 2015.

September 15, 2006 In response to Queer Action's and the LGBT Subcommittee's request for an LGBT Resource Center, VCU Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) is given a part-time GTA position devoted to "provide assistance for the LGBT student community and Women students, including programs and services that promote well-being and success for these students and that assist with a broader understanding and sensitivity within the University community." This represents the first ever expansion of OMSA's services to the LGBTQ VCU community.

November, 2006 The LGBT Subcommittee publishes its first call for nominations for Burnside Watstein LGBT Award.

January 2007 The first official LGBTQIA support group at VCU begins meeting at the Multicultural Center. The group's aim is to provide an affirming place of support and discussion for VCU students.

April 26, 2007 The LGBT Subcommittee hosts its Inaugural Burnside Watstein Award Ceremony, honoring Chris Burnside and Sarah Watstein for whom the award is named, and its first recipients: Jeremy Kidd, Mike Fuller, and Scott Whitlow. As of Fall, 2015, 32 students, staff, faculty, and community members have received this award.

Spring 2007 The Attorney General's office has questioned VCU about its extension of domestic partner gym membership options to faculty and staff. President Trani addresses the situation about gym membership by honoring the memberships already in place until the subscriptions expire. VCU will drop the membership category for spouses and for domestic partners and create a new membership category which allows faculty and staff to purchase a guest membership (1+1 membership). As with VCU's previous domestic partner policy, Dr. Trani would prefer for the new policy to have low visibility.

2008 Students submit a resolution to both Student Government Associations to amend VCU's Reaffirmation Statement of the Equal Opportunity Policy to include gender identity and its expression. The resolution is approved by both associations.

2008 VCU LGBT Subcommittee presents the resolution to add gender identity and its expression to the Faculty Senate who approves the resolution. Staff Senate approves the resolution the following semester.

May 2009 The LGBT Subcommittee updates the Domestic Partner Benefits Proposal.

Fall 2009 Jan Altman and the LGBT Subcommittee petition the university's Committee on Equity and Diversity to support VCU's participation in the Campus Pride LGBT-Friendly Index. This index measures VCU's inclusivity against a listing of defined benchmarks. The request is not approved until 2010.

Fall 2009 Michael Rao becomes the first VCU President to attend the LGBT Subcommittee's Annual Fall Welcome Reception.

March 6, 2010 The Commonwealth's Attorney General Cuccinelli's letter is e-mailed to all state universities advising that they should remove sexual orientation protections from university non-discrimination policies. A rally demonstration and a student protest march to the legislature followed. President Rao's initial response is not clearly supportive of the LGBT community. He receives many e-mails and letters from VCU alum, faculty, staff, and students. The Provost and the LGBT Subcommittee hold five town meetings (between both campuses) and collect comments (which are later reviewed and organized by themes for the Subcommittee). General topics of concern during these forums includes diversity as a core VCU value; supporting VCU's current non-discrimination policy; seeking a strong response from the university; the impacts of this type of discrimination; how discrimination negatively affects recruitment and retention of students, staff and faculty; issues with current state laws and perceived threats to academic freedom; equal rights protection; expanding the discrimination policy; and several others. The Subcommittee writes a letter to President Rao to include a request that the BOV act now to explicitly reject the Attorney General's advice and that we also take action to add "gender identity and its expression" to the reaffirmation statement because it has been fully vetted by the university (student government associations and both faculty and staff councils).

April 2010 Chris Burnside reads his personal letter to President Rao at the 4th annual Burnside Watstein Award Ceremony. The letter addresses how the absence of domestic partner benefits at VCU has led Burnside and his partner, another VCU faculty member, to leave VCU so his partner can take a job at a university which offers equal employment and treatment.

VCU LGBTQIA+ Historical Timeline

Excerpt from the LGBTQ Task Force Report

December 2010 41 members of the VCU Police participate in the 2-hour Safe Zone workshop and received a Safe Zone sticker. Police have held regular Safe Zone trainings since, including every Academy receiving training.

December 2010 The university's Equity and Diversity Committee approves the LGBT Subcommittee to proceed in collecting information and participating in Campus Pride's LGBT-Friendly Index.

Spring 2011 The LGBT Subcommittee is approached by Student Affairs to combine the Burnside Watstein LGBT Awards with PACME, the multicultural awards. To give more emphasis to the LGBT Awards, the LGBT Subcommittee moves the stand-alone event to Fall to align with LGBT History Month.

2011 The LGBT Subcommittee, VCU and Network Virginia co-sponsor a statewide LGBTQ Symposium, "And Justice for All." Keynote address "2010 State of Higher Education for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People" by Dr. Susan Rankin.

Fall 2011 Another group, The Rainbow Group, offered by University Counseling Services, begins meeting, offering support to closeted LGBTQ students. Currently, VCU does not have a full-time staff person for its LGBTQIA-supportive programs.

2011-12 With Jan Altman's leadership, the LGBT Subcommittee begins its visits to various departments to answer questions on the Campus Pride LGBT-Friendly Index.

2012 The LGBT Subcommittee completes the Campus Pride LGBT-Friendly Index, and the President of the university and the Provost agree to publish VCU's results. VCU receives 3 out of 5 stars.

April 27, 2012 The LGBT Subcommittee hosts VCU's inaugural Lavender Graduation.

June 2012 David Hanson, the Vice President Finance and Administration and the Assistant VP of Human Resources, Cindy Andrews request that the Subcommittee update the Domestic Partner Benefits proposal and provide anecdotal information about the impact for faculty and staff. Hanson is later told by the Attorney General's Office and the Board of Visitors to cease all efforts in this regard.

