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White Supremacy and White Fragility: The Firing of Dr. Jonathan P. Higgins

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The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals [denounces the recent dismissal of Dr. Jonathan Higgins from the Claremont Colleges](#).

The firing of Dr. Higgins shines a bright light on entrenched white supremacy and white fragility in higher education as well as the hypocrisy at play in the free speech debate across higher education. Media outlets like *The College Fix* claim to ardently support free speech yet condemn and call for the termination of those who do not conform to their worldview.

We are particularly concerned about the impact that Dr. Higgins' dismissal has on QTPOC (queer and trans people of color) students, faculty, and staff at the Claremont Colleges, as well as the message this sends to our QTPOC colleagues and students across institutions. This is not an isolated incident, but yet [another example of faculty and staff of color speaking truth to their experiences](#) of [anti-Blackness and racism to be met with devastating and violent consequences](#). College and university leadership should stand by their employees when they are targeted for harassment, and this most recent incident demonstrates how faculty and staff members, particularly those holding marginalized identities and sharing their experiences, have been singled out by right wing media outlets and their supporters. The Consortium echoes the call by [Julia Golden-Battle](#) for student affairs professional organizations, including NASPA and ACPA, to support the dedicated professionals who serve students on a daily basis. These professional

organizations must also interrogate and address how white supremacy and white fragility adversely impact the lives of our QTPOC colleagues.

We also wish to affirm our support for the Queer Resource Center of The Claremont Colleges (QRC) and the staff members currently serving in the Center. This decision to terminate Dr. Higgins was made by the Pomona College administration, and the actions taken by the administration make the [QRC's work](#) of “actively challenging all forms of oppression, including but not limited to racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, xenophobia, classism, and ableism, and actively working toward justice, and prioritizing lived experiences and centering voices of those who have multiple marginalized identities” even more challenging.

Campuses can support Dr. Higgins' work by employing him as a [speaker and facilitator](#). Dr. Higgins has been named a “Top 100 LGBTQ Emerging Leader” by the National Black Justice Coalition and he has “over 10 years of experience in education, social justice and grassroots movements, Dr. Higgins is focused on public speaking and working with the media on issues centered on people of color, LGBTQ storytelling and marginalized communities.” Campus administrators can also [sign onto an open letter](#) in defense of Dr. Higgins, which includes a list of demands to Dr. Miriam Feldblum, Vice President and Dean of Students and Dr. Jan Collins-Eaglin, Associate Dean of Students for Personal Success and Wellness at Pomona College.

The Consortium's 2014 self study report indicated that 22.1% of members identified as POC while only 7% identified as Black across all levels of experience collectively. Our own field is gravely lacking in QTPOC leadership on college and university campuses. This is an important moment to center our QTPOC colleagues and students, as the violence that consistently oppresses these identities is made public and more tangible through this type of action and limits opportunities for advancement and growth within our profession. In the spring of 2016, the Consortium released our [Recommendations for Supporting Trans and Queer Students of Color](#), which may be a helpful resource at this time. We also invite our membership to speak with [members of our board](#) at any time, including our [Racial Justice Chair](#) and [People of Color Co-Chairs](#).

The Consortium of Higher Education LGBT Resource Professionals envisions higher education environments where LGBTQ people, inclusive of all of our intersecting identities, are fully liberated. We are a member-based organization working towards the liberation of LGBTQ people in higher education. We support individuals who work on campuses to educate and support people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as advocate for more inclusive policies and practices through an intersectional and racial justice framework. Learn more about the Consortium at lgbtcampus.org.