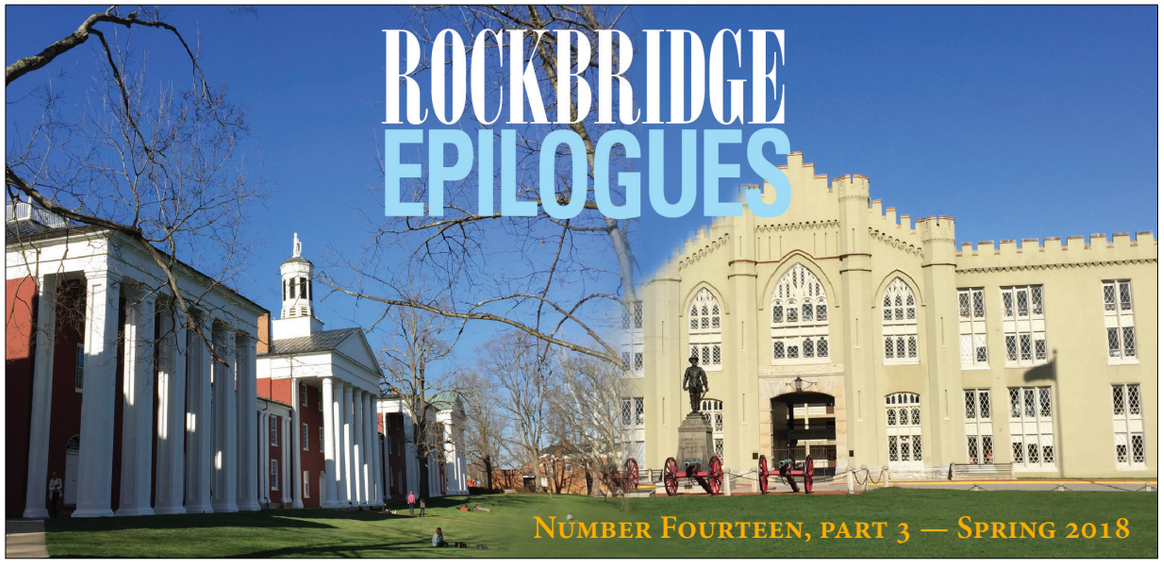


Gay at Washington and Lee: Discussion and Change in the 1980s and 1990s

By Emily Robideau

Senior Thesis, Washington and Lee University, 2007

The years following the emergence of a nationwide gay liberation movement were marked by a slow opening-up on Washington and Lee's campus. Some gay students came out to their friends, dated other students — although still secretly — and formed Washington and Lee's first gay and lesbian campus organization. The student newspapers provided a forum for much of the discussion in the 1990s, positive and negative. Many alumni from more repressive decades also took advantage of the increasing openness to discuss homosexuality in the university's alumni magazine and to push for their own organization for alumni and students. All these changes set the stage for the larger transformation of the 2000s and gradually helped the campus become more accepting of gay and lesbian students.

After her graduation from Washington and Lee University in 2007, Emily Robideau earned an M.A. from the University of Chicago. She is a research historian with Historical Research Associates Inc. in Missoula, Montana.

Washington and Lee students of the 1980s and early 1990s still found the atmosphere at Washington and Lee repressive, and expressed the same fear of ostracism and harassment described by students of the 1950s, '60s and '70s. A student who attended Washington and Lee from 1988 to 1992 wrote:

> During my time there, there were no support networks or anything for gay people. I regularly heard anti-gay remarks, and was far too frightened of being rejected to come out. . . . I was never physically threatened. I know that the guy who came out early in my senior year was physically attacked and threatened. I also heard that when a female friend of his asked him to escort her on the homecoming court, her sorority all but kicked her out for bringing a gay guy.[1]

Mistreatment was still a reality; yet there was a slight change from the atmosphere of earlier decades. Gay students during the 1980s and 1990s were more aware of one another and of gay faculty members. One student wrote: "I know several members of my fraternity have turned out to be gay, and I think we all 'knew' but did not discuss it openly or directly in any manner."[2] A 1989 alumnus wrote:

> There were rumors that a certain senior professor in English was very gay; however, the school was a very closed place at the time. There were a few guys in glee club who I thought might be gay . . . but at the time, I was too clueless to seek such community out. My roommate senior year at the new dorm, one of my best friends even today, was a 'mo. I didn't find out until five years after college. He was surprised at my ignorance, but he didn't know where to place me either.[3]

In an article in the Washington, D.C., magazine *Metro Weekly* article, Sean Bugg, '89, similarly writes:

> I can look at the yearbook picture of my Sigma Nu brothers standing on the front porch of the frat house later that year and count seven then-closeted gay guys — eight if I broaden my definition a bit to include "just curious" — and that's without knowing much about the juniors and seniors. . . . Lest anyone think this was an anomaly, I can make similar picks in the group pictures of some of the other fraternities.[4]

