

Stockton University Establishes Women's, Gender & Sexuality Center

Center will Provide Advocacy and Outreach to Students

For Immediate Release

Friday, March 13, 2015

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Galloway Township, NJ - Stockton University recently announced the establishment of the Women's, Gender & Sexuality Center (WGSC) on the Galloway campus.

The new center will serve as a clearinghouse for gender, sexuality and survivor resources to provide a safe, welcoming space to enhance the quality of campus life. The mission of the WGSC is to serve the entire campus, including Stockton's instructional sites, via internet resources and outreach programs.

The WGSC is founded upon the conviction that issues related to sexualized violence, gender and sexuality are pertinent not only to women, but to everyone.

"The entire community should address problems such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, interpersonal relationship violence, bullying and homophobia, and issues such as sexual orientation and parenting if we are to effect political and social change," stated the WGSC Faculty Senate Task Force proposal and report.

To provide advocacy and outreach to students, the center will work with various departments across the University including Stockton's Wellness Center, the Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies Program, the Office of Institutional Diversity and Equity and several student organizations.

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Initial advocacy projects include addressing issues such as: sexual assault, sexual violence, and gender and sexual identities, including advocacy for additional gender-neutral bathrooms and gender-inclusive practices and policies on campus.

“The center’s focus is on advocacy targeting specific family-friendly issues to make systemic changes transferable to the future workplace. It is a practical effort to build consciousness of the importance of the changing landscape of gender-based issues,” explained Dr. Kristin Jacobson, associate professor of Literature and co-chair of the Faculty Senate Task Force.

The WGSC will recruit and supervise campus advocates called, “Osprey Advocates.” These specially trained volunteers support individuals of sexual assault through various methods, including forensic exams, medical systems, police, or campus hearing board and legal proceedings. The Osprey Advocates provide peer support and empowerment, access to resources, and information about rights and options to survivors.

Since spring 2013, more than 75 Osprey Advocates have been trained in the national certification program. Currently, 10 advocates are actively volunteering on campus, while some certified advocates volunteer at off-campus locations.

The center will also partner with the Atlantic County Women’s Center (TWC), the Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Office of Residential Life, and Campus Police. The WGSC will serve as the primary unit responsible for prevention-oriented programming on campus, including arranging joint programming and training with the TWC.

Other responsibilities of the center include LGBTQ support; the development of a Safe Zone program for the LGBTQ community and allies; pregnant and parenting student resources; and the coordination of the Green Dot bystander intervention program, a comprehensive approach to violence prevention.

Cases involving medical issues - physical or psychological - may be referred to the University’s Health Services or Counseling Services divisions respectively.

Laurie A. Dutton, LPC, LCADC, ACS, Stockton’s associate director of Counseling Services, has been named interim director of the center.

Dutton has an extensive background in social work, assessment, counseling, crisis intervention, domestic violence intervention, program and office administration, training programs, collaborative efforts, and more. She has worked extensively with AtlantiCare and other health care institutions to provide services in the local community. Prior to her work in New Jersey, Dutton was a social worker for nearly 10 years with Alexandria, VA’s Domestic Violence Intervention Project. She is a licensed professional counselor and a licensed clinical alcohol and drug counselor and has her master’s degree in Counseling.

“I am excited to return to my professional roots and work again as an advocate for victims and survivors of power-based personal violence,” said Dutton, who also co-chaired the Faculty Senate Task Force.

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In the spring of 2013, faculty and staff responded to student requests for such a center on campus and prompted a formal call to action by the Stockton community. An ad hoc committee of faculty, staff, students and community members composed an initial proposal for the center. A Faculty Senate Task Force was formed in January of 2014 to further review the center's mission, responsibilities and required resources. The task force presented a final proposal to the Faculty Senate which was approved in May 2014. Stockton University President Herman Saatkamp approved the approach in June 2014.

"This project really began with the students - this is their success," Dr. Jacobson said. "The students performed the advocacy and worked through the institutional channels. We as faculty and staff members simply supported their seeking of a sustainable resource to provide to the campus community."

Stockton University joins seven of its sister schools in New Jersey that have women's centers, including Rowan University, The College of New Jersey and Montclair State University.

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