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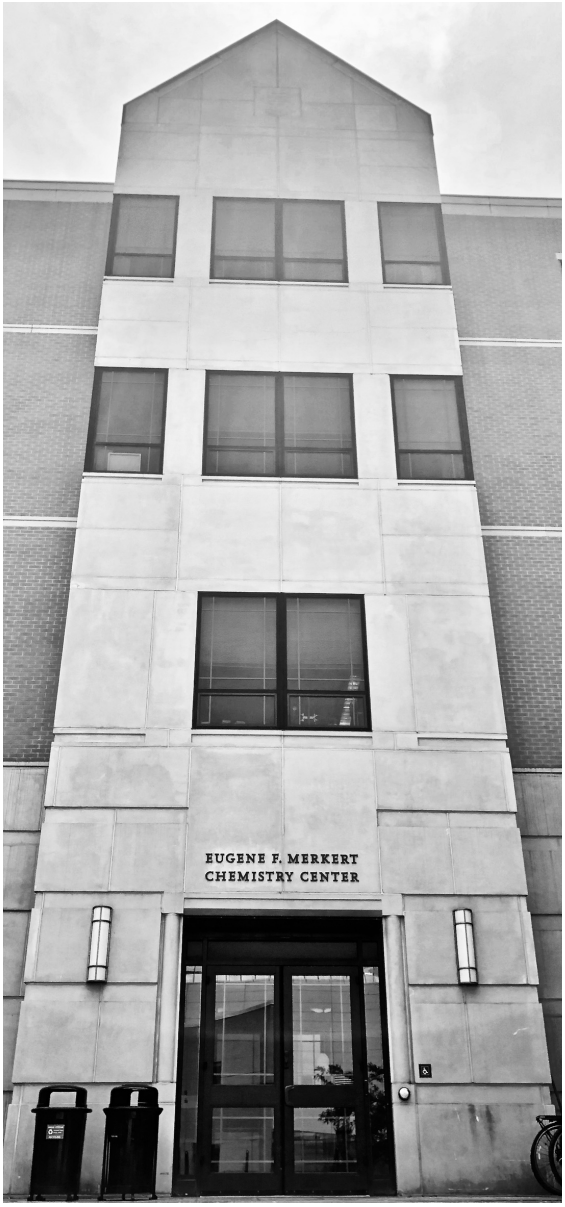
THE MERKERT CATALYST

Brought to you by the Diversity and Inclusion Committee



THIS MONTH'S FEATURE STORY:

LGBTQ Inclusion in STEM

THE IMPORTANCE OF ALLYSHIP

Written by Sarah Canarelli

I think we can all agree that there is opportunity for improvement as it pertains to diversity within the Boston College chemistry community. The Diversity and Inclusion Committee was established in order to address this opportunity and help foster a more inclusive culture in our department. As a committee, we have discussed how to best recruit and retain a more diverse population. While the Committee has worked to develop plans for future recruitment, there are many ways that we can improve the current culture and community in Merkert. One way we can help to encourage diversity is through allyship.

What is an ally? An ally is someone who is supportive and stands up against prejudices experienced by people outside of their own identity. Allyship is especially important for individuals coming from oppressed groups, as they experience hostility, unfair treatment, and other discriminatory behaviors on a regular basis. Being an ally doesn't require much, but it does require you to take action and use your voice to speak up for others.

Why should we care? If we understand that diversity fosters innovation and creative thinking, then we should all also agree that the STEM fields depend on diversity. In order to build a more inclusive community, we must create a culture that welcomes and supports people of all backgrounds. When one person is affected by injustice, we all are. That's a realization we must all accept.

LGBTQ INCLUSION IN STEM

Written by Kevin Byrne

Compared to the arts, humanities, and social sciences, STEM fields have made little progress towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) inclusion. The norm in STEM, to separate personal and professional identities as a means of promoting objectivity, can create new challenges for LGBTQ people in the workplace. Without explicit signs of acceptance, many queer people feel the need to hide their identities at work due to fear for personal safety and/or professional advancement [1]. Despite increasingly supportive social attitudes in recent decades, >40% of LGBTQ-identified STEM professionals are not out to their colleagues [2].

"...THE PRESSURE TO CONFORM OR CONCEAL ASPECTS OF IDENTITY IS FELT MUCH MORE INTENSELY BY THOSE WHOSE IDENTITIES FALL FARTHER OUTSIDE THE STEREOTYPE OF A STRAIGHT, CISGENDER, WHITE, MIDDLE CLASS, MAN. [1]"

Major barriers for LGBTQ inclusion in STEM include a heterosexist/cissexist environment that reinforces gender role stereotypes, a culture that strongly encourages LGBTQ people to remain closeted, and a general lack of awareness or dialogue about LGBTQ issues. Within chemistry, a C&EN poll reported that 44% of LGBTQ chemists have felt excluded, intimidated, or harassed during their career because of their identity [3]. Additionally, a study of STEM faculty found that 70% of out LGBTQ faculty members felt uncomfortable within their own department, and were five times more likely to consider leaving their position after experiencing exclusionary behavior [4].