This new awareness of other gay students brought a slight increase in openness on campus. A graduate of the class of 1993 wrote: "To my knowledge, there was only one student a year ahead of me who was out. And then my senior year, I believe there was only one other student besides me who was known to be out."[5] A different 1993 alumnus wrote:

> I was not out on campus but I did know a few other gays and lesbians . . . during my senior year. . . . When I was gone to France for my junior year, a senior . . .

who was a fraternity brother of several of my friends on campus came out and my friends seemed ok with it.[6]

Yet a third 1993 alumnus said:

I came out in high school. While at W&L in my freshman and sophomore years, I was out to only a handful of friends and professors . . . . I was an exchange student at University College, Oxford, in my junior year, and I was romantically involved with another (male) W&L student who was abroad that year in London. Upon returning for my senior year, I came out to all of my friends.[7]

Such statements do not indicate a significant increase in openness on campus, but do indicate a trend toward individual "coming out" experiences. Witnessing others coming out may have encouraged a few other gay students to do the same.

The increase in openness probably resulted from the fact that the university would no longer expel known homosexuals. None of the gay alumni from this period recalled fear of expulsion.

Yet by the year of 2000, there were still few openly gay students on campus. Some gay Washington and Lee students formed covert romantic relationships with other students that probably would not have been possible during earlier decades. An alumnus of 1989 reported that in his senior year "I had a boyfriend of sorts at VMI [Virginia Military Institute, adjacent to the Washington and Lee campus]. I felt like we were boyfriends, but neither of us could really admit that our relationship was such."[8] In his *Metro Weekly* article, Sean Bugg, '89, recounted a relationship with a fraternity pledge brother:

I suddenly had a secret life . . . . Given the rank homophobia of many of my pledge brothers — the viciousness of which I wouldn't truly understand until a couple years later, a story for another day — it was a pretty dangerous secret . . . . I was happy, and I think he was too, but only behind closed doors.[9]

A 1996 alumnus wrote, "I met up with VMI guys and other closeted gay men from campus. I never had a relationship with any of these men, but I did have sexual relations."[10]

Determining why things began to change at Washington and Lee, particularly during the 1990s, is difficult; a nationwide study in 2003 suggested that from 1992 onward, public opinion in the United States steadily became less hostile toward homosexuality.[11] Whatever the reason, things began to move toward more openness in the early 1990s, and by the mid-1990s, open discussion of homosexuality became possible among students.

One of the school newspapers, the *Ring-tum Phi,* broached the subject of homosexuality in the mid-1990s. A main concern for the student writer was the university's ranking in the *Princeton Review.* Washington and Lee rated high in a number of favorable categories, but in 1994, but it also ranked fourth in the category "Gay Students Ostracized, Discriminated Against."[12] (More than a decade later, a 1997 alumnus commented on the ratings: "The *Princeton Review* rated W&L as `the most homophobic campus' for several years in the mid-90s. While the *Princeton Review* often lacks credibility, this was an embarrassing statistic and should have been a call to action."[13])

From that point forward, occasional *Ring-tum Phi* articles discussed homosexuality on Washington and Lee's campus. One positive response to the article about the *Princeton Review* came from a 1996 law alumnus, who expressed concern about the treatment of gay and lesbian students and an atmosphere in which most were unwilling to "come out." He called for the inclusion of a sexual orientation clause in the university's non-discrimination policy.[14] On September 29, 1995, a *Ring-tum*

Editor's note: This "Epilogue" consists of the last of three chapters in a 2006 honors thesis by Emily Robideau, W&L 2007, written under the supervision of Professor Ted DeLaney of the history department. It appears here with her permission (and our thanks). See the Author's Note, page 8, to understand what prompted her to focus on this broad topic (among other matters).

Ms. Robideau's first chapter told of her attempts to corroborate and independently document the coming-of-age story of a 1922 graduate thought to be the university's first admittedly gay student. But her research was frustrated by historiographical shortcomings of the young man's niece, who, in the process of editing fifty volumes of his memoirs down to one, conflated people and incidents to the point of scholarly uselessness.

By contrast, Ms. Robideau's second chapter and the present article are based mainly on her own primary research – questionnaires she sent to living Washington and Lee alumni and completed by them, together with in-person interviews and her research in W&L archives from mid-century and later. This third chapter contains by far the richest detail about issues, attitudes and activity among students, faculty, staff, trustees and alumni. (The first and second installments are available, however.)

Ms. Robideau's questionnaires and interviews were originally meant for a research setting, and participants may not have intended to be identified on the internet, although her complete paper, in many cases using full names, is accessible to anyone. For that reason, we do not name people unless they previously identified themselves in the general media or in public forums.

