

3 March 2008

To the WWU Presidential Search Committee:

My name is Ronna J. Biggs, and I am writing as a member and current chairperson of Western Washington University's Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Concerns Committee (LGBTCC). The mission of the LGBTCC is to create a safe, supportive, and inclusive educational environment by promoting awareness and understanding of LGBT issues and by advocating for the unique needs and concerns of LGBT students, faculty, and staff. On campus, the committee has the following roles:

- 1.) to mentor LGBT students in their growth and development in order to support academic and personal success;
- 2.) to support and advocate for LGBT students, faculty, and staff as they address issues of safety / hostility and discrimination / inclusion in the university community;
- 3.) to serve as an advocate and resource for WWU students, faculty, staff, and campus organizations by supporting diversity and anti-discrimination policies; and,
- 4.) to promote the use of current and accurate information about LGBT individuals and issues, and, in general, the use of inclusive language within both the academic and social contexts of the university community.

As the process for searching for a new president unfolds, I encourage the committee to recruit candidates who have demonstrated leadership and knowledge in creating socially just communities and fostering diversity education and multicultural competency for faculty, staff and students. Western's Mission and Strategic Plan outline core values and objectives to create the Western Experience. I encourage you to seek a president who also reflects those values and who can serve as a visionary and innovator as Western's student, staff and faculty populations become increasingly diverse and we serve in our role in local, regional, national and global communities.

Our new president should be an individual who is open to new ideas, who is genuinely interested in understanding and addressing the unique needs and experiences of traditionally underrepresented populations, and who is committed to creating a safe, equitable and supportive environment for all of Western's LGBT student, faculty and staff community, as well as those who visit our campus. Our new president should "appreciate the importance of diversity of thought and people and seek to become [a] more diverse [campus];" "honor the contributions of all members of the campus community;" and be "committed to listening to all sides of an issue and [be] opposed to any form of discrimination." The president should "value and expect open, fair, and straightforward behavior and take personal and collective responsibility for [her/his] words and [her/his] actions..." and "...expect all members of the campus community to interact honestly and ethically." (*Western Washington University Strategic Plan, 2006.*)

I encourage the search committee to seek candidates who will demonstrate leadership in and deep understanding of the following areas:

1. Recruitment & Retention Plans for LGBT-identified Students, Staff & Faculty
 - a. Explore, encourage and create recruitment / retention efforts for LGBT-identified faculty, staff & students in conjunction with recruitment efforts outlined in the strategic plan.
 - b. Encourage review of “on-boarding” practices (new student, faculty and staff orientation processes) in key offices (e.g. Human Resources, University Residences, Academic Advising, etc.).
 - c. Understand the impacts of changing laws in Washington State regarding domestic partner benefits as well as evaluate campus policies and practices regarding domestic partner benefits to ensure equitability for all employees.
 - d. Support training opportunities for all members of campus regarding LGBT issues and ally development.
 - e. Financial scholarship development for LGBT students and/or students with an academic focus of LGBT studies.

2. Recognition & Campus Inclusion
 - a. President’s reception for LGBT faculty & staff (similar to the President’s reception for new faculty and staff of color).
 - b. Alumni group development for Western LGBT alumni.
 - c. Accurate and visible commitment to LGBT students, faculty & staff represented in diversity statements, especially on the WWU website, public talks, written materials presenting Western, etc.
 - d. LGBT representation on presidential campus and/or community advisory boards, especially those designed around issues of diversity and multiculturalism.

3. Campus Climate Assessment
 - a. WWU should undertake a campus-wide campus climate assessment to gather information on attitudes and perceptions, as well as gather information regarding the effectiveness, awareness and application of policies and practices that affect the LGBT population.
 - b. WWU has completed an initial survey through the Pride Foundation’s “Campus Climate Index” that reflects the current status of policies and practices on campus. It is imperative to continue this process on a larger scale to support strategic goals regarding self-assessment on our progress in creating a diverse and inclusive environment.
 - c. Strengthen availability and access for students, faculty and staff to report concerns or hate crimes. A hate crimes / incident reporting mechanism would support the maintenance of the campus infrastructure so “that the campus environment remains healthy, safe, and secure.” (*WWU Strategic Plan, 2006.*)

4. Equal Access Restrooms (EARs)
 - a. EARs are a concern for Transgender individuals, individuals with disabilities who have opposite sex caregivers, and students, faculty, staff or community members who bring a child of the opposite sex to campus. Individuals are placed in awkward circumstances in a forced binary choice of restrooms as the geographic frequency and convenience of uni-sex / EARs is low on Western’s campus.