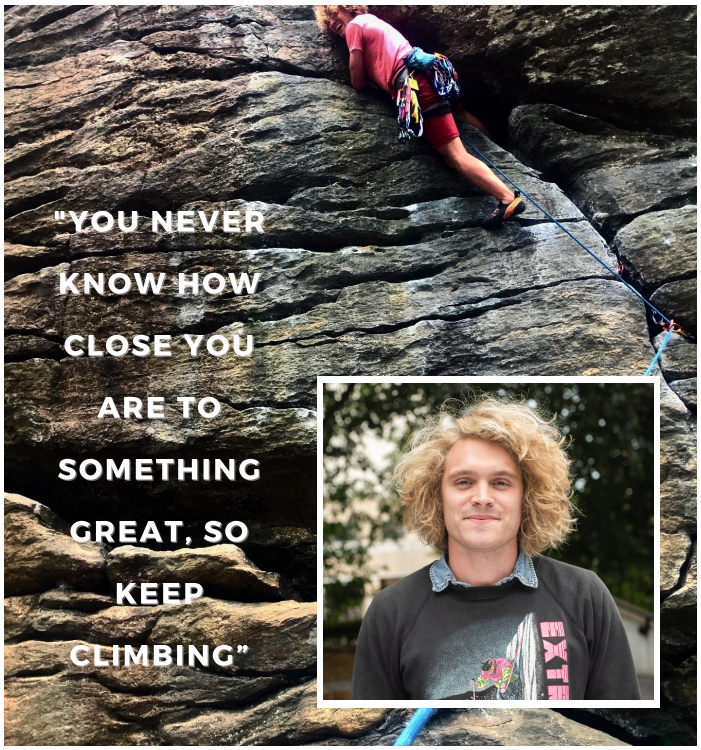
Currently, the STEM fields have a culture that pushes queer people away, but there are many ways to promote LGBTQ inclusion:

- **Become an ally** – educate yourself on LGBTQ issues; challenge discriminatory behavior or comments from peers; normalize holding conversations about inequality within STEM.
- **Use inclusive language** – respect preferred gender pronouns when talking about a person; use gender-neutral phrasing whenever possible; avoid heteronormative assumptions.
- **Gender-neutral bathrooms** – many transgender and gender-nonconforming people experience anxiety or harassment when using gender-specific bathrooms, providing a gender-neutral bathroom can help reduce stressors.
- **Mentoring programs** – while it has been shown that mentoring programs increase overall retention within STEM fields, LGBTQ role models can be especially challenging to find.
- **Promote name changes for publications** – many people transitioning genders undergo a name change, which can erase your research history; publications with birth names can out LGBTQ people who wish to remain closeted.
- **Consider location of events** – increase turnout at conferences and professional events by holding them in locations without local anti-LGBTQ laws or high hate crime rates.

While many LGBTQ people struggle within STEM fields, increasing LGBTQ visibility has been shown to combat feelings of isolation in heteronormative environments and raise awareness of LGBTQ issues. As society continues to move forward and become more supportive to the LGBTQ community, we hope to see a similar shift in the STEM fields. We must embrace and celebrate all intersections of identity and work towards developing initiatives that encourage and support LGBTQ individuals in the STEM fields.

[1] J. Homosex. 2020, 67, 1839-1863 https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2019.1610632
[2] J. Homosex. 2016, 63, 1-27 https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2015.1078632
[3] C&EN 2016, 94, 18-20. https://cen.acs.org/articles/94/i41/place-bench.html
[4] J. Women Minor. Sci. Eng. 2014, 20, 75-98. http://dl.begellhouse.com/journals/00551c876cc2f027,761a7b37493b2d86,6fe4cda94f55abdf.html

MEET OUR COMMUNITY



Meet Conor Loynd! Conor is a third-year graduate student originally from Lincoln, New Hampshire. He earned his Bachelor's degree from the University of New Hampshire (UNH) in 2015 and then spent a few years working at a vaccine startup in Cambridge before coming to Boston College.

As a member of the Chatterjee lab, Conor is working to develop bioorthogonal reactions and methods to isolate newly synthesized proteins. When Conor is not in lab, you are likely to find him climbing all of the large rocks that New England has to offer. And when he is not 500 ft above the ground, you can find him enjoying a craft beer and the latest issue of Nature Chemistry.

Conor says that he chose Boston College because he was fascinated by the work in the Chatterjee lab regarding 5-hydoxytryptophan-targeted click chemistries. After graduation, Conor hopes to inspire the next generation of chemical biologists through research and teaching.

RESOURCES

UPCOMING EVENTS:

BMS Women in Chemistry Outreach Event,
Monday, November 2nd
International LGBTQ STEM Day,
Wednesday, November 18th
The Women Chemists Committee Merck Research Award
Nomination Deadline: Tuesday, December 1st
https://acswcc.org/awards/merck-research-award/

For more information, please visit the Boston College chemistry webpage. Under the Diversity and Outreach tab, you can find additional resources and link to the Diversity and Inclusion website.

Want to be featured in our next "Meet Our Community" story? Email us at diversity.chemistry-ggroup@bc.edu and we will be in touch!

NOTES FROM THE EDITORS

Sarah Canarelli and Kevin Byrne

Thank you to all of those that contributed to this month's issue. The theme for the next month's issue has not yet been finalized, if you have a diversity and inclusion-related topic that you are passionate about and would be interested in writing a piece, please email us at diversity.chemistry-ggroups@bc.edu.