Phi article focused on campus discrimination based on race, gender, and religion; it also emphasized intolerance of homosexuality and noted: "Washington and Lee is a tough place to announce one's sexuality because of the climate of homophobia. . . . Openly gay students run the risk of being excluded from fraternity life. They risk the threat of physical danger and verbal abuse."[15]

Washington and Lee was certainly more open than it had been in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but many gay students in the mid-1990s felt that it still lagged in terms of tolerance and social outlets. A 1996 alumnus wrote: "I didn't feel that I could be out and open around campus, but I could definitely be gay. I just had to be quiet about it."[16]

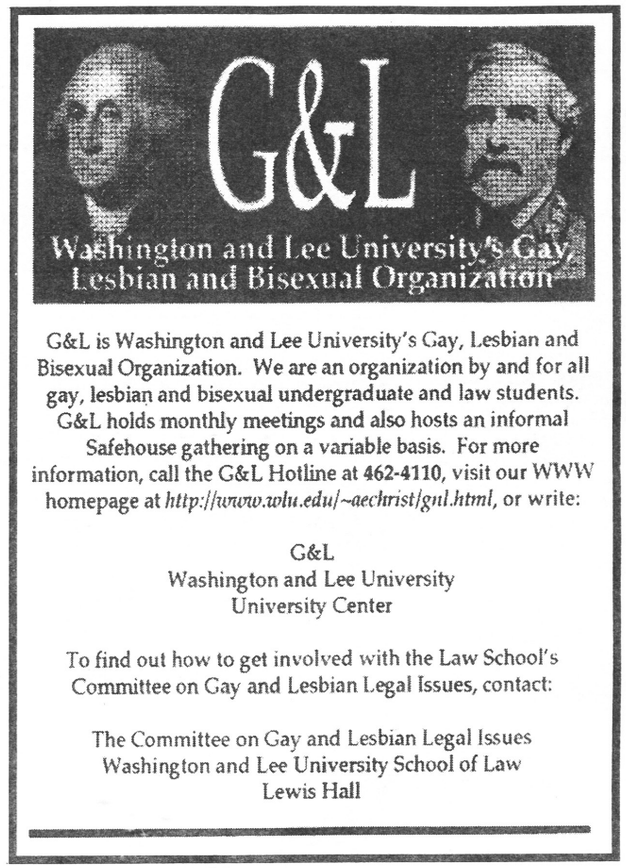
Yet in spite of a consensus that Washington and Lee was still not an ideal environment in which to be open, gay students began to organize officially for the first time in the mid-1990s.

Several undergraduate and law students started Washington and Lee University's first gay and lesbian campus organization, called G&L, during the 1995–96 school year. The founder of the group, a 1996 graduate, noted: "W&L was not a hotbed of information and resources for gays and lesbians. That is why I started G&L."[17] The organization applied to the student government for funding but received none. Someone from the Lexington community, however, donated $500, and members used a portion to buy advertising space in student publications. The organization operated a hotline out of a student's dormitory room, held meetings, and participated in a few public events. Active membership never exceeded five to ten students. The faculty and administration generally tolerated the organization, but its leadership felt that most of them were never truly comfortable with its presence on campus.[18]

An advertisement in the March 1, 1996, *Ring-tum Phi* declared that G&L was an organization "by and for gay, lesbian and bisexual undergraduate and law students" and informed readers of monthly meetings and of "informal Safehouse gathering on a variable basis." The advertisement also listed the G&L hotline telephone number and a webpage. A May 3, 1996, letter in *Ring-tum Phi* charged that the university's other newspaper, the *Trident,* refused to publish advertisements for the organization.

Two members of G&L met with President John W. Elrod to discuss the organization and the general experiences of gay and lesbian students. "President Elrod was polite and listened attentively, but nothing actionable came from the meeting," a G&L leader said later."[19]

The most visible G&L-sponsored event occurred on May 15, 1996, when the organization hosted a Coming Out Day in Lee Chapel. The event featured speeches by Reverend James Steen, '66, Alex Christensen, '97, and Jay White, '96. Inspiration for the event came from a nasty anonymous letter in the *Trident,* alleging that, "80 percent to 90 percent of the women on this campus are actually lesbians." The letter-writer added, sarcastically: "On May 15, 1996, I recommend that we have the 1st annual Washington and Lee Come Out of the Closet day."[20] Ironically, that is precisely what happened.



G&L announces itself: Advertisement in the *Ring-tum Phi*, March 1, 1996.

