2019-2020 LGBTIQA+ Advocacy Award Recipients

Members of the 2018-2019 Advocacy Award Committee worked hard to determine three winners from over 30 nominations recognizing the contributions of talented and committed UNC community members:

Undergraduate Awardee: Graeme Strickland

Graeme saw the need at Kenan-Flagler Business School to create an undergraduate organization for LGBTIQA+ students. While there was a Graduate LGBTIQA+ organization at Kenan-Flagler, there was no organization for queer undergrad students to interact or access queer-specific resources in the school. Plus, there was no organization to promote allyship among undergraduate students in the business school. Noting this need, Graeme brought together individuals from around Kenan-Flagler and revived the Undergraduate Pride Club in 2018.

The former president of the Graduate Pride group had this to say about Graeme: “Graeme approached me… saying that he was interested in bringing back to life the undergraduate Pride Club. Since the beginning, I knew that he was going far. Graeme brought his passion and immediately started to work to improve our community. In less than one month, he put up a proposal to put the Pride flag at the McColl building, collecting signatures from all business programs. He dealt with multiple stakeholders in a very political environment to come up with a solution that could be approved by the administration. Furthermore, he showed his managerial and organizational skills by setting milestones and tasks for each individual involved with the proposal. Subsequently, Graeme was able to attract multiple companies to campus, building a panel that had more than 40 attendees, with companies like Accenture and P&G. Graeme has hosted multiple events for the Pride Community, and … engages his peers his true and kind leadership.”

A peer likewise commented on the ways that Graeme has increased LGBTQ visibility at
the business school, and the importance of the inclusion of the rainbow flag on Kenan Flagler’s campus. She said that “His role in leading the diversity and inclusion board established an identity flag display, including the pride flag. He pushed this initiative, despite initial opposition from conservative leadership, as a way to signal to queer students on campus that they, too, can study business - despite the reputation of the school as an overwhelmingly heteronormative environment. Furthermore, he has helped the undergraduate program promote queer-focused programming and has advocated for non gender-specific language and the use of pronouns in his classes.”

She went on to say that “Graeme's role on the diversity and inclusion committee constantly pushed events that highlighted intersectional perspectives and experiences at UNC. This year, Graeme put on a TED talk-style event which purposely sought to elevate voices that are not typically given platforms at the business school. Among these were someone who grew up in a rural area, the first elected Vietnamese person in NC, and a black woman who talked about her experience at UNC in a very white environment. Because these are not conversations generally had at the business school, Graeme has without a doubt brought conversations of intersectionality, equity and inclusion to the forefront of his programming.”

When told that he had won this award, Graeme had the following to say: “It is an honor to have been selected as an undergraduate recipient for the LGBTIAQ+ Advocacy Awards. I am immensely grateful for all of the support that the Center has provided me in leading LGBTQ+-focused initiatives during my time here, and I could not have done it without them. Their leadership and support goes to show how important all the work the Center does is, and the vital role it has on campus.”

Graduate/Professional Awardees: Noa Nessim and Margo Faulk

These two graduating medical students were jointly nominated by four of their peers, who wrote:

Noa and Margo, through the funding of a Schweitzer grant, started the Gender Affirming Care Clinic at UNC’s Student Health Action Coalition (SHAC, the nation’s first student-run free clinic). Through this clinic, Noa, Margo, and their supervising providers offer free, gender affirming care, including prescriptions for hormone therapy, primary care, and access to other outside resources. These two medical students have gone above and beyond the expectations of fourth year medical students, putting hundreds of hours into starting and operating this clinic and ensuring its continuation once they graduate and begin residency.
In addition to running the clinic, Margo and Noa created a specialized training program for all SHAC volunteers and staff to ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all trans people who come to the clinic to receive care. In particular, it focuses on the challenges faced by trans-identifying individuals within the healthcare system. Their work toward realizing a vision of incorporating this training into the curriculums of UNC health profession schools -- making it mandatory for all graduating students -- holds the potential to yield sustained benefits in providing medical care for LGBTQIA+ patients.

Noa and Margo have enhanced visibility and awareness of LGBTQIA+ issues by identifying a need in the community and doing everything in their power to fill it. They saw a lack of free, safe medical care for trans people in the Chapel Hill community, highlighted the gap, and used their medical knowledge and academic resources to make a change. By creating an extensive network of LGBTQIA+ folks in the triangle and beyond, they have been able to reach a wide community and provide services that may otherwise be inaccessible.

Noa and Margo have made every effort for their clinic to operate within an inclusive environment. They offer all of their documentation and services in both English and Spanish. They have also begun to apply for grants in an effort to provide transportation assistance for community members unable to find rides to clinic appointments. Additionally, they are working to find funds that would allow the clinic to provide free hormone therapy for patients in their clinic who cannot afford it. Margo and Noa are constantly looking for ways to make their care more accessible, seeking out potential barriers in order to break them down.

Overall, Margo and Noa’s work has provided a resource for the LGBTQIA+ community in Chapel Hill that was previously unmet. They have identified the need for quality, kind care for the trans community, and then masterfully filled that need. This clinic will not only continue to provide care for years to come, but will also allow the opportunity for current and future medical students to learn to provide excellent healthcare to trans patients.

Faculty, Staff, and Postdoctoral Scholar Awardee: Dr. Brad Figler

Dr. Figler is a fellowship-trained expert in transgender care and gender affirming surgery and an Associate Professor in the UNC Department of Urology. When he started at UNC in 2016, he noticed that there was a lot of great work being done for transgender patients across the healthcare system. However, it wasn't always clear to patients how to best access those services. Therefore, in 2018 Dr. Figler proposed the UNC
Transgender Health Program as a way to improve access to UNC Healthcare, and to support coordination and quality of care for transgender patients. The program was officially launched in July of 2019, and draws on the strength and commitments of many departments across UNC, including urology, gynecology, plastic surgery, family medicine, endocrinology, and psychiatry. Further, two of the three employees of the UNC Transgender Health Program are trans, allowing members of the community to guide people through transition and train faculty and staff across UNC on how to provide better care to trans individuals.

During the creation of this program, Dr. Figler tirelessly sought guidance and insight from existing programs across the country, travelling to observe surgery and learn from the experiences of other programs, setting UNC’s program up for success. And indeed, in its first year, the Transgender Health Program at UNC has been a resounding success. In fact, there has been such a high volume of incoming patients that the program has not just been approved for continuation into next year, but instead for expansion.

Patient feedback for Dr. Figler has been overwhelmingly positive, with a recent patient stating, “Dr. Figler is the very best as far as I’m concerned. He …was so careful not to cause me any pain. He explained everything he was doing, and completely put me at ease.” Dr. Figler clearly cares deeply for the health and well-being of transgender patients, and provides a safe space that recognizes differences in his patient’s experiences.

2019-2020 Advocacy Award Committee Members

- Gretchen Bellamy
- Charla Blumell
- Sherah Faulkner
- Jacob Lau
- Stacey Parker
- Jacob Robins
- Ashton Thorne