

NAFSA Rainbow SIG SIGnals Newsletter



Rainbow SIGnals is published once a semester by the Rainbow Special Interest Group (SIG) of NAFSA: Association of International Educators. The Rainbow SIG is comprised of diverse NAFSAns whose goals are to combat homophobia, heterosexism and transphobia within NAFSA, to counsel international students and study abroad students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, and to support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered professional in international education.

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Meet Our New Co-Chair: Brita Doyle

By Andy Coleman (CEA Global Education)

Elected during the NAFSA National Conference in Houston, TX, we are thrilled to welcome Brita Doyle as our new Co-Chair. Brita hails from Erie, PA, but it wasn't until moving to D.C. that she began to notice a greater diversity of population and particularly the visibility of LGBT people. After coming out during her mid-20s to supportive family and friends, Brita met her girlfriend, Jenn, and they have been together for three and a half years. Brita enjoys Jenn's talents as a fantastic sous chef at Graffiato, an Italian inspired restaurant, and they live together in the Mount Pleasant neighborhood of D.C.

Brita began working in International Education nine years ago with American University's AU Abroad office following her work study position during her senior year at the university. She has been

involved with NAFSA since her commencement in the field, however this year she was looking for ways to become more involved in NAFSA and specifically Rainbow SIG. She is excited about the regional participation and wants to keep the momentum alive. She is encouraged by the presence of Rainbow SIG members at events throughout the year and across the globe, making the Rainbow SIG a constant presence outside of NAFSA. Considering the approaching Rainbow SIG 20th anniversary, she looks forward to celebrating the milestone of LGBT engagement in NAFSA.



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Additionally, Brita is determined to increase visibility and funding of the LGBT scholarship! Beyond the SIG and AU Abroad, she is passionate about youth exchange opportunities since her first international sojourn was as a Rotary exchange student in Finland for her entire junior year of high school. Her sentiment is that access to international involvement at early age creates a mindset of global responsibility.

During her spare time, you may find Brita wielding a tennis racket, crochet needles, a Washington Nationals pennant, or wooden spoon, spatula and mixing bowl to showcase and share her love of baking!

Interview with Rainbow SIG Scholarship Winner Abraham Martin

By Alayne Wood (Arcadia University)



The inaugural winner of the Rainbow Scholarship!

AW: Tell us a little about yourself.

AM: I am from Potosi, WI., a town of about 1000 people, and am pursuing my BA in History at the University of Wisconsin - Platteville. I am involved with a group that advocates for Disabled students called "Students Planning for Success", as well as the UW-Platteville Women's Center Staff, where I work in office and help promote awareness that gender inequalities still exist. Outside of school, I work for a state organization called the Wisconsin Youth Leadership Forum, Inc. For one week last June I worked with a team to teach 20-30 disabled high school students how to be effective leaders in their communities - to seek the resources they need to empower them to succeed. I feel this is my one greatest accomplishment because I am doing what I love.

AW: Describe your study abroad experience this semester, and how it ties in to your academic plans and personal interests.

AM: I am studying in Thailand, (the Land of Smiles). It has been an amazing semester so far - I am learning the history of a country seldom talked about in the USA. To be here learning the history from the natives and the sights has been invaluable. I chose Thailand mainly because it was a non-traditional study abroad location. When UW-Platteville students think Asia - many would typically think China, Japan or Korea. We often forget about Southeast Asia. In addition, a very good friend from my home campus is a Bangkok native - which made my transition much easier. I would be lost without her friendship and her considerable care in helping me get to Thailand.

AW: If you have previously traveled abroad, where have you visited? What was your most memorable experience, and why?

AM: This is the first time traveling out of my own time zone, so it has been pretty amazing. The farthest I had traveled before was to Arkansas and Tennessee.

AW: In your opinion, what are some of the benefits of study abroad, in general?

AM: As I mentioned previously, learning the culture, language, and history of Thailand has been more meaningful here than if I learned it back home.

AW: What thoughts do you have at this point regarding life after college, and how might this study abroad experience play into those thoughts and plans, either literally or because of how the experience shapes you as a person?

AM: Ideally I would like to pursue a master's degree in Asian Studies with an emphasis on Thailand. I would like to become an educator in a college environment, if not teaching Thai language - at least Teach Thai history, culture, or studies of Southeast Asia. Thailand is interesting because it is a blend of culture from Cambodia, Laos and Burma. The wars waged between the countries, the movement of people, art and architecture combine to make it a truly unique place. Perhaps someday I can return to Thailand to teach- culture, history or perhaps English language.

AW: What else would you like to share with us to help us learn a little more about what makes Abraham Martin tick?

AM: My friends describe me as very shy, but I am also kind and generous. My work with the non-profit I mentioned earlier is my passion-- and much of the time I spend on their behalf is volunteer work. I find work I love to be the most rewarding even if it does not pay well, or at all. Money can't buy happiness, it can only buy things.

I also wish to say that I am extremely grateful for being selected as the winner of the first annual Rainbow Sig Scholarship. It helped tremendously in my cost for going abroad. (The way I figure it paid 1/3 of my program costs.) Please let the committee know that without this scholarship my study abroad would have been in jeopardy. Yet here I am living in a country that I have grown to love from day one. Sometimes I forget I am actually on the other side of the world. I hope that this scholarship will continue to help other students to reach for the stars and study abroad. Many, many thanks.

Report from Rainbow Scholarship Coordinators: We Need Your Help!