Jay White, one of the speakers, wrote:

> The speech in Lee Chapel was not my idea. Basically, a younger and more "out" student approached me one Friday as I was leaving to go to Virginia Tech one weekend (I was literally driving out of town when he stopped me). He indicated that "something" needed to be done for National Coming Out Day. I agreed, but did not really commit to anything. I came back to town to find my name on a bunch of posters as giving a coming out speech in Lee Chapel. I was not overly thrilled with the idea, but since my name was already on the poster, I figured, "What the hell." If I recall correctly, there were probably 50 people at the event and there was a small reception in the D-Hall afterward. I did not prepare comments and spoke strictly from the cuff. In essence, my point was that I thought that there needed to be more education on campus before it would be an ideal environment in which to come out.[21]

The *Ring-tum Phi* reported on May 17, 1996, that the event drew a crowd of around fifty people, including students and faculty members. Much reaction to the event was positive, but a number of negative responses also appeared in the student newspapers. One student wrote a letter to the *Trident* after the event, saying: "Thanks a lot for the letter about how all women are lesbians and some guy cannot get a date with them. Because of this we got to have 'Coming Out Day,' where a bunch of gays met above the Lee family crypt. This is sick."[22]

January 22, 1997 NEWS 5

Great debate leaves audience yawning

By Alison Beard

The hoards of students that packed Northen auditorium expecting to see Alex Christensen and Glenn Miller trade insults in the culmination of their ongoing debate over the Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Organization were sorely disappointed last Wednesday.

Anticipating controversial sparring of the kind that has played out across The Back Page and the letters page of *The Trident* for months, bloodthirsty students and interested professors filled all the auditorium seats, covered the floor, lined the walls and spilled out the doors. Latecomers were forced to hover behind the crowd, several feet away from the room, straining to hear.

But Alex and Glenn were remarkably civil and the debate was a lackluster one.

ment on the insensitivity of Glenn's columns, while Glenn centered his discussion around G&L's role on campus.

"I went there willing to suspend my personal biases and explore G&L's role in a serious and sober manner unlike on The Back Page," Miller said. "Alex turned it into a personal gripe session."

Alex said that because Glenn conceded that G&L was a legitimate campus organization in his opening statement, he was forced to improvise.

Coverage in *The Trident,* which had precipitated the debate.

In November 1996, Alex Christiansen, president of G&L, responded to a theme he perceived in *Trident* columns by writer Glenn Miller: "[I] find that, whatever his topic, Glenn Miller has included some sort of jab at G&L." Christensen ended his letter by challenging Miller to debate him on the topic, "What role the campus gay and lesbian group should play at W&L."[23] The debate took place on January 15, 1997, and the January 22 issue of the *Trident* reported on the event in an article entitled, "Great debate leaves audience yawning." The article expressed disappointment that the debate remained "remarkably civil," quoting one student observer: "Both stated their points, but I don't think the debate was entertaining or conclusive."[24]

No campus-wide movement formed in the 1990s, but the decade was a time of remarkable change. Despite stiff resistance from some students, a campus organization did form, and it provided education through a few public events. Members of G&L managed to turn negative forces into positive events, like the Coming Out Day in Lee Chapel and the public debate between Miller and Christensen.

The 1990s was also a decade of open debate among alumni and administrators about gay life at Washington and Lee. In August 1992, two alumni sent similarly themed letters, apparently independently, to the university in the span of two days. One came from Alan Weber, of the class of 1953, to the university editor, and the other was from Sean Bugg, 1989, to alumni director James Farrar Jr. Weber's letter described his difficult experience as a gay student during the 1950s, and called for the establishment of a gay and lesbian alumni association.[25] Bugg's letter announced the establishment of GALA, Gay and Lesbian Alliance, an organization devoted to "fostering social and intellectual interaction among Gay and Lesbian students and alumni."[26] An edited version of Weber's letter appeared in the Winter 1993 *Alumni Magazine.* James Farrar [alumni office] and Peter Cronin [development, *i.e.,* fundraising, office] sent advance notice of its publication to all alumni chapter presidents and class agents.[158] With Weber's letter, the *Magazine* printed a statement from Waller T. "Beau" Dudley '74, '79L, former president of the alumni association, noting the university's existing policy against separate alumni associations. An editor's note also informed readers of Sean Bugg's announcement of the formation of GALA, although Bugg's letter was not printed.

The letters in turn sparked a series of responses, which the alumni magazine published; other letters circulated privately between alumni and the university officials. Three responses to Weber's letter appeared in the Spring 1993 issue of the magazine. Two were thoroughly negative. Erick H. Rock, of the class of 1990, argued that the alumni magazine is not a "proper forum" in which to discuss "private lives." He wrote:

> I consider their behavior to be immoral, disgusting, and disease-ridden, which causes me to view homosexuals with pity rather than fear. . . . I feel no need to march in parades, basking in my own heterosexuality. Should we, in this new age of enlightenment, also expect W&L to support organizations for pedophiles, necrophiliacs, or people of other deviant concupiscence? Will we be allowed to condemn bestiality, Mr. Weber? Or perhaps that will be considered zoophobia which only afflicts the narrow-minded, provincial, and bigoted.
>
> The point of this letter is not to attack, but rather to implore people to keep their private lives *private.*

In a similar vein, Charles G. Gilmore '39 wrote:

> It now appears that we're stuck with queers proclaiming their queerness as loudly as possible, making a celebration out of it, with parades and letters to the editor. Why are they being so loud about their queerness? That is one of the many reasons why normal people are getting more and more disgusted with queers.
>
> All of this "publicity" the queers put out is probably so they'll get more candidates available to do the things they do to each other that queers do relentlessly and constantly and disgustingly.
>
> *Homomaniacs?*
>
> Next we'll have parades and letters to the editor from other monsters who go for sex with young children, usually of their own gender. When this group starts its own support group, a suggested name is Monsters Drooling for Kids (MDFK), not to be confused with the mainstream Medical Doctors for Kissing.
>
> Why don't you queers cool it and be sure you stay away from young children.[27]

(An editor's note in the Summer 1993 alumni magazine informed readers that, "Gilmore has since written to retract his earlier letter with an apology: 'My letter was not fitting for a W&L alumnus following the great tradition of General Lee.")