Summer 2012 The LGBT Subcommittee formalizes a new name, Equality VCU, along with an official mission statement, goals and objectives.

September 29, 2012 Rodney the Ram makes his first appearance at Virginia's Pridefest, thanks to targeted efforts by Equality VCU.

October 10, 2012 VCU welcomes its founding Vice President for Diversity and Equity, Wanda S. Mitchell, Ed.D.

November 19, 2012 Despite a strong, winning record, a superior national reputation as a coach and excellent reviews from student-athletes, VCU does not renew the contract of its women's volleyball coach, James Finley, an out gay man. VCU holds town hall meetings to address the protests over the contract non-renewal and the general climate towards LGBT issues in Athletics. Because non-discrimination against LGBT people is not codified into state law, Finley has no recourse beyond VCU's investigation.

February 12, 2013 David Hanson testifies to a house committee asking that the legislature codify non-discrimination in state law. This is the first time a VCU administrator has joined faculty and staff to testify before this legislative body. Hanson reports that there are repercussions from legislators.

February 26, 2013 At the request of the Division of Inclusive Excellence, Pat Griffin, Professor Emerita in Social Justice Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst visits VCU as a consultant to discuss strategies for working with athletics to maintain a respectful and inclusive LGBTQ climate.

July 1, 2013 Timothy Bostic (VCU, 2006) and Tony London seek to obtain a marriage license at the Norfolk Circuit Court but are turned down because of the state's ban on marriage equality. The couple then files a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court. They are joined by Carol Schall, a VCU faculty member and 2003 alumna, and Mary Townley. On February 13, 2014, the U.S. District Court rules in favor of the plaintiffs declaring that laws prohibiting gay and lesbian couples from marrying are unconstitutional. Marriage equality is granted to Virginia, West Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina (Maryland, also in the Fourth Circuit had previously adopted marriage equality via legislative action in 2014).

VCU LGBTQIA+ Historical Timeline

Excerpt from the LGBTQ Task Force Report

August 30, 2013 As an outcome of her discussions with the Provost (Dr. Bev Warren), Tarynn Witten forms VCU GenderSafe to address making VCU more safe and welcoming for students, staff and faculty who claim gender non-conforming identities. GenderSafe begins its discussions about Gender neutral bathrooms; Dormitory safety; Campus police training; VCU website.

September 18, 2013 The Division of Inclusive Excellence and Equality VCU introduce VCU's results on the LGBT-Friendly Campus Pride Index. Shane Windmeyer, LGBT advocate and co-founder of Campus Pride gives a keynote on both campuses.

November 1, 2013 VCU's Office of Inclusive Excellence hires its first Diversity Educator and LGBT Coordinator, Michael Pisarcik, though he leaves several months later.

2014 Alex Wagaman, faculty member in Social Work, asks that Equality VCU work with the Office of Inclusive Excellence to provide student scholarships for Creating Change conference.

May 2014 VCU's Wellness Resource Center hires an LGBTQ Violence Prevention Health Educator to address needs of LGBTQ survivors of interpersonal violence. This position is a 3-year, externally funded position.

October 6, 2014 The State of Virginia is forced to offer parallel benefits for same sex married partners of state employees when the Supreme Court of the United States ordered this provision.

October 29, 2014 Pat Griffin, Professor Emerita in Social Justice Education at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, returns to VCU as a consultant to assess the progress made in the climate for LGBTQ individuals at VCU. Among recommendations were the creation of a full time position as Director for LGBT matters, and the creation of an LGBT Center with an operating budget and additional staff.

January 2015 Equality VCU submits answers to the updated Campus Pride LGBT-Friendly Index and on May 15, 2015 is informed that VCU received a 3.5 stars overall. 3.5 stars for sexual orientation, 3 stars for gender identity/expression.

September 18, 2015 Thirteen members of VCU's Police Department, including the entire Academy class, take the first ever Transgender Sensitivity in a Policing Context training, a special program designed by Alex Wagaman, Kaylin Tingle, Donna Coghill, and other key members on campus and in the Richmond Community.

Fall 2015 VCU's Chief of Police, John Venuti, holds an LGBTQ Listening Forum, seeking input from students in regards to LGBTQ Climate on campus.

Spring 2015 The Division of Inclusive Excellence initiates a search for a Diversity Educator and LGBTQ Coordinator. This search brings Paris Fitzgerald Prince to VCU, who is hired as a Special Assistant for LGBTQ Initiatives, late summer 2015.

October 29, 2015 Jen Manion, a leading scholar in U.S. Trans History and a national leader in LGBT campus services and inclusion, visits VCU and presents a public lecture to an overflow crowd, "Unraveling Gender from the Classroom to the Restroom" as part of an educational awareness campaign launched to announce VCU's bathroom signage change, an important indicator of the University's commitment to an inclusive climate for all persons.

Fall 2015 13 anti-LGBT bills are introduced in the Virginia State Legislature.

December 2015 Following a strategic experiential analysis conducted at a LGBTQ Leadership Forum and amid growing campus conversations on issues of diversity and inclusion, Special Assistant for LGBTQ Initiatives Paris Prince convenes the Task Force for LGBTQ Equity and Inclusion within the Division for Inclusive Excellence.

January 2016 Provost Gail Hackett and Vice President for Health Sciences Dr. Marsha Rappley provide funds for eleven VCU students to attend the Creating Change Conference.

January 2016 Division for Inclusive Excellence initiates search for Director for LGBTQ Inclusion and Diversity Initiatives.