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A close-up portrait of Mary L. Trump, a woman with long brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a pink shirt and a dark blazer. She is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

**Mary L.  
Trump**

**POTUS's out niece  
tells her truth**

**Mayor  
Alex Morse**  
In his own words

**Challenging  
Times**  
The year in review

**Social Media  
Influencers**  
Local LGBTQ trendsetters

**Shifting Scene**  
New England's gay gathering spots

**Virtual Dancer**  
Boston Ballet's John Lam





## Campus Connection

### LGBTQ COLLEGE CENTERS STRIVE TO KEEP LINES OF SUPPORT OPEN FOR STUDENTS

Back in March and April, when the coronavirus pandemic sent LGBTQ college students packing as campuses shut down across New England and all over the country, LGBTQ students faced a unique challenge. Aside from practical issues like how to get themselves and their belongings home and how to maintain their studies, many suddenly lost the support they'd found on campus.

From the start, LGBTQ college resource centers suspended in-person events or gatherings, and many remain closed. The Stonewall Center at UMass Amherst, for example, won't open its doors until 2021. Some resumed limited support virtually, others could not. Events, too, took a hit.

The University of Connecticut's Rainbow Center had to cancel a highly anticipated drag show, an event used to educate around drag ball culture and talk about the

history and relevance to gender nonconforming and queer folks of color.

UConn also canceled its Lavender Graduation, "which is another really big event that we do to celebrate seniors," said Kelsey O'Neil, the center's director.

Bowdoin College in Maine took a similar approach. "We had to postpone large speaker events or any events that would have brought students together on campus," said Rachel Reinke, associate director at Bowdoin's SWAG (Sexuality, Women and Gender) Center. "And since so much of what SWAG offers to queer students revolves around community spaces and connection, we had to re-think what that would look like in the context of not being able to be physically together. Dinners, in-person workshops and social gatherings just couldn't happen in the same, intimate ways as before."

At the Sexuality, Women and Gender Center at Bowdoin College (pre-COVID). PHOTO [bowdoin.edu](http://bowdoin.edu)

Despite the suspension of in-person events, many colleges allowed LGBTQ students to stay on campus and find ways to stay connected. "UCONN ResLife worked very hard, and they were diligent about the fact that home is not always an affirming place for many different folks," said O'Neil. "There was an appeals process that students had to go through in the spring in order to remain or come back on campus. So they partnered with the Rainbow Center. We very much collaborated and worked together in order to have students be able to get back on campus."

At Bowdoin, "SWAG was still present as a source of virtual support," said Reinke. "We created a weekly email newsletter to provide students with regular updates from SWAG, and shifted many programs to a virtual format that would previously have happened in person—for instance, weekly dinners for queer students and allies that

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**Rachel Reinke**

*Associate director at Bowdoin’s SWAG*

typically happened at the SWAG center moved to Zoom, and students were able to bring their own dinner—or breakfast, lunch, whatever time zone they might be in! We provided students with resources for maintaining privacy as they learned at home, some students were allowed to stay on campus.”

Reinke said the centers were especially mindful of students who had been out on campus but now back in the closet, studying from home.

One student who asked to remain anonymous since his return home to Newtown, Massachusetts, experienced this “push

back” from his parents over his sexuality and felt like it was high school all over again, in all the worst ways. His response? Reinke described it like “putting on armor” to protect himself from his parents, who considered his sexuality a phase. He noticed changes in himself back at home, and he mentioned how he saw a difference in his style choices, dressing “less feminine,” although that was not an issue for him at college. To cope, he said, he began focusing on music and his health has gotten better. Coping mechanisms like these are what LGBTQ college centers often help students with; like everyone else these days, it’s just a little more challenging getting that support

to those studying remotely, from home and even from the otherwise isolated dorm rooms right on campus.

Bennington College Freshman Ava Freyer, who identifies as queer and uses they/them pronouns, spoke of the previous semester’s challenge when they were home with their family. “I planned to be home because I took the gap year so things kind of just worked out, but I didn’t plan on spending all of my time indoors with my family. In the beginning, I was kind of going crazy, like adjusting to spending all of my time with my family after spending zero time with them. But we all kind of adapted. We learned to give each other space and learned how to be around each other.”

Now that the fall semester is in swing, these college centers are finding ways to keep their students engaged. “In all settings, we’ve taken a heightened awareness of how these times of isolation more broadly are impacting students with marginalized identities,” Reinke said. “Starting from that point of understanding has shaped the variety and format of programming we’re providing to LGBTQ+ students specifically this semester.” [x]



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