The one supportive letter came from Gilbert Dale Cornelius, a 1956 alumnus who identified as a gay man, and urged Washington and Lee to gain knowledge of homosexuality and to "open your school to gays and lesbians; support them; protect them."[28]

The magazine continued to receive responses to these letters and to Weber's original letter. It responded in the Summer 1993 issue with an editor's note that read, in part: "Having published Weber's letter, we felt an obligation to publish replies, pro and con, to his position. Both sides have had an opportunity to reply, and we have chosen to print no more letters on the subject."[29]

The discussion of homosexuality in the alumni magazine ended, but a separate discussion was already in progress between one alumnus and the Washington and Lee Alumni Association. In a response to Sean Bugg's letter about the establishment of GALA, James Farrar Jr. declared that the university is devoted to maintaining "one cohesive alumni association, not divided by a collection of subgroups based on experiences as students, or professional and personal experiences as alumni" and that "the W&L alumni association is open to all alumni without discrimination." He further stated that because Bugg's proposed group would include students, it would be subject to the "procedures for the establishment of student organization on campus, under the jurisdiction of the office of the dean of students."[30] The university's response mirrored its response in 1980 to an attempt to form a black alumni association.[31]

In his response, Bugg clarified the purpose of GALA, saying, "We do not wish to be perceived as a 'subgroup' dividing W&L alumni," and he announced plans to move forward with the group.[32]

In September 1992, GALA was formally introduced in the *Ring-tum Phi*. The university policy remained in favor of one Alumni Association, but James Farrar publicly wished the alliance well, and said simply, "We're just not in a position to recognize them officially."[33] The organization eventually dissolved.

A 1963 alumnus who later tried to revive the organization explained:

> I went to [Sean Bugg] and I said, "Give me whatever files you have and I'll try to pick it up," which I did. I, too, got very discouraged for two factors. Number one, a lot of alumni were not interested in getting reassociated with Washington and Lee because they had had such poor times of it as students. They had moved on in terms of their orientation and sexuality and to fuss much about coming back to campus was like going backward for them. They weren't interested. I also found what I thought was a bit of a curious reaction at the time, on the campus, itself, among the gay students. We thought that they were looking for support from alumni, but they really weren't. By then, they pretty much wanted to go their own way.[34]

There may also have been lingering fears about openness on campus. As "an example of the rather poor environment that existed for gays at W&L in the early 90s," a 1993 alumnus recalled the student indifference to the formation of GALA:

> Sean Bugg . . . took out several good-sized advertisements in the student newspaper to promote a gay-straight alliance or a gay and lesbian club or something similar at W&L and asking interested folks to call him in D.C. The ads ran for several weeks or even months and finally during the Spring of my senior year I was curious enough to call Sean and ask when they were meeting, etc. We talked for a little bit about his plans for the group, etc. and just before he hung up, I asked him "Hey, so how many students have called you about the new club?" I'll never forget the answer, as he replied "How many?! Why, you're the first one!" I couldn't believe it. I realized at that point that I went to school in a weird, weird place.[35]

Other alumni too pushed the administration to create a more welcoming atmosphere for gay and lesbian students. A 1966 and 1969 (law) graduate wrote President John Elrod late in 1997 to express concern about the lack of a "sexual orientation" clause in the university's nondiscrimination policy. Citing the *Princeton Review* ratings and his "own informal discussions with persons close to current campus life," he urged President Elrod to take steps to revise the policy.[36] President Elrod replied that he was "pleased to be able to say that the *Princeton Review is* off the mark about this matter." He continued, "I also believe that the image within the Washington and Lee community regarding its gay members is generally a positive one. Whatever its image is externally, a non-discrimination statement will not do much, I suspect, to correct it."[37] He declared that the university does not discriminate based on sexuality in hiring practices, admission, or any other policies. The alumnus responded to Elrod's letter and "respectfully, but strongly, disagree[d]," saying:

