

Remarks by Robert M. Anderson, Chair of the University of California Academic Senate, at Lavender Graduation, UC Berkeley, April 27 2012

Of all the speeches I will give in my year as Chair of the Academic Senate, this is the one that is most important to me. I felt it was essential for me to express, on behalf of the Academic Senate, congratulations to the LGBT graduates. LGBT students, faculty and staff are an essential part of the diversity that is critical to the University of California. In addition, I want to congratulate and thank you for being out. I realize that being out is a continuum, and some of you will be more out than others. But your presence here at Lavender Graduation is symbolic of your present and future membership in a vibrant LGBT community. By being out, you create hope and a model for those who are still in the closet. By being out, you educate the society which surrounds us.

I want to note in particular LGBT graduates of color. Being queer is complicated, and being of color is complicated. Being both queer and of color is especially complicated. I have a small window into this through the experience of my husband, who is Korean.

One of the extraordinary things about the University of California is that although it is a highly selective research institution, it enrolls an extraordinarily large number of students of families of modest economic means, often the first generation in the family to go beyond high school. UC Berkeley enrolls more Pell Grant recipients than the entire Ivy League combined.

This has been a tough year for all of us at the University of California, with massive budget cuts and tuition increases. Whenever I feel discouraged, I remind myself that in educating all classes of California students, the University of California has been doing something very right for the last hundred and forty-four years.

I want also to congratulate the families of the graduates. I particularly want to thank the parents for raising these extraordinary young men and women, and those somewhere in between.

I came to Berkeley twenty-nine years ago, and I am here to tell you that it *has* gotten better. When I arrived, Berkeley already had separate and large undergraduate and graduate LG student groups, and the dances drew hundreds. There was an informal faculty group. There were, however, very, very few bisexual and transgender people.

In spring 1983, the Regents adopted a policy of nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation. Unfortunately, effective implementation took a couple of decades longer.

In the 1980s, Berkeley carried out an extensive study of campus climate for underrepresented minorities; requests to include LG students were rebuffed. There was no LGBT Resource Center and no LGBT studies minor. The first LG-related courses began as student-initiated courses in the mid-1980s; these inspired faculty-created courses in the early 1990s that grew into the LGBT Studies Minor.

Until the mid-1980s, LG couples rarely had children, except those from a former heterosexual relationship. Then, the Great Lesbian Baby Boom started. Gay men, facing a more complex reproductive technology, became fathers in significant numbers a decade later. Now, each one of you graduates has the choice to have children, and that choice is a very good thing.

In the early 1990s, the campaign for equal employment benefits for LG families heated up. Within UC, this was spearheaded initially by the Academic Senate. A staff coalition mounted a truly extraordinary lobbying effort to demonstrate that this really mattered to UC employees. President Atkinson was supportive but cautious. Duncan Mellichamp, one of my predecessors as Academic Senate Chair, forced consideration of the issue. Governor Wilson unleashed a full court press to block the proposal. In 1997, health benefits for domestic partners and their children passed the Regents by a vote of 13 in favor, 12 opposed, and one abstention. Pension benefits followed in 2002.

In the 1990s, transgender people started becoming much more numerous and visible. I am happy to say that the University of California was a leader, not a

laggard, in changing policies to accommodate their needs, but more needs to be done.

So things have gotten better. But there is still much to be done. It is only in the last three or four years that LGBT people have begun to be included within UC's diversity policies and practices, and then only in tentative ways.

The Undergraduate Experience Study now addresses LGBT students and issues. The responses are unsettling; on question after question, LGBT students express alienation in much greater numbers than other students. After a series of incidents of bigotry in the spring of 2010, President Yudof established a Campus Climate Council, which includes an LGBT working group. Next academic year, UC will conduct the first comprehensive survey of campus climate within all UC constituencies: faculty, staff, graduate students, as well as undergraduates. This survey treats LGBT issues symmetrically with issues based on race, gender, religion, and class. This will give us a much better sense of what problems we need to address.

I have had some particularly interesting experiences as a gay man during my service as Vice Chair and Chair of the Senate these last two years. I had long been out to everyone who knew me, and that had long since ceased to be an issue. While I had continued to work on LGBT issues within the Academic Senate, my focus was much more on issues of faculty and staff compensation and benefits. Suddenly, I was coming in contact with a large number of new people—Regents, senior administrators, student leaders, the press—who almost certainly would assume I was heterosexual. So although my coming-out skills had gotten rusty over time, I knew I had to do it, and right away.

I got some push back on that from two very wise, well-meaning people that I consider good friends. I realized that, if *they* didn't get it, then a whole lot of other heterosexual people wouldn't get it, either. So I explained to the Regents that students in other minority groups can see successful role models, albeit not enough of them, in the senior administration. But LGBT students see very few LGBT role models, in part because we are largely an invisible minority.

Afterwards, I was thanked by a couple of administrators, one of whom told me that his college-aged son had recently come out to him.

We have made progress, in part because of the help of allies. I would include several current Chancellors, especially Bob Birgeneau, who has been a true friend of the LGBT community at Berkeley. Chancellor Tim White at Riverside took Ally training, so he could post his Ally sign at the entrance to his office. Some of his visitors know what it means; others don't, so they ask and he tells them. When a Chancellor does that, it sends a powerful message to the campus community.

Just as the Civil Rights Movement was driven by the courage and determination of African-Americans, the LGBT movement has been driven by the courage and determination of LGBT people. We are grateful for the support of our allies, but we did this ourselves, and we must *continue* to do it ourselves. By being out to the extent you are able, and strong, you provide hope and support for those who are not yet able to be out. By being out, and strong, you change the minds of the rest of society.

LGBT faculty and staff will continue to work to Make It Better here at UC. You who are graduating are going out into the world. You must continue to Make It Better wherever your bright futures take you.