We are raising money and spreading the word about the FEA Rainbow Scholarship!

As we approach the end of the year and the holiday season, we'd like to focus your attention on helping us raise money for our 2013-2014 award. Our goal is to raise at least \$5000 by December 31. Please consider hosting a private fundraising party to benefit our scholarship. We'd be happy to send you the materials you need to make this party successful.

We'd also welcome your individual donations: Give at www.fundforeducationabroad.org by clicking "Donate Now," and choosing the Rainbow Scholarship from the "program" drop-down menu. All donations are tax-deductible; donors will receive an official thank you letter from FEA. Also, if you or your friends will be in Washington, DC on November 27 or Boston on December 7, we encourage you to join FEA's cool fundraising events, which are detailed on FEA's website.

Finally, note that LGBTQ students can apply for the 2013-2014 Rainbow Scholarship during the upcoming application period, which begins November 15 and ends January 18. Details and application instructions can be found on the FEA website. The \$5000 award can be applied to summer and fall 2013 programs or spring 2014 programs.

Mark Lenhart, Wendy Gaudin, George Kacenga

Election 2012: What's to Come?

By Andy Coleman (CEA Global Education)

In the months and weeks leading up to this year's election, social issues seemed to take a back seat so that the spotlight could be left for the issues related to jobs and the economy. Advocates for gay rights were often asked to put their "hot button" thoughts aside for a moment and think about the consequences of a slight rise in some of the lowest taxes we have ever seen and affordable healthcare for all Americans. It was often argued that fixing our economy was paramount and all else could wait. However, election results surrounding gay marriage rights told a different story.

It turns out, marriage equality is very important to a lot of people. Maine, Maryland, and Washington passed legal gay marriage and Minnesota struck down a constitutional amendment to ban it. Furthermore, at least six openly gay candidates were elected to Congress and ten anti-LGBT candidates lost to more equality minded candidates. In New York, Iowa, and New Hampshire, negative ads were run against politicians who supported legal gay marriage in their states, but those ads proved ineffective. All of the said politicians were elected, which effectively blocked gay marriage repeal efforts in those states. President Barack Obama, the first sitting president to ever go on the record in support of gay marriage, was re-elected in a message that Mitt Romney's anti-gay marriage stance was not acceptable to the American public. It seems that many voters found human rights to be just as important to our democracy as a healthy economy and job market.

Now that the public has spoken and the votes have been tallied, the momentum has picked up and the stage has been set for real progress in LGBT rights. There are a number of actions President Obama can take in the next four years to add to the victories we have seen recently. He can extend benefits to same-sex military spouses and pave the way for the same to happen for gay civilian couples. President Obama can also continue to refuse to defend the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) in court. DOMA allows the Federal government to not recognize a marriage that a state recognizes. Therefore, legal gay marriage is not recognized on the Federal level. If Obama continues to oppose DOMA, progress for gay rights may come a bit easier. Also, Obama will have the opportunity to appoint pro-LGBT justices to the Supreme Court. If he has the opportunity to do this before they decide on the constitutionality of DOMA, he will strengthen the chances of DOMA's repeal. Due to DOMA, immigrants who marry an American citizen of the same sex are not issued green cards. The Obama administration has made steps toward helping immigrants married to same-sex partners avoid deportation, but further work on this immigration reform is another way Obama can help the LGBT community make progress.

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In addition to the work that Obama can continue to do, there are at least seven more states that could see legal gay marriage due to this most recent election. Colorado's speaker of the house, Frank McNulty does not support gay marriage, but he just lost his majority. McNulty's likely successor is openly gay, and polls show that 70 percent of Colorado citizens are in favor of marriage equality so we can expect it is a matter of time before they move toward legal gay marriage. Minnesota governor Mark Dayton is a strong supporter of gay marriage, so he may move on making it legal in 2013 after the most recent strike down of the gay marriage ban in his state. Rhode Island's openly gay speaker of the house Gordon Fox has promised to work towards a marriage equality bill next year. State legislators in Illinois are considering moving their state's laws from civil union to legal gay marriage in 2013. Delaware's re-elected Governor Jack Markell says the switch from civil unions to legal gay marriage in his state is "inevitable," and he is expected to act on this soon. Citizens in Ohio are working to repeal a 2004 marriage inequality amendment and instead enact an amendment for marriage equality. New Jersey may be putting marriage equality up to a vote soon and with the changing sentiment, a vote in favor of equality is certainly possible.

While we've experienced some progress related to LGBT rights during this year's election, nationwide equal rights are yet to come. What this election has done, however, is create hope for further progress and shows LGBT people and their allies that change is possible. Thank you for voting.

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The Rainbow SIG Regional Representatives:

Region I: Joshua Davis '12-'13

Region II: **Open Position**

Region III: Mark Powell '12-'13 & Wafa Istambouli '12-'13

Region IV: BJ Titus '12-'13

Region V: Jesus Velasco '12-'13, David Gardner '12-'13, Joseph Halaas '12-'13 & Mark Chung Kwan Fan '12-'13

Region VI: Sarah Wann '12-'13

Region VII: **Open Position**Region VIII: **Open Position**Region IX: **Open Position**

Region X: Rebecca Greenstrom '12-'13

Region XI: Sara Sanford '12-'13

Region XII: Travis Pentz '12-'13 & Steve Jacques '12-'13

Outside US: Kevin Stensberg (China) '12-'13 & Christopher Daberer (Canada) '12-'13

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