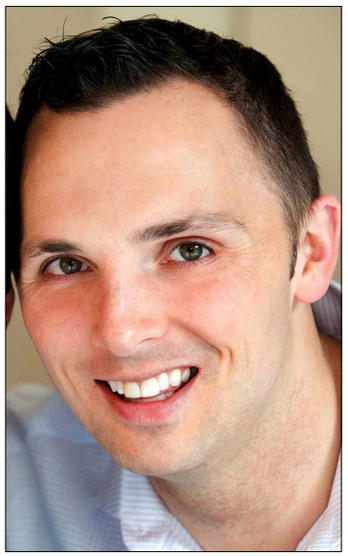
> I suspect one reason for not issuing such a statement may be the negative reaction of some alumni. While there was some negative alumni reaction to the inclusion of blacks and women into the university community, concurrent with their arrival on campus W&L adopted a formal non-discrimination policy regarding them. . . . Concurrent with the more open gay presence on campus, issuing a sexual orientation non-discrimination statement is the right thing to do.[38]

By the late 1990s, Washington and Lee had undergone subtle but significant changes in the treatment of and visibility of gay students. In contrast to practice of just a few decades before, gay students and alumni organized, held campus events, and ended a long silence. Although their endeavors did not always meet with success and often encountered opposition, their actions paved the way for rapid changes on the campus in the early 2000s.

Afterword

The beginning of the twenty-first century marked a time of significant change on campus.

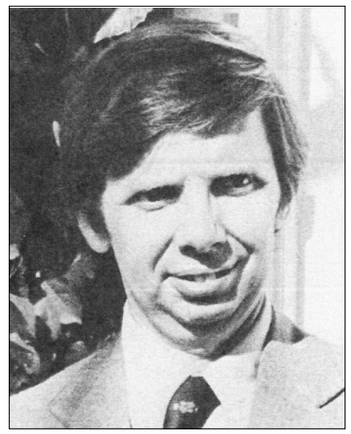
In 2000, the student body elected Jeff Cook, an openly gay member of the class of 2001, to be president of the Executive Committee, or E.C., as the student government is known. Cook's election to a position of prominence on campus was a major achievement, but he said that his time as president did not pass without some negative reactions. Cook recalled, for example, that "a student parodied me with an effeminate voice on campus radio, mocking that I was going to bring the Gay Games to W&L." In addition, he noted that "a student running for president of my class, while I was E.C. president, was running unopposed, but he decided to put posters up all over campus proclaiming to vote for him because he'd be *'straight* with you.' . . . Also there was a column in the school newspaper that referred to me as a 'lavender teletubby' after I won my election." Nonetheless, Cook noted, "I think that the environment definitely improved while I was enrolled."[39] Professor Ted DeLaney said Cook "was masculine, hardworking, well-groomed, and he used the force of his personality to change the negative stereotypes that some students held of gay men."[40]

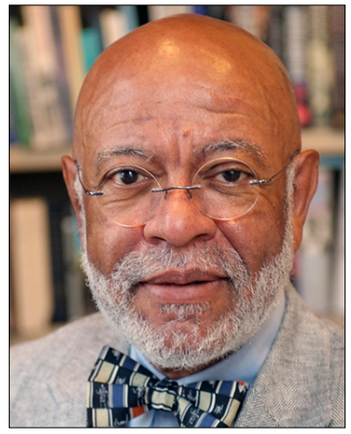


Jeff Cook
(photo: *The New York Times*).

As president of the E.C., Cook met regularly with the board of trustees, and early in his term, he became concerned over the absence of a "sexual orientation" clause in the university's nondiscrimination policy. He decided to raise the issue with the board, although President Elrod protested, probably out of concern for alumni and trustee reaction. Cook moved forward anyway, discussing the issue with the rector [chairman] and making a formal presentation to the board. The trustees received his proposal favorably and soon approved the change.[41]

According to Professor DeLaney, three incidents in 2000 underscored the need for a change in the nondiscrimination policy and "prompted the faculty to set up a task force to deal with tolerance."[42] These incidents included the appearance on campus of racially and sexually offensive T-shirts, the anti-Semitic treatment of a Jewish freshman at a fraternity houses, and negative reactions to Cook's election.[43] The faculty's task force consisted of Professors Robert McAhren (history), Harlan Beckley (religion), Suzanne Keen (English), Sascha Goluboff (anthropology), Louise Halper (law), Kary Smout (English), and Ted DeLaney (history).





Top: Professor Robert W. McAhren (photo: 1977 *Calyx*, W&L student yearbook); above, Professor Ted DeLaney.

Among the eventual recommendations of the task force was one seeking to add sexual orientation to the university's nondiscrimination policy. According to DeLaney, "There was some debate in a faculty meeting about it. There were a few religious faculty members who vehemently opposed it, but the overwhelming majority of the faculty supported the resolution."[44] The resolution was quickly adopted. DeLaney said that its passage made good sense, and he believes that the businessmen who largely make up the Board of Trustees felt the same way.[45]

The task force member who had done the most to bring about change for gay, lesbian, and bisexual students was Robert McAhren, professor of American history and former associate dean of The College, Washington and Lee's liberal arts division. DeLaney recalls attending gatherings of gay and lesbian students in McAhren's home as early as 1997. DeLaney describes McAhren as a true advocate for the students. He recalls that McAhren arranged for the university president to meet at least once a year with the students, many of whom were members of G&L.

