

One to Know

Power of One Conference
comes to Reed College

BY RYAN J. PRADO

The cause of human equality, while still an uphill battle around the globe, is of the utmost immediacy in recorded history, especially when it comes to the LGBTQ community. Gay marriage is in constant debate at the highest levels of government, anti-bullying laws have been put into effect and hate crimes legislation has made minorities safer than ever before, in theory. Yet before LGBTQ Americans were told *en masse* "it gets better," the uncertainty and stigma stemming from mainstream culture weighed daily on the minds of those who weren't entirely convinced. It was with an ear toward the student population of this demographic that the Power of One Conference was forged in 2004.

The eighth annual event—held April 1-3 at Reed College—has evolved since its inception as the Out in the Wheat Fields Conference at Washington State University. While the creation of an annual LGBTQ leadership conference for the Northwest was certainly a landmark step in the right direction, founders Heidi Stanton of WSU and Leslie Webb of Central Washington University knew that in staging an event of this importance, a governing body was necessary to help it grow.

Enter Region V of the National Association of Student Affairs Professionals (NASPA)—encompassing Utah, Alaska, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, Washington, Alberta, British Columbia and Oregon—to the fold.

Kyle Webster, this year's conference chair, explains that the NASPA partnership—which provides professional development and advoca-

cy for student affairs educators and administrators—has skyrocketed the conference into much more than a regional endeavor.

"Getting that partnership really solidified and legitimized the conference and made it a bigger deal," explains Webster, who is on the Power of One committee for the first time. "We now have a little more national attention and a little more sustainability throughout the year. We're pretty much guaranteed to be able to continue on."

Webster reports that registration for the 2011 conference—the first at Reed College and second with the NASPA partnership—is much higher than last year. While the bulk of attendees

will travel from Washington, Montana and Idaho to Portland for the event, the scope of the conference has yielded an opportunity for Webster and the rest of the committee to target participation from students in California and beyond.

At its core, the Power of One Conference is a Northwest student leadership summit designed to encourage and empower LGBTQ college students, their allies, and the faculty and staff who support them.

This year's event centers on the theme "Crossroads of Identities," which Webster explains as the "intersectionality of how different identities come into play with someone's sexuality, gender identity and expression." Webster says that during his undergraduate studies, the LGBTQ-focused conferences he attended were heavy on the gay, male, white culture—topics he in turn aimed to avoid while at the helm of this year's

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—KYLE WEBSTER, CHAIR,
POWER OF ONE CONFERENCE



Power of One event.

"We wanted to really try to challenge people by pushing away from that conversation as much as possible," explains Webster, "and really forcing people to actively engage in this conversation about the complexity of identity and the varying levels of privilege within the LGBTQ community. I think that that overarching theme will be carried throughout, and our hope and our goal as a committee is to really have that be an ongoing conversation throughout the weekend."

Helping carry that conversation along is keynote speaker Parvez Sharma, director of *A Jihad for Love*, a documentary chronicling the lives of gay Muslims around the world. The addition of Sharma to the speakers list highlights one of the major themes during the conference, that of the opportunity for attendees to be challenged by blatant religious dialogues—something decidedly tricky at Reed College, whose unofficial motto lists atheism as a campus-wide tenet.

Elena Rose Vera is likely to provide a similar jolt during her discussion. Described as a "Filipina-Ashkenazic mixed-class trans dyke mestiza," Vera will hold a presentation on queer women of color and read from some of her selected works. Vera has previously performed to sold-out crowds along the Pacific coast as a spoken word artist and has been a repeat San Francisco Pride featured performer with the

A speaker at the WSU/UI Power of One Conference in 2010

National Queer Arts Festival production *Girl Talk: A Trans and Cis Woman Dialogue*.

Other guest speakers include Oregon Congressman Earl Blumenauer, former Q Center executive director and current Governor Kit- zhaber staffer Kendall Clawson, Boston trans slam poet Kit Yan, Silverton Mayor Stu Rasmussen, representatives from Basic Rights Oregon, and Nike's GLBT and Friends Network, who will give a panel discussion centering on their efforts to end homophobia in sports, as well as being out in a Fortune 500 corporation.

"I think that it's very attractive to bring a wide variety of people together to talk about something that's maybe not as often talked about," says Webster.

Having widened its focus beyond LGBTQ student education, the Power of One event has become one of the largest of its kind in the Northwest. With growth comes the spread of the messages of pride in identity, equality and expression. It's only a matter of time before the rest of the world catches on. ☐

The 2011 Power of One Conference runs April 1-3 at Reed College, 3203 SE Woodstock Blvd. Registration information and a full schedule are available online at nwlgbtleadership.wsu.edu.



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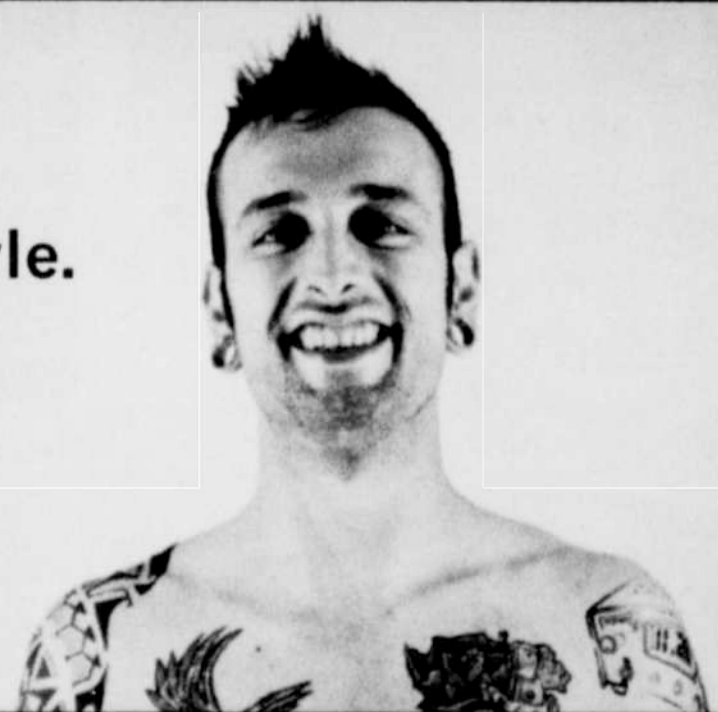


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