

# Queer Luncheon



*Left to right:* panelists Matty Quinn, Serenity Raewyn, Alyssa Voyles, Christina Smith and moderator Sonia Talero Pachon.

An attentive crowd of 80 students, faculty, and staff gathered for the Spring Queer Luncheon on June 8 during Pride Month. The free event is presented each term by Clark's Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

A panel representing Clark students, faculty, and staff shared their journey toward discovery of their queer identity, their search for building community, and their challenges including feeling safe and navigating family relationships. The panel was moderated by student Sonia Talero Pachon. Panelists were:

- Student Matty Quinn
- Student Serenity Raewyn
- Alyssa Voyles, Director of Employee Equity, Outreach & Engagement
- Professor Christina Smith

## **Here is some of the panel's discussion:**

### **What