

# BRYANT'S



**BRYANT PRIDE EXECUTIVE BOARD**  
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HALL 17

PHOTOGRAPHY: SARA ELDER



# EYE ON PRIDE



PAUL DEWOLF, BRYANT'S UNIVERSITY RELATIONS

**B**ryant University might be known primarily as a business school, but that doesn't mean it's not progressive. In fact, Bryant is among about 5% of four-year universities in the United States that have enacted some sort of gender neutral housing on campus. In the same year, Bryant has set aside space for a **GLBTQ Center** which opened November 30, 2011. Our school is a reminder that progress and business can go hand in hand.

Through **Bryant Pride**, our gay-straight alliance, we fought for equality on campus. We both joined the organization as soon as we came to Bryant. Jonathan is a senior and currently the vice president and Sara is a junior and the secretary. For the past few years, our focus has been bringing a GLBTQ center to Bryant.

In 2010, it became clear that a GLBTQ center wouldn't be enough. Students needed to feel safe in their dorms as well. Jonathan experienced first-hand the ignorance and misunderstanding that can lead people to act on their hatred. His suitemate, in a drunken rage, broke a university-issued coffee table, so Jonathan told him he was going to have

to pay for the table. The suitemate responded by making threatening gestures and calling him a faggot.

After this, Jonathan didn't feel safe living with him. The next year's housing lottery would be taking place soon, so we went to the director of *Residence Life* to propose living together. But there was no policy in place regarding opposite sex roommates. So we decided to go to the *Vice President of Student Affairs*, **Dr. Thomas Eakin**, who understood our reasoning but couldn't do anything for next year's housing. This meant we would both have to find same-sex suites to live in.

Despite this, we decided that it was important to fight for gender neutral housing, even if it wouldn't directly benefit us. We wanted to spend Jonathan's last year at Bryant making sure nobody else had to go through what he did. He wanted to leave the campus knowing he had made a difference.

With the help of Bryant Pride gender neutral housing became another top priority. Bryant Pride had submitted several proposals over the years for a GLBTQ Center, so we didn't expect to receive one anytime soon, let alone gender neutral housing—which would require a huge policy change. We just wanted to start the long process so the students after us would have a foundation for change.

We had a lot of support from faculty and staff; **Judy McDonnell**, a professor of sociology and one of the founders of Bryant Pride, spent a significant amount of time trying to convince the administration of the benefits of gender neutral housing. She was one of the first people to find out when gender neutral housing was passed. We were the first ones she told, even though she wasn't sure it was completely official.

We set up a meeting with Dr. Eakin to find out the logistics and how the change would actually be implemented. The pilot program would begin in Bryant's newest dormitory, **Hall 17**, because it's the only residence hall that has two bathrooms in each suite. This would give students the option to designate bathrooms by sex if they chose to. Up to three suites would be set as gender neutral.

Prior to housing selection, students can opt to be in a gender neutral suite and would go through a separate housing lottery. Similar to other schools with gender neutral housing options, students are discouraged from living with their partners.

We didn't expect the news to come this quickly; we expected to spend all year fighting for this, so getting it before the first semester was over was startling. At the same time, the school was allotting space in the student center for the new GLBTQ Center, and the opening was in a few weeks.

The opening of the GLBTQ Center began with a March for Inclusiveness around campus. Jonathan and I organized the entire event—everything from speakers to advertising. We didn't expect many people—we knew from experience that when events focused on anything related to the GLBTQ community, they were not very successful. So the turnout was unexpected. Over 30 people came, and the students came from many organizations on campus. Many of the people were part of Bryant's administration and had helped us achieve our goals. Among them were **President Ronald Machtley** and Dr. Eakin.

We hope that the GLBTQ Center and gender neutral housing will inspire more GLBTQ students to consider Bryant as a school. We want the student population to diversify, just like Bryant is diversifying their academic programs to include more liberal arts. The GLBTQ Center will supplement gender neutral housing by giving students a place to further explore their identities.

The GLBTQ Center is already in operation, and gender neutral housing will begin the Fall 2012 semester. We take comfort in knowing future generations of Bryant students will be able to feel safe and included where they live. Even if it only makes one student on campus feel safer, it'll be worth it.