

# UOTeachOUT TO SCREEN DOCUMENTARY ON TRANSGENDER TEACHER

A multitude of misinformed ideas about gender and bathrooms has permeated the national discussion as of late, but here in Eugene, the University of Oregon is addressing homophobia and transphobia in public education through UOTeachOUT, its annual series of events on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Each year, UO education professor Julia Heffernan and her colleagues invite a guest speaker to provide insight on LGBT-related topics for future educators and the general public. This year, UOTeachOUT has invited Hina Wong-Kalu, a transgender woman and educator in Hawaii, who is featured in the documentary *A Place in the Middle*.

According to a recent climate survey in Eugene School District 4J, 7 to 9 percent of secondary students in the district identify as LGBTQ, and 54 percent of secondary students in 4J suffer harassment on a monthly basis due to sexual orientation.

Heffernan, Tina Gutierrez-Schmich, equity director of Bethel School District, and UO seniors in Heffernan's class about homophobia all helped organize UOTeachOUT.

On May 12, UOTeachOUT hosts a screening of *A Place in the Middle*, followed by a discussion with Wong-Kalu. The film's directors will also be present.

"This is such an important topic, and Hina's story

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— HINA WONG-KALU

offers us a window into what it can look like to have safe, welcoming and inclusive schools for diversity to thrive," Heffernan says.

*A Place in the Middle* shares Wong-Kalu's transition story and how she supported a female student, who identifies as male and female, to lead an end-of-the-year dance performed by male classmates.

When Wong-Kalu was 18, she began transitioning, which she describes as a "slow and painstaking transition process." She was concerned with looking like a woman and being beautiful like her mother, she says.

She explains that she didn't want to look like a boy in girl's clothing. "I wanted to be my family's daughter," she tells *EW*.

When asked about what educators and future educators can do to be allies for transgender students, Wong-Kalu says, "Stop identifying with penis and vagina and thinking about what's between people's legs."

Wong-Kalu says she believes that getting to know someone should be the focus. She adds, "What's the great difference on the inside between a transgender person and a non-transgender identifying person? Do we not all have feelings? Do we not all have goals, some kind of aspiration, some kind of want, some kind of need? Do we not all have likes and dislikes?"

At the UOTeachOUT, Wong-Kalu says, "I hope to share that there is a particular feel and flare to the transgender experience and [in] the Polynesian and Asian context, and that I am but one example of that." — *Claire Rischiotto*

UOTeachOUT kicks off with a BBQ fundraiser starting 3 pm Saturday, May 7, at Claim 52 Brewing, 1030 Tyinn Street. The screening of *A Place in the Middle* begins 6 pm Thursday, May 12, at Prince Lucien Campbell Hall, Room 180, on the UO campus. Admission is free. Find more event information at [uteachout.com](http://uteachout.com).



HINA WONG-KALU