Several students started a Safe Place program in 2000, after observing similar programs at the University of Virginia and James Madison University. The program involved identifying faculty and staff whose offices would be "safe places" for gay and lesbian students to discuss problems and issues openly. At first the program drew little support from the administration, but Professor McAhren suggested that they start a Gay Straight Alliance on campus in order to promote the Safe Place program. McAhren's suggestion worked, and Safe Place stickers appeared all over campus.[46] A student who holds undergraduate and law degrees affirms: "There are

so many professors and deans with Safe Place stickers, it's like, wow, there actually is a place for us to go to if we need to talk to someone. . . . It just makes you feel better because you know there are people who support you . . . "[47] Safe Place stickers are still commonly seen on campus, and GSA is still active, sponsoring speeches and events, Rainbow Week and National Coming Out Day activities, and meetings and social activities.[48]

Curricular recognition became another significant development. Approximately seven years ago [i.e., around 2000], Professor McAhren began teaching a course on gay and lesbian history. Eventually, the faculty placed History 353, Gay and Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America, in the university catalog. The course quickly gained popularity among heterosexual and gay and lesbian students alike. After Professor McAhren's retirement, Professor DeLaney began teaching the course.[49]

University counseling services have become available specifically for gay and lesbian students in recent years. Dr. Kirk Luder, a full-time member counselor since 2004 and consulting psychiatrist for the university from 1999 to 2004, recalls working individually with a number of gay and lesbian students. He wrote:

> During my four years as consulting psychiatrist, I recall seeing 6 students who self-identified as gay (this was out of approximately 128 consultations). Of these, one was fully out, one came out at W&L, and 4 were almost completely closeted. During the time I have worked full-time at W&L, I have seen 21 students in my clinical role who self-identified as gay or bisexual; of these, 14 self-identified as gay, 7 as bi.[50]

Luder reported that once GSA was established, a significant number of his gay clients turned to that organization for support. University Counseling also offers group counseling for gay students. Luder reported that a group for male students, which has met since 2005, "now has 12 participants with very consistent attendance. University Counseling recently started a group for lesbian women students; the group has met three times, with a high of 5 participants and a low of 2 participants. Both groups are planned as ongoing activities."[51]

Despite these encouraging developments, many students still feel that Washington and Lee remains behind the times. In 2001, a male student accused a male dorm counselor of sexual assault. Before the police could reach the dorm counselor's room, fraternity brothers of the alleged victim beat up the dorm counselor in his room, creating enough of a ruckus to awaken other hall residents.[52]

Gay students also experience other forms of discrimination on campus. Dr. Luder recalled two incidents of discrimination against gay students:

> The first involved a student who was on one of the athletic teams and was in a fraternity that was seen as having high social status on campus. After he came out (I believe this was about 2003) he was asked to leave his fraternity, ostensibly because he had an alcohol problem. The other incident involved one of the fraternities having a rancorous internal disagreement about whether to offer a spot to an openly gay potential pledge; the prospect ended up going into another fraternity.[53] In addition, many students report frequently hearing gay slurs.

Dr. Luder writes:

> Gay students have also reported to me that they have frequently heard demeaning slurs including "fag" and using "gay" and "queer" pejoratively. Gay and bisexual students have also frequently reported experiencing social rejection and neglect after disclosing their sexual orientation.[54]

Recently, the most negative publicity for the university has involved the School of Law rather than the undergraduate campus. A gay student's version of a 2007 incident, which reported that students physically and verbally attacked two openly gay law students, received attention in two publications outside of Lexington, including the University of Virginia school newspaper, but the Washington and Lee administration has been silent about the incident.[55]

In recent years, Washington and Lee has changed into a college with a campus support group for gay and lesbian students and a nondiscrimination policy that includes sexual orientation — a place where public discussion of homosexuality is finally possible. Gay students and alumni aided by a number of supportive administrators and faculty members drove these changes. Although Washington and Lee may still not be the ideal environment for gay and lesbian students, it has come a very long way.

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Author's Note

My original interest in the topic comes from my strong relationship with my brother, who is gay. Last spring, I took History 353, Gay and Lesbian History in Twentieth Century United States, a recent addition to the Washington and Lee curriculum. During that time my plans for this thesis developed.

My methodology entailed writing to gay alumni to request information about their experiences. I conducted interviews in the few cases that were possible. When interviews were not possible, I sent questionnaires, which most alumni returned to me via email. Additionally, I asked each alumnus if he knew anyone else who might want to participate. Most provided names, or contacted classmates for me.

