Bringing Princeton Reads to the Regions

The Princeton campus is abuzz about the pre-read assigned by President Eisgruber ’83: *Whistling Vivaldi* by Claude Steele. The University of California-Berkeley’s Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost, Claude Steele is a social psychologist who has written extensively on the threats that individuals encounter psychologically every day.

In *Whistling Vivaldi*, Steele focuses on the notion of “stereotype threat”, whereby individuals from different groups can have markedly different experiences in the same situation because of the stereotypes that are affiliated with the groups to which we each belong. These threats manifest themselves in situations like standardized testing, classroom discussions, and athletic contests, among many others, and the results are borne out through a series of social psychology experiments.

Not only have incoming first-year students engaged in meaningful discussion on the topic after arriving on campus this September, but also faculty, staff, and many regional associations have read the book or will host events that foster dialog about the book’s concepts. The Rocky Mountain Princeton Club of Colorado and Wyoming hosts a regular women’s book club series, and they plan to discuss *Whistling Vivaldi* as part of a broader club discussion in October. The Princeton Alumni Association of France also will host an event in November.

Here are some fun photos showing how *Whistling Vivaldi* is being enjoyed on campus.

Engaging the LGBTQ+ Alumni Community

As a result of University initiatives and the enthusiastic dedication of alumni volunteers, new resources exist to assist regional associations with embracing and engaging alumni from the LGBTQ+ community. This issue of the *Regional Roar* features tools and tips for regional associations seeking to increase participation and regional involvement by LGBTQ+ alumni.

In April of 2013, Princeton hosted the Every Voice conference, bringing together approximately 550 LGBTQ+ alumni, faculty, staff, students, and their guests on campus. Building upon the success of Every Voice, in December 2014, the Alumni Council Ad Hoc Committee on LGBT Alumni Affairs released its Committee Report. The report includes numerous recommendations aimed specifically at connecting with LGBTQ+ alumni. To view the report, visit: [http://alumni.princeton.edu/goinback/conferences/lgbt/](http://alumni.princeton.edu/goinback/conferences/lgbt/).

Robert Gleason ’87 is co-chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on LGBT Alumni Affairs and an appointed Member-at-Large of the Alumni Council Executive Committee. Gleason sees the Every Voice conference and other conferences hosted by the University as a great opportunity for traditionally underrepresented alumni to reconnect.

“Our some, their undergraduate years were painful and isolating. For others, there was a need to reconcile their LGBT identity with their identity as a Princeton alumnus. All were able to see what a different place Princeton is today than when they attended, and the lengths the University has gone to be a genuinely welcoming environment for all students, including the LGBT members of its community. Through the catharsis and reconciliation, most left with a renewed commitment to Princeton and deeper engagement with the University.”

The need for special efforts by regional association leaders to engage LGBTQ+ alumni arises from the recognition that some of the most engaged alumni come from the least marginalized groups at Princeton. Gleason points out that “increasing attendance from those who might not automatically feel welcome requires specific outreach and overt signs of welcome.”
Some simple steps to engaging LGBTQ+ Alumni include:

• Including photos of a diverse range of alumni participants in newsletters and on websites and other material
• Using event registration and name tag language that does not discriminate – including using the word “spouse” rather than husband or wife
• Contacting the LGBT alumni affiliate group, FFR/Princeton BTGALA (Bisexual, Transgender, Gay and Lesbian Alumni), and asking that the event be promoted to alumni who have asked to be included on their e-mail list.

Shawn Cowls ’87, president of FFR/Princeton BTGALA and co-chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on LGBT Alumni Affairs, recognizes the challenge of maintaining engagement in the long term. “Regional associations could address or mention LGBT alumni periodically to make it clear that LGBTQ alumni are part of the fold.”

Encouraging LGBTQ+ alumni to actively become involved in local leadership, event planning and volunteering reinforces messages of inclusion and involvement. A title such as “LGBTQ+ Chair” renders such involvement particularly visible to the LGBTQ+ community. Cowls points out that LGBTQ+ volunteers will reach out to their friends which may pull in folks who otherwise wouldn’t have paid attention.

Regions can replicate the enthusiasm generated by Every Voice conferences by hosting their own LGBTQ+ event. Cowls urges regions with fewer alumni to consider partnering with alumni from other schools in order to generate sufficient attendance.

Gleason notes that issues of “welcome” are especially acute for the transgender alumni, many of whom have undergone transition after graduation and may need to reconcile their gender identity with their identity as Princeton alumni.

Gleason also notes that most members of the LGBT community have other identities as well, so events that might be geared towards other groups (e.g., women or people of color) should be inclusive of the LGBT community as well, and vice versa.

An engaging speaker on an LGBTQ+ topic draws greater attendance to events, and appeals to all alumni. Finding a speaker can be done by appealing to local alumni, scholars, and authors, or reaching out to local LGBTQ+ non-profits.

For information on co-sponsorship of a local event with FFR/Princeton BTGALA, regional association leaders may contact Shawn Cowls at scowls@mac.com.

The first 25 people who respond to this email will receive a free copy of Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do by Claude M. Steele. Please provide your name and mailing address when responding.

Join CORA’s discussion group for regional officers and share information and best practices.