

LAFAYETTE COLLEGE

May 29th, 2019

To the Lafayette Community:

Every two years, the Lafayette community comes together for the Equality Rally, which focuses on relevant issues for and tries to increase awareness and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community. The purpose of the Equality Rally is twofold. It serves as a reminder of those who have come before us, and the strides that have been made in working towards LGBTQ+ equality on this campus. At the same time, it is a reminder to the student body and the administration that there is still work to be done, and it makes requests for specific change that we, members of the queer community on this campus, would like to see implemented. This year, the combined leadership of Quest, QPOC (Queer People of Color), and PALM (Pride Association for Leadership and Mentoring) present this letter in solidarity.

The theme of this year's rally is "Intersectionality on Campus." In striving for an approach to activism that recognizes the interactions between multiple institutions of oppression, we want to focus on de-centering whiteness and turning our attention to marginalized groups in seeking social justice. Recognizing the interplay between different social identities and working to counter injustice holistically is an essential part of activism and change. While this is an incredibly broad topic, we have narrowed our focus to three main changes we would like to encourage the administration to implement.

The first of our three points is a push for diversity and inclusion within the school's faculty. Specifically, we would like all faculty members to agree to be Safe Zone trained. There are currently many departments where few or no professors are trained. This creates a potentially hostile environment for queer students. In addition, we would like some faculty members who have already had Safe Zone training to consider an update. Language and ideas surrounding the LGBTQ+ community are constantly evolving, and it is the responsibility of our mentors and educators to be aware of this. We would also like to encourage diversity in the hiring of new faculty, as it is isolating to not see oneself represented among potential role models and mentors.

Second, although the Equality Rally is focused around LGBTQ+ rights and well-being, it is important to recognize that discrimination affects people at the intersections of marginalized identities in different ways, as they are subject to multiple forms of exclusion and disempowerment. As long as some among our community face institutional challenges, we cannot move forward with the progression of queer rights. As such, the second point we would like to address is accessibility and accommodation for disabled students. To this end, we ask for increased accessibility to resources for students with learning disabilities and a shift away from stringent academic policies and housing restrictions that harm students struggling with mental health concerns. For

instance, the GPA requirement for many housing options prevents students from seeking housing options that would be beneficial for their well-being. Queer students, in particular, use off-campus housing options in order to feel more safe and comfortable in their living environment, and could be harmed by these restrictions.

Our third point is the result of a series of actions on the part of the administration that we regard as being in bad faith and putting marginalized students at risk. To deny that racism is still a prevalent issue on this campus is ignorance at best, and an act of violence at worst. The presence of certain speakers on campus, the administrative support they have been provided, and the platform this has raised for hatred and bigotry on this campus is unacceptable. We demand that the administration of Lafayette College works with marginalized students to ensure that their safety and comfort are not compromised by the rhetoric of speakers. In addition, it is necessary for marginalized students to have their own spaces on campus. To this end, we demand that the administration removes the destruction of Portlock Black Cultural Center from its expansion plans.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of necessary reforms. The process of ensuring that this institution is equitable for all is a long one, and one that cannot be ignored or considered a second priority. We want to be clear that this is the reality that students on this campus face. In addition, these changes must be implemented with intentionality and the genuine goal of improving students' lives, rather than empty gestures. As we come together to celebrate the experiences of current queer students and the efforts of those who came before us, we want to continue to emphasize the importance of change and avoid complacency. We look forward to seeing changes made to improve the lives of not only LGBTQ+ students, but all marginalized students on campus, and will continue to demand this change and hold the administration accountable.

Regards,

Quest, QPOC, and PALM