Oral history and questionnaires deal with people's memories and personal experiences. This is an important tool for learning about the experiences of gay students on campus, but memories change over the years, and each person's experiences are different. It is difficult to synthesize these experiences to draw general conclusions about gay life at Washington and Lee. Where possible, I quoted people directly, allowing their words to tell the story. Alumni from particular periods wrote about similar perceptions and experiences. Where a great number of alumni recalled a particular aspect of student life, or a particular incident, I generally trusted their similar recollections. I also balanced alumni memories with interviews with faculty members and research in school newspapers, other university records, and secondary sources on the gay and lesbian college experience.

My sample of participants comprised what sociologists call a "snowball sample," meaning that participants gave me names of people they knew, those people in turn gave me names of people they knew, and so on. This presents the risk of producing a group of people who may have shared similar experiences because they knew each other. Because I targeted a very specific group of people, however — gay and lesbian alumni — this method of finding participants was appropriate. Not everyone who responded to my questionnaire knew or socialized with each other. In addition, respondents did not always agree on what gay life was like at Washington and Lee. I believe, therefore, that this method of sampling did not present any serious problems.

Notes

1 Response to author's questionnaire. Washington and Lee University co-educated in 1985.

2 Ibid.

3 Response to author's questionnaire.

4 Sean Bugg, "Open Secret: First in Love: A Valentine's Essay," *Metro Weekly,* February 9, 2006.

5 Response to author's questionnaire.

6 Response to author's questionnaire.

7 Response to author's questionnaire.

8 Response to author's questionnaire.

9 Bugg, "Open Secret: First in Love," *Metro Weekly.*

10 Response to author's questionnaire.

11 Paul R. Brewer, "The Shifting Foundations of Public Opinion about Gay Rights," *The Journal of Politics,* 65, no. 4 (November 2003): 1208.

12 Emily Baker, "Princeton Review finds strong Greeks, alcohol. W&L ranks 4th in gay discrimination." *Ring-tum Phi,* October 14, 1994.

13 Response to author's questionnaire.

14 Letter to Editor, *Ring-tum Phi,* November 14, 1994.

15 Dan Odenwald, "Hidden Rage: Haste and Prejudice at Washington and Lee," *Ring-tum Phi*, September 29, 1995.

16 Response to author's questionnaire.

17 Response to author's questionnaire.

18 Response to author's questionnaire.

19 Response to author's questionnaire.

20 Anonymous, "Student says most W&L women are lesbians," Letter to the Editor, *Trident,* May 1, 1996, 3.

21 Response to author's questionnaire.

22 Rick Hill, "Senior sees unwelcome changes," Letter to the Editor, *Trident,* May 22, 1996, 3.

23 Alex Christensen, "Alex challenges Glenn," Letter to the Editor, *Trident,* November 20, 1996.

24 Allison Beard, "Great debate leaves audience yawning," *Trident,* January 22, 1997, 5.

25 Alan Weber, Letter to the Editor, *W&L: The Washington and Lee University Alumni Magazine,* Winter 1993.

26 Sean Bugg to James D. Farrar, Jr., August 26, 1992, Alumni Office Records, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

27 Erick H. Rock, Letter to the Editor; Charles G. Gilmore, Letter to the Editor, *W&L: The Washington and Lee University Alumni Magazine,* Spring 1993.

28 Gilbert Dale Cornelius, Letter to the Editor, *W&L: The Washington and Lee University Alumni Magazine,* Spring 1993.

29 The *Alumni Magazine* did print one more response in its Fall 1993 edition under the heading "Closing Argument," objecting to the amount of space allocated to Rock's and Gilmore's letters in contrast to the amount of space given to Weber's letter. Lee Bivins, "Closing Argument," *W&L: The Washington and Lee University Alumni Magazine,* Fall 1993.

30 James D. Farrar Jr. to Sean Bugg, September 11, 1992, Alumni Office Records, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

31 Alumni Office Records, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia, 1980 and 1992.

32 Sean Bugg to James D. Farrar, Jr., September 30, 1992, Alumni Office Records, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

33 Madelyn Rosenberg, "W&L grad forms gay support group," *Roanoke Times and World News,* October 1, 1992.

34 Interview conducted by author.

35 Response to author's questionnaire.

36 Alumni Office Records, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

37 Alumni Office Records, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

38 Alumni Office Records, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia.

39 Response to author's questionnaire.

40 Comments to author.

41 Robert McAhren, comments to author.

42 Ted DeLaney, interview conducted by author.

43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Robert McAhren, comments to author.

47 Interview conducted by author.

48 Wendy Lovell, "A Spirit of Community: The Gay-Straight Alliance," *W&L: The Washington and Lee University Alumni Magazine* 81, no. 4 (2006), 14, 15.

49 Ted DeLaney, comments to author.

50 Response to author's questionnaire.

51 Ibid.

52 Allison Trinidad, "Senior faces felony charges," *Ring-tum Phi,* May 29, 2001, 1.

53 Response to author's questionnaire.

54 Ibid.

55 Ted DeLaney, comments to author.

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