

Educational Outreach to LGBT Evangelicals in Orange County

I propose to host a series of educational events supporting LGBT students and religious congregants in some of the most conservative institutions in Orange County. As one of California's most religiously conservative counties, Orange County creates an environment wherein LGBT youth are forced to worship and learn in isolation. Frequently, such LGBT individuals are obligated to remain in the closet at both their religious congregation and their school, because of the social interconnectedness between their school and their church. Biola University, a university on the border of Orange County, is a prime example of such interconnectedness. As one of the nation's most well respected centers for conservative Evangelical thought, Biola University strongly prohibits "homosexual behavior" in its student policy, invoking feelings of isolation in the university's LGBT students. Local church congregations which partner with Biola University, consequentially, also condemn LGBT identity. LGBT Christians in Orange County are thus caught in a cycle of loneliness and spiritual conflict. My goal is to offer LGBT students and congregants in these religious institutions a safe space to combat their feelings of isolation, and to host educational outreach to their religious communities.

I'm aware of this need firsthand, as I am a lesbian student who grew up in Orange County and attended Biola University. While finishing my final semester at the school, I began a weekly, secretive, support group for LGBT students called, "The Biola Queer Underground." In May 2012, we launched our website (thebiolaqueerunderground.com) which received national press-coverage, and in the Fall

of 2012 we hosted our first public event for the Biola community: a panel-style discussion featuring national LGBT rights group Soulforce, and LGBT alumni. The delegates from Soulforce, an organization committed to reconciling religious communities with LGBT communities, discussed LGBT identity in religious texts. Likewise, the LGBT alumni from Biola University shared their coming-out stories in relation to their spiritual wholeness. Over 110 students and alumni were able to attend this panel and spoke afterwards of the healing benefit of the event.

Although I transferred out of Biola University and am now a student at Scripps College, I remain the President of The Biola Queer Underground, now consisting of forty official members. I host our weekly private support-group, wherein we discuss the difficulties of student life and listen to advice from older LGBT alumni. For the Fall semester of 2013 and the Spring semester of 2014, my primary goal is to broaden my outreach goals and host two events per semester in the Orange County area featuring respected LGBT Christian leaders, such as Justin Lee of the Gay Christian Network. In addition to such large events, I aim to host three smaller events per semester at local churches wherein religious students and church congregants are able to openly dialogue about issues of Christian faith and LGBT identity.

Within the past year I have developed an array of local and national connections and resources, including a developing network of LGBT groups at other Christian universities. I am committed to maintaining my relationship with local organizations and churches to help accomplish my goals for outreach, such as the Whittier Rio Hondo Aids Project, Brea United Methodist Church, Episcopal Church of the Messiah, and the LA Gay and Lesbian Center. As the president of the Biola Queer Underground, I have a

wealth of experience in facilitating dialogue on LGBT identity and Christian faith, as I navigate these topics on a weekly basis. I believe my experience with the community of Biola University is essential to beginning dialogue between LGBT students and religious communities in the Orange County area. Looking at my past year's accomplishments, I believe my goals for outreach and continued support are ambitious yet tangible with financial support.

Approximate Outreach Timeline:

Fall 2013	
9/20/13	Small Event at Orange County church Theme: LGBT Christian Coming Out Stories
10/11/13	Large event –Venue near La Mirada Anticipated speaker: Justin Lee, Founder of the Gay Christian Network.
10/25/13	Small event at Orange County local church Theme: LGBT Identity and Scripture
11/8/13	Small event at Orange County church Theme: Church/Classroom Environment and Safe Language
12/6/13B	Large event –Venue near La Mirada Anticipated speaker: Jennifer Knapp
Spring 2014	
2/14/14	Small event at Orange County church Theme: Transgender Experiences in Religious Environments
2/27/14	Large event –Venue near La Mirada Speaker: Dr. Ralph Blair, Founder of Evangelicals Concerned.
3/11/14	Small event at Orange County church Theme: Christian Tradition and Sexual Identity
3/28/14	Small event at Orange County church Theme: Necessity for LGBT-Affirming Religious Spaces
4/11/14	Large event –Venue near La Mirada Speaker: Dr. Mel White, Founder of Soulforce.

Budget:

Personal Funds	
Salary/Gas compensation	\$2,000
Outreach Events:	
Travel expenses - Airfare and hotel rooms for speakers	\$4,000
Speakers' Fees	\$1,500
Venue Costs – Venue, refreshments, etc.	\$2,000
Advertising for Events:	
Yearly Website Maintenance Fees	\$150
Merchandise - T-shirts, stickers, etc.	\$150
Literature -Pamphlets, flyers, posters	\$200
Total Expenses	\$10,000