

CONSORTIUM OF HIGHER EDUCATION LGBT RESOURCE PROFESSIONALS

Genny Beemyn – Research and Assessment Award

*Presented onstage at the Creating Change Conference 2015 in Denver,
Colorado*

Hello Denver! I'm Warren Scherer. And I'm Demere Woolway. We're here representing the Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals, a professional association supporting over 600 people employed on college campuses around the world. And our members, in turn, serve over 4 million college students.

We are thrilled to stand in front of you today to honor the work of Dr. Genny Beemyn. Genny is the director of The Stonewall Center at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and is so much more to so many more. Genny has been a force in our field, reliably pushing us forward as a profession and as a community. Genny reminds us of the every day actions that we can take to help build inclusion: allowing no one but ourselves to define our names, pronouns, and gender identities.



Genny has contributed tremendously to our understanding of transgender and non-binary college students. Through webinars, conference presentations, articles, and every other medium out there, they work tirelessly to share knowledge across the nation. Along these lines, Genny led a Consortium task force to help create applied, practical recommendations for policies and practices that support transgender college students. Moreover, through a variety of research projects, Genny has uncovered new knowledge and new ways of understanding transgender people. This is especially clear in *The Lives of Transgender People*, co-authored with Sue Rankin. Rather than relying on someone else's narrative of what trans development should look like, this book allows transgender people to define what their own development looks like and how they came to understand who they are. As practitioners in higher education, we have all become better at what we do, thanks to Genny's research.

If this were all that Genny had accomplished, it would be impressive. And yet, there is more! Genny is also a scholar of history, having taught and published on a variety of under-represented topics. They have a particular interest in understanding the history of LGBTQ people of color. They have worked to elevate trailblazers who have often been overlooked in queer movements. They have published *A Queer Capital*, on the gay history of Washington, D.C. This important work documents oral history, examines how race impacted the homophile movement, and humanizes the past. Genny's work helps record pieces of our shared queer heritage that would otherwise be lost.

And finally, as Consortium co-chairs, we can attest that Genny remains committed to pushing higher education to become more fully inclusive of queer people. Genny helps us connect to national leaders, brings us innovative ideas, and constantly supports us. They also have the fastest email response rate we have ever seen - Genny gets more done in a few minutes than we get done in an hour. Diligence, support, friendship, and collegiality make Genny an incredible contributor to the work of the Consortium.

Therefore, on behalf of the Consortium and the National LGBTQ Task Force, we are proud to present Dr. Genny Beemyn with the Consortium Research and Assessment Award.

To critically transform higher education environments so that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students, faculty, administrators, staff, and alumni have equity in every respect.

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Dr. Genny Beemyn's remarks

I tremendously thank the Consortium for this award and Creating Change for the opportunity to have the award be presented here. For the past 14 years, both the Consortium and Creating Change have been supportive homes for me—among the few places where I feel visible and understood as a genderqueer person.

It is wanting to help other non-binary queer people feel more visible and more understood through telling their stories that drives me as a researcher. Sharing our experiences contributes to our being seen and to changing institutions.

To that end, I want to share briefly with you one such story.

In conducting a national study of college students who identify outside of gender and/or sexual binaries, I recently interviewed B, a student at a large, public university. B identifies as gender fluid and sexually fluid, specifically as demisexual and sapiosexual, which ze describes as being “sexually/physically attracted to all genders, if [ze is] first mentally/emotionally attracted.” When puberty started, B began to hate hir body, as ze did not want to develop breasts. Ze even hit hir chest to try to make them go away. B tried to talk with hir parents, but they were entirely unsupportive. Even after B attempted suicide, hir parents did not and still will not accept hir sexual and gender identities.

B is now a college student, and hir college also offers hir little support. Like almost all of the non-binary gender students whom I interviewed, B felt that hir institution had little understanding of hir as a gender-nonconforming individual and, as a result, cannot address hir needs. For example, B stated that professors assume a person's pronouns. Faculty members never consider that a student might want to be referred to by “ze/hir,” “they/them,” or another set of gender-inclusive pronouns, much less ask what pronouns students' use at the outset of a course. B's campus also does not offer gender-inclusive housing and has few gender-inclusive bathrooms, so non-binary students do not have always have a safe and comfortable place to call home and often cannot pee in peace. Yet, B's university is rated as one of the more supportive of trans students in the Campus Pride Index because it has some trans-inclusive policies, whereas most schools fail to consider non-binary trans students at all.

I offer this example from my work because the voices of non-binary individuals like B often continue to be silenced, so that few people know the truths of our lives and little pressure is applied to institutions to make our lives better. We need many more people to help bring our stories to light. Several of us queer activist researchers will be leading a workshop in the first session tomorrow morning, discussing how people can contribute to LGBTQIA+ communities and movements through scholarship. You do not need to be a faculty member or graduate student or have a Ph.D. to be a researcher. Anyone can make a difference. Create change.

