

UNIVERSITY OUTREACH

By Rhonda Lee

One of the four primary premises for the founding of Sigma Epsilon is “To provide information on cross-dressing to the general public, in order to encourage understanding and acceptance within the community.” Learning to accept self and others is the foundation for outreach, not just to our members, but to our families, churches, and communities. The attached paper details past and recent efforts of our Chapter to reach out to universities, as well as my vision of what I believe university outreach can/should accomplish, a vision which I hope will appeal to all. It is only one of many outreach efforts being made by Sigma Epsilon.

We have recently visited students, faculty, and administrators at Oglethorpe, University of Georgia, Emory, Clemson, Georgia Tech, Kennesaw State, and Georgia Southern University. Overviews of some of these encounters are summarized. Separately, student questions, fielded subsequent to visits, are reported, along with our responses. Following this is student feedback to presentations, with certain particularly insightful comments highlighted.

I am intrigued at the wide variety of “takeaway points” that students find particularly relevant, as well as by the fact that comments are overwhelmingly positive, with some describing the encounter as the “most enriching and educational experience” of their year. Stereotypes are blown apart as students realize crossdressers differ from transsexuals, aren’t typically gay, aren’t drag queens, don’t typically dress full-time, we self-identify and live in a manner consistent with our birth sex, are not typically progressing toward transition, and often have long marriages. They are often surprised to learn that birth sex may differ from gender identity, presentation, or typical sexual orientation, and such gender/sexual orientations are likely not subject to change.

At least 2 students have been emboldened to come out. Others have come to an awareness that they can be proud, rather than ashamed, of who they are. Others have been challenged to adjust long-held beliefs. Even more impressive, many have taken these ideas to the next level, being motivated to advocate for us or become actively involved in correcting social injustice or spreading the broad message of need to accept self and others.

Faculty encounters, only a few of which are recorded here, have led to exchanges of views that have broadened both our understanding/visions and theirs. Definitions which can impact counselors and public understanding of who we are, and policies, teaching, and counsel derived from such understandings are being revised as a result. My hope is that our interactions will lead to broader acceptance by and for all segments of the gender non-conforming community, that we may work in closer harmony toward common goals.

Those of us who have gained so much from Sigma Epsilon by learning to accept ourselves can learn a lot from students, faculty and administrators who have come to realize the value of using this knowledge to educate, learn from, and support others, not just crossdressers. WE can make a positive difference in the lives of many!

Bear in mind that this paper covers only the dents we are making in university outreach. There is much going on in other areas of outreach also.

I hope the attached report will motivate others to become more involved in community outreach. I am trying to provide opportunities for as many as may express interest. I welcome feedback on this report and the vision portrayed therein, as well as suggestions, support, and volunteers. This is a big vision, which I hope we can share collectively. We can all benefit from both individual and collective efforts.

For the full report, please pull up the following link: