Faculty of Education
University of Alberta

2009 – 2010 Annual Report

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The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services: An Overview

The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services in the Faculty of Education, University of Alberta is an interdisciplinary “hub” for scholarly and community work in sexual-minority studies. The Institute’s mission is to help enhance possibilities for groundbreaking research, policy development, education, community outreach, and service provision focused on sexual minorities and their issues and concerns. Sexual minorities are those persons who have minority status due to differences in their sexual orientations or gender identities. Groups characterized as sexual minorities across sex, sexual, and gender differences include lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transsexuals, intersexuals, transgendered, and Two-Spirit persons. Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and Section 3 of the Canadian Human Rights Act protect sexual minorities against discrimination in Canadian culture and society.

Since most Canadian universities engaged in sexual-minority work tend to separate studies functions (research and teaching) from university and community service and outreach functions, the Institute represents a unique and holistic Canadian model placing sexual-minority inclusive studies and services in a dynamic, interdependent relationship. Bringing research, teaching, institutional service, and community outreach together under one umbrella enables the Institute to intersect its studies and services functions in ways that create opportunities for innovative intellectual work and sustained outreach.

A major component of the studies function of the Institute is to contribute to knowledge production by conducting research on sexual-minority identities, subjectivities, and needs in education, culture, and society. We are currently conducting research funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council that focuses on identifying assets that enable sexual-minority youth to develop as resilient individuals able to mediate life situations complicated by daily challenges and barriers impeding being, becoming, and belonging as persons and citizens.

The Institute also plays a role in knowledge exchange and distribution through ventures such as our InsideOUT Speakers' Series. We host monthly seminars during the academic year that focus on sexual-minority research in education and culture. These seminars are designed as an interdisciplinary engagement for academics, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students. Undergraduates and members of the larger community are also invited to attend.

As a core part of its provision of services, the Institute provides educational experiences about sexual minorities and issues affecting them in education and culture on a request basis using workshops, presentations, seminars, and guest speakers for graduate and undergraduate students as well as university staff. We do extensive educational
outreach to pre-service teachers in the Faculty of Education. As Director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services, I co-developed content and instructional methods with iSMSS staff for delivering sessions for undergraduate education sessions focused on 1) the needs of sexual minority and gender variant students and teachers and 2) sexuality and gender inclusive educational policies and practices in relation to schooling. I have trained new staff and graduate students to deliver sessions in keeping with ATA policies promoting diversity, equity, and human rights. During the 2009-2010 academic year, iSMSS provided a total of 22 workshop sessions for nearly 1100 students. These sessions were given in various undergraduate and graduate courses throughout the Faculty of Education including EDPS 310, EDPS 410, and EDPS 360 in the Department of Educational Policy Studies.

Another major service function of the Institute is to support the needs and address the concerns of sexual-minority students at the University of Alberta as well as sexual-minority youth in the larger community. In this regard, iSMSS runs two programs:

- The Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker program, which is a year-round program that provides supports for Edmonton area youth.
- Camp fYrefly, which a national leadership camp for sexual-minority and allied youth that focuses on individual needs, socialization, health and wellness, and building resiliency.

Through these initiatives, the Institute endeavors to meet the personal, social, and cultural learning needs of sexual-minority and allied youth. We emphasize an arts-informed, community-based approach to education to help youth focus on building and nurturing their personal resiliency and leadership potential within an environment that fosters individual development, positive socialization, and enhanced social- and self-esteem. The goal is to help youth learn how to make significant contributions to their own lives and to life in their schools/learning environments, home/group-home environments, and communities.

**The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services: Policy and Practice Initiatives**

During the 2009-2010 year, I drew on expertise from Risk Management Services and other University of Alberta constituents to write:

- The iSMSS Policy Guide titled Guiding Principles, Policies, and Procedures (21pages), and
- The Camp fYrefly Program Manual (81 pages).
I also oversaw the development of two new training manuals – one for youth leaders and one for adult volunteers – written by iSMSS staff for our spring/summer Camp fyrefly training sessions.

The iSMSS Policy Guide is our core document and details the Institute’s principles, policies, and procedures. It provides a framework to guide responsive and responsible behavior whereby Institute constituents exercise an ethic of care and use good judgment when interacting with youth and one another. The iSMSS Policy Guide provides procedural protocols and reinforces the importance of ethical conduct in daily interactions with youth and other constituencies.

**The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services: Youth Intervention and Community Outreach Worker Program**

Since December 2008, the Institute has operated the Youth Intervention and Community Outreach Worker program as its key year-round project to meet the needs of sexual minority and gender variant youth in the University and the greater Edmonton community. The primary objectives of this program are:

- To develop a sexual minority and gender variant youth intervention and outreach program and an annual youth needs assessment;
- To provide support for Youth Understanding Youth as a primary intervention and prevention site for at-risk sexual minority and gender variant youth in the greater Edmonton area; and
- To create a sexual minority and gender variant mentorship project with Big Brothers and Big Sisters Society of Edmonton.

To support the Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker program, a Community Advisory Board with members from Alberta Child and Youth Services and an array of government and private youth serving agencies has been formed. The Community Advisory Board meets every 6 weeks and provides advice and guidance to the Institute in relation to the objectives, goals, delivery, and evaluation of the YIOW program. This program is a unique “first of its kind” position in Edmonton that allows sexual minority and gender variant youth who are at increased risk for suicide, suicide ideation, drug and alcohol abuse, bullying, poor mental health outcomes, increased victimization, and social isolation to have a centralized access point for advocacy and support where none previously existed. Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker advocates for youth and can provide youth serving agencies with evidence-informed information, intervention strategies, and consultation around sexual orientation and gender identity issues for youth on their caseload. The Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker also mentored two community service placement students – one from Concordia University College of Alberta and one from University of Calgary – who developed knowledge and skills in sexual minority and gender variant youth programming during the 2009-2010 academic year.
During 2009-2010, the Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker, in consultation with the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Subcommittee of the Diversity, Equity, and Human Rights Committee of the Alberta Teachers’ Association, hosted a monthly Gay-Straight Alliance Roundtable meeting to help support the development, coordination, and sustainability of GSAs as a primary source of school-based resiliency development for sexual minority and gender variant youth in junior and senior high schools in the Edmonton region. The Institute also hosted our annual Queer Prom, which was held at University Extension down town and attended by more than 350 youth. Funding was provided by a number of businesses and individual donors. Community speakers included Ms. Laurie Blakeman, Edmonton-Centre MLA and Deputy Leader of the provincial Liberal Party and Mr. Ben Henderson, Edmonton City Councilor. In order to circulate information about the event, we use a website (www.queerprom.ca) and a postcard designed by local youth and circulated to community partners and youth-serving agencies. Several youth serving community agencies set up information booths at the event to create an opportunity for youth to directly access these community supports while at prom.

This year the Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker also initiated a queer youth mentorship program in conjunction with Big Brothers and Big Sisters Society of Edmonton. The YIOW program is also part of the “Bridging the Gaps” community initiative, placing it in a database with other youth serving agencies. The purpose of this partnership is to allow youth to make multiple community connections in “one stop” rather than having to access one agency at a time. The database will allow other agencies (i.e. Alberta Health Services) to refer youth to see the YIOW on scheduled appointment times to access assistance. To further increase the visibility of the YIOW program, during Fall 2009 the Institute conducted an advertising campaign that included posters and brochures to support community awareness of both the YIOW program and Youth Understanding Youth, an Edmonton area youth group that we host on Saturday evenings. We also maintain the Institute and Youth Understanding Youth websites, Facebook pages, and listservs, which have a combined membership of over 400 individuals. The following statistics for the Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker program, tracked from January 1 to June 30, 2010, provide testament to our increased visibility and need in the community: The Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker 1) addressed 350 youth and agency phone calls; 2) ran 49 youth group outreach meetings involving 1093 youth; 3) conducted 60 individual outreach meetings with youth in need; and 4) responded to 362 youth contacts via the Internet requesting the Institute’s intervention and outreach services.