- b. Creating and designating EARs should be an administrative led and funded decision to provide appropriate accommodations to campus and visiting community members and reflect Western's commitment to and sensitivity for issues with underrepresented populations.
- c. New facilities, including residence halls, classroom space and public buildings, should have EAR considerations.

5. Campus LGBT Resource Center

- a. Creation of a center with full-time, professional staff who will provide outreach, support, training and advocacy for students, faculty and staff.
- b. Such a center would serve as a central coordination point for resources, support groups, student assistance, and community connections as well.

I am proud of the work that the LGBTCC has done regarding serving as a resource for the LGBT campus community, assisting offices with creating safer spaces, establishing a faculty and staff network of mentors for students, and advocating for the rights of all in our community. Western has had significant accomplishments in the last three years. Several months ago, the Equal Opportunity Office began a significant updating of Western's nondiscrimination clause to include the phrase "gender identity and expression," and they continue efforts to update Western's publications and websites to reflect this change. Our University Residences Housing Assignments office also has a long history of coordinating accommodations for transgender students, and the doctors and nurses of our Student Health Services center specifically receive training on the unique needs of LGBT-identified students to provide them with appropriate, sensitive and effective health care. These are a few highlights of strides Western has made.

While there are a few offices, committees and individuals who have taken the lead in understanding, advocating for, and educating on the rights of LGBT students, faculty and staff, Western still has a journey to continue. This journey needs to move from the actions of a few, to a concerted institutional commitment to creating a socially just educational environment. As Western positions itself to be a premier institution, it is imperative that the valuable contributions of LGBT individuals be recognized, honored, celebrated, acknowledged and sought. I encourage the search committee to select a new president who will vigorously continue the creation of an exceptional campus in which ALL students, faculty and staff can live, work, teach and learn in a safe and affirming community.

Thank you for your consideration and best of luck in the search process. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

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Western Washington University Presidential Qualification Recommendations

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) Concerns Committee requests that the Presidential Search Committee recruits presidential candidates who have proven to be progressive in their views on LGBT issues. As you know, Western Washington University prides itself on creating a campus of inclusivity and we encourage you to search for a president who will not only be accepting, but actively respectful of the multiplicity of identities and diversity of the students, faculty, and staff of WWU. The new president should be aware that creating a campus and community free of discrimination against anyone of an LGBT identity is a very serious issue for our community.

Recently, our LGBT Concerns Committee has been dedicated to increasing our awareness of LGBT issues and focusing on ways we can positively enhance our campus. Our main tool of organization has been through a newly developed website, (*Campus Climate Index*) for LGBT prospective students who want to see how well their Universities of interest address LGBT issues. Through Campus Climate Index our committee has been able to learn what areas WWU needs to improve upon in order to make our campus a safer, more inclusive place for students. The areas that need more attention are as follows:

- Gender Identity and Expression scored 2.5 out of 5 stars. Based on these results, campus climate index recommends that our "campus strengthens its LGBT commitment by enacting more trans-inclusive programs and services."
- Policy Inclusion scored 3.5 out of 5 stars. One major problem area is found in defining diversity within our mission statements. The words "gender identity or expression" are not currently included in the campus non-discrimination statement (which we are currently addressing). The many written statements addressing diversity and/or discrimination need to be revised in order to respect our variety of students, faculty, and staff.
- LGBT Campus Safety scored 1.5 out of 5 stars. This poses a serious problem. Immediate change needs to occur based on this fact that certain students may not feel our campus is safe. Changes in the following areas are of important focus:
 - No training for campus police on LGBT issues
 - No safety outreach to LGBT student leaders/organizers
 - No violence prevention education based on LGBT issues

This information is provided to assist you in the selection process. You have a great opportunity to find a president that demonstrates quality education on these issues plus a creative attitude to continue to address the needs of our LGBT students, faculty, and staff.