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local news

School's in—and out

Portland Community College offers classes for a sorely underserved population

by Inga Sorensen



School's in session, and it's the same old, same old—math, science, literature, writing. Maybe you'll jazz it up a tad and take beginning basketball. But hold on, did you ever dream you could go to college and take a class on how to better communicate with your *same-sex* partner?

Well, you can now at Portland Community College, which is offering a number of practical classes this fall on gay and lesbian issues.

"We're very excited about this series," says Ann Van Orman, who oversees PCC community education programs.

According to Van Orman, PCC joined up with Kaiser Permanente two years ago to co-sponsor a class designed to enhance communication specifically between same-sex couples.

"It was a huge success, filling fast every term," she tells *Just Out*. "Obviously there was a huge need, underscoring my feeling that this population has been sorely underserved by the community college."

So Van Orman decided to try and change that. She brainstormed with, among others, openly lesbian therapist Mariah Ureel, the instructor of the couples communication class, about ways to expand the pickings.

And that's exactly what happened. Starting in October, four classes of interest to lesbians and gay men will be offered: *Couples Communication for Couples in Same-Sex Relationships*; *Understanding and Healing Possessive Love*, which will address the origins of jealousy and offer strategies for healing this "painful issue from the particular perspective of being gay or lesbian" in this society; *Relationships: A Pathway of Healing and Spiritual Growth*; and, *Legal Issues of Unmarried Couples*, to be taught by Portland attorney Marlene Findling, who will "share information about creating and dissolving domestic partnerships, co-habitation agreements, joint ownership and health issues."

Ureel, 42, who has been in private practice

since 1992 and also counsels teenage girls through Janus Youth Programs, will lead the other classes.

According to Ureel, instruction focusing on same-sex relationships not only provides important skills-building opportunities, but also gives couples a chance to tap into a support network.

"Many of the communication issues we address are probably similar to those facing straight couples," she says. "But there are also major differences, for example, around extended family and in-law issues, financial matters, as well as the general stress of being gay or lesbian in this culture. All of that influences our relationships."

Ureel adds, "In a class for same-sex couples, a certain connection can develop with other gays and lesbians. It's not something you're going to experience in a class with predominately heterosexual couples."

According to Van Orman, college officials never balked at the notion of offering more gay-related classes.

"We can't live in a vacuum," she says. "Besides, this is an educational institution. This is what we do."

Understanding and Healing Possessive Love will be held each Thursday from Oct. 2-23.

Tuition is \$25. Couples Communication for Couples in Same-Sex Relationships will be held each Tuesday from Oct. 7-Dec. 2. Tuition is \$40. Relationships: A Pathway of Healing and Spiritual Growth will run each Thursday from Oct. 30-Nov. 20. Tuition is \$25. All three classes will be held at Lincoln High School, Room 234, from 6:30-8:30 pm.

Legal Issues of Unmarried Relationships is a one-night-only class scheduled for Oct. 27 from 7-9 pm at Lincoln High School, Room 233. Tuition is \$10.

For more information or to register, contact PCC's Community Education Department at 614-7308.