2017-2018 LGBTIQA+ Advocacy Award Recipients

Members of the 2017-2018 Advocacy Award Committee worked hard to determine three winners from over 40 nominations recognizing the contributions of talented and committed UNC community members:

Undergraduate Awardee: Ariana Rivens

Ariana is graduating with a Bachelor’s in Psychology, as well as a Minor in Social and Economic Justice. She received four nominations for the Undergraduate LGBTIQ Advocacy Award, each filled with glowing praise. From the nominations, it was easy to see that this person has demonstrated her dedication to the LGBTQ community time and time again.

This awardee has been exceptionally active in LGBTQ advocacy in both her professional and personal lives. One area where this can be seen is in the work she has done as a Resident Advisor Mentor. By creating bulletin boards, highlighting diversity throughout her events for her residents, and serving as a multicultural advisor on the staff, she has been able to bring to light a number of issues in the LGBTQ community while serving as a clear ally and person of support for anyone struggling with their identity. Her impact has reached countless individual in the LGBTQ community at UNC.
Another area of note for this awardee is the work that she has done with UNC QTPOC, an undergraduate student group for queer and trans people of color. Her leadership in UNC QTPOC has been invaluable since its founding, which she played a most significant role in. She stepped up as an organizer and planned many of the events for the organization, including bake sales, movie nights, game nights, and meet-ups. She has worked towards getting new members, publicizing events, and ensuring that everyone in the organization felt safe and affirmed. Many of the steps she took to make the organization better, like providing rides for people without cars and bringing food to events, truly made it a space of comfort and love.

Through these avenues and through more personal means, this individual has become a cherished mentor to many. One nominator stated that “Through everything that she does, helped me through my coming out experience as someone who made me feel like my story was unique and valid, rather than another classic tale of a queer standout.” Another said “When I was a first year, I struggled accepting my sexuality and finding the courage to come out and take pride in my identity. was an integral person of support for me in one of my hardest times, and for that I am forever grateful. I’m not sure she even realizes how much she helped me in accepting my truth because she helps so many people in similar ways.”

All of the nominators spoke of this awardee as an intersectional advocate for all identities in the LGBTQ community. She brought awareness to issues through programming and advocacy for every party of the acronym LGBTIQA, not just the traditional sense of the word gay. She has also participated in efforts to advocate for civil rights for important and marginalized communities, standing up for the rights of LGBTQ folk and people of color. She has been an active part of protests on campus. On top of everything, she selflessly provides any member of the LGBTQ community with love, support, advice, and care. She has changed the lives of every LGBTQ-identifying person she has come across and will continue to do so in the future.

UNC will feel her absence sorely once she graduates this year and moves forward to her next adventure, but we wish her all the best as she continues on her path towards the field of clinical psychology, where she will continue shine as an advocate for marginalized folks.

Graduate/Professional Awardee: Kimberly Pentel

Kimberly is a clinical psychology doctoral student in the Department of Psychology and Neuroscience.

During her time so far at UNC, the awardee has made great strides in improving
LGBTIQ+ inclusion in her department, UNC’s campus, in North Carolina and nationwide. She has accomplished this by drawing attention to areas of academic and clinical training that could be improved and then providing education opportunities and community building spaces to address the needs of LGBTIQ-identified clients in an affirming and sensitive manner.

Her nominators remarked that the awardee is the “go to” person in her department for learning about best practices for working with LGBTIQ individuals, especially in terms of couple-based psychotherapy. She has supported her department in a myriad of ways, including organizing an LGBTIQ and Allies brunch during applicant weekend that focused on local resources and climate. She has solicited workshops from community experts, including a local certified sex therapist, on how to talk about sex with clients in an affirming and inclusive manner. She has helped coordinate a panel of LGBTIQ-identified faculty in the sciences and arranged tailored SafeZone trainings for her department. These programs aimed to increase LGBTIQ visibility, competence in talking about LGBTIQ issues in the classroom and in the therapy room, and awareness of local political events.

The awardee has also emerged as a leader on UNC’s campus. She serves as a board member of UNC Queer Grads. Queer Grads is a collaboration between the UNC LGBTQ Center and the Graduate School that provides opportunities and resources for LGBTIQA identified graduate students to support them in developing community and achieving academic success. She presented “When the Political Becomes Personal: Discussing LGBTQ+ Issues and Politics in Therapy” and “Couple Therapy with LGB Couples—Theoretical and Empirical Considerations for Affirming and Sensitive Therapy” as part of the UNC LGBTQ Graduate Speaker Series as well as other graduate program brown bag lunch talks.

Outside of UNC, she has fought back against anti-LGBTQ legislation in our state by speaking at national conferences about the clinical harm of such legislation. She has spoken about LGBTQ mental health to local providers and she helped the North Carolina Psychological Association draft a press release in response to legislative action of concern to her and the field of psychology and neuroscience.

Her nominators shared that for her dissertation, the awardee is conducting an important pioneering project: developing the first same-sex couple therapy to be subjected to empirical evaluation. Her pilot study is currently underway to deliver this therapy to a small sample of same-sex female couples. The study addresses an important, local gap in mental health care by providing culturally sensitive and accessible couple therapy. Findings will advance the field of sexual minority-affirming mental health care.
Faculty/Staff Awardee: Kai Ewing

The very first recipient in the faculty, staff, and postdoctoral scholars category, Kai has been described as an excellent role model and dedicated public servant as well as hardworking, humble and kind. Graduate assistants who work with this person expressed enthusiastic gratitude for such a wonderful example of passionate and committed advocacy.

Kai thoroughly embodies what it means to be an advocate, using their expertise in daily life to educate and advocate one-on-one within their department but also finding ways to have a broad impact across campus, in local communities, and beyond. We were so impressed by how Kai used their expertise and obvious love for library work to make crucial information and resources accessible to library users as well as to educate library professionals so as to make libraries more inclusive of LGBTQIA patrons.

Kai worked with the Library Diversity Committee to give a presentation educating departmental faculty and staff on how to better serve transgender patrons. They are now developing this content into a training module so that libraries both at UNC and beyond will have access to this important resource for years to come. They have also served on the School of Information and Library Science Diversity Committee where they successfully advocated for the addition of trans-positive and trans-specific materials into the training for the SILS Diversity Certificate.

Kai has advocated for the need of gender-inclusive restrooms in campus libraries within their department and also campus-wide, through a presentation to the employee forum. Further, they petitioned the CITI Program for more equitable treatment of LGBTIQ+ topics. This program is the mandatory training required of all faculty, staff and students who are engaged in research involving human subjects at more than 1300 institutions, including UNC.

They also created a centralized database to connect resources in the LGBTQ Center’s library to the larger UNC Library system, making them more easily and widely accessible. In addition to creating the database, this project included recruiting and training library professionals and students to help catalog thousands of items, and creating finding aids for popular topics in the collection.

They also volunteer with the LGBTQ Center of Durham's Library. This work has included creating collection policy and library usage guidelines; forming and leading a Committee to develop a unique in-house, LGBTIQ+-friendly classification system for the collection; leading volunteer cataloging sessions; creating materials to aid users and promote the collection; and authoring a chapter in a forthcoming monograph about the process of creating an in-house classification system. All of this work is done to bring crucial resources to community members who truly need them and may have no other
free options.

2017-2018 Advocacy Award Committee Members

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