**The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services: Camp fYrefly**

Camp fYrefly, which I co-founded with Kristopher Wells in 2004, is a university-community educational outreach project that focuses on the needs of sexual minority
and gender variant youth who variously identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans-identified, two-spirited, queer, and allied. The fyrefly acronym stands for: fostering, Youth, resiliency, energy, fun, leadership, yeah! Camp fyrefly has evolved into a 4-day volunteer-based, residential style summer leadership retreat for these youth. Camp fyrefly’s philosophy and programming emphasize a by-youth-for-youth approach where older youth and adult facilitators mentor and help to support younger youth. The camp focuses on building and nurturing their leadership potential and personal resiliency in an effort to help them become agents for positive social change in their schools, families, and communities. To our knowledge, Camp fyrefly is the largest youth leadership camp of its kind in Canada and the only one in the world affiliated with a major research university, which ensures for research-informed programming, sound pedagogical principles, and strong fiscal management. In sum, Camp fyrefly’s pedagogy focuses on four key areas: leadership, individual development, socialization, and resiliency. Five themes comprise the framework that guides the development and delivery of the Camp fyrefly program: 1) Creating a socially just and inclusive community; 2) building resiliency and youth leadership capacity; 3) empowering youth to address bullying, harassment, and hate crimes by knowing their rights; 4) learning through art, music, writing, performing arts, and games; 5) self and social development. All of our camp programming is guided by input from youth and facilitated by trained educators and youth workers in collaboration with a team of artists, dramatists, and community and youth leaders. The camp, guided by an arts-based educational philosophy, is jam-packed with dance, drama, music, writing, visual art, empowerment and reflection exercises, anti-oppression work, personal growth opportunities, healthy socialization, and in-depth learning activities about specific youth topics and social issues.

As I wrote the Camp fyrefly Planning Manual, I positioned it as a living document. I ask Directors and Coordinators at other Camp fyrefly sites to liaise with the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services as they prepare a local Camp fyrefly in keeping with the Camp’s philosophy and principles. Good communication is essential to our program to ensure the best planning and development of cohesive, comprehensive, inclusive, and informative individual, social, and cultural learning at our camps.

During the 2009-2010 academic year, I worked with iSMSS staff to co-organize Camp fyrefly VII in Alberta and Camp fyrefly II in Saskatchewan. I oversaw and participated in the training of adult volunteers and youth leaders in both Edmonton and Regina. I personally attended the AB and SK camps as a mentor and facilitator. These 4-day summer youth-leadership camps were held July 23-26, 2010 in Edmonton and July 30 - August 2, 2010 in Regina. Camp fyrefly AB offered 20 workshops to 48 youth and 8 youth leaders for a total of 56 youth. Camp fyrefly SK offered 22 workshops to 25 youth and 7 youth leaders for a total of 32 youth. Both camps were planned over the course of the 2009-2010 academic year to provide youth participants with opportunities for peer mentoring and leadership training in a safe and supportive teaching-learning environment.
The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services: Funding

I would like to acknowledge and publicly thank the following funders that enable us to run our year-round programs to make life better for sexual minority and gender variant youth.

- Alberta Children and Youth Services, Government of Alberta who provide funding for the Camp fyrefly Coordinator position through the Community Incentive Fund.
- The City of Edmonton - Community Services, Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) Programs, the Edmonton Community Foundation, and the United Way whose collective funding enables the Sexual Minority Youth Intervention and Outreach Worker Program.
- Other key funders include the TELUS Community Foundation, the Alberta Treasury Branch Financial, the Edmonton Public Teachers' Charitable Trust Fund, and the Stollery Charity Foundation.
- Other sources of funding include the Camp fyrefly Winter 2010 Community Fundraiser, the Mayor's Pride Brunch for Camp fyrefly, the Edmonton Hash House Harriers' Red Dress Run and Camp fyrefly donations.

The Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services: Knowledge Dissemination in Canada

1. Contribution to Congress 2010: I organized and hosted a pre-conference: *Queer Issues in Education and Culture II*. The full-day pre-conference at CSSE/Congress 2010 involved faculty and graduate students from Australian, Canadian, and US universities.

2. Contributions to the Alberta Teachers’ Association: a) Served as a member of the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Sub-Committee of the Alberta Teachers' Association's Diversity, Equity, and Human Rights Committee. The committee meets four Saturdays a year and conducts workshops for teachers and students in schools and at teachers' conventions on topics regarding sex, sexual, and gender inclusiveness. b) I am a volunteer consultant who assists the ATA to development resources for teachers that address issues and concerns for sexual-minority students and teachers in education and culture. Some of these are print resources; others appear on the ATA's Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Website. c) I acted as a consultant to lawyer Julie Lloyd for a hearing of the Complaint Appeal Committee of the Alberta Teachers' Association. The hearing investigated a case of homophobic bullying against a junior high school student.

3. Contribution to the Canadian Teachers’ Federation: Having accepted the invitation of the Director-General of the CTF, I am the Federation's consultant on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity.
4. **Visit to University of Windsor, October 1-2, 2009**: Starting with a university-community keynote address titled *Creating inclusive schools for sexual minorities: professional, ethical, and legal implications for educators*, I did two days of educational and consultative work in the Faculty of Education, University of Windsor. I was invited by Dr. Patricia Rogers, the Dean of Education to work with faculty, SAGE (Sexuality and Gender Education Committee), undergraduate education students, and community interest groups to build knowledge and understanding of national educational policies and practices focused on sexual minority and gender variant children, youth, and teachers. I also did three two-hour sessions (200 students per session; total of 600 students) that allowed all undergraduate education students to gain professional learning on these issues.

5. **Other National Presentations**: a) Invited presentation titled *Health, wellness, and building resiliency through sexual-minority youth intervention and outreach work* given at the Sexual and Gender Diversity: Vulnerability & Resilience Colloquium, Université du Québec à Montréal, November 21, 2009; b) Invited presentation titled *Linking research to advocacy in community work with sexual minority youth* included in the University of Regina’s 2009-2010 speakers' series, November 6, 2009; c) Featured presentation titled *Expanding frontiers in inclusive education: sexual minorities in our schools* given at the 2009 Convention of the Horizon Teachers’ Association, Saskatoon, SK, November 9, 2009; d) Invited presentation titled *Engaging sexual-minority youth in strategic, asset-creating, community-based learning to counter exclusion and trauma in formal schooling* given to the Canadian Association for School Health & the Public Health Agency of Canada, Dartmouth, NS, April 23, 2010;

6. **Local Presentations**: a) Invited presentation *What beginning teachers can do to address sexual minority issues in schools* given at the Beginning Teachers' Conference (Southern), Alberta Teachers' Association, Coast Plaza Hotel, Calgary, AB, October 17, 2009; b) Invited presentation *What beginning teachers can do to address sexual minority issues in schools* given at the Beginning Teachers' Conference (Northern), Alberta Teachers' Association, Fantasyland Hotel, Edmonton, AB, September 25, 2009; c) Invited presentation titled *Canadian sexual minority rights, issues, and their social and cultural implications*, McDougall United Church, Edmonton, AB, January 24, 2010; d) *Bill 44 and potential impacts for queer youth and teachers*, Department of Political Science, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, February 5, 2010; e) Invited Presentation titled *An asset-based approach to helping sexual-minority youth grow as healthy, resilient individuals* given with Cory M. Dawson at the Alberta Teachers' Association’s conference *Can We Talk? Communities and Teachers Supporting Mental Wellness*, Chateau Louis Hotel and Conference Center, Edmonton, AB, May 7, 2010; f) Invited presentation titled *Sexual-minority youth resilience research as informed by queer critical theory building: a qualitative inquiry*, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB, June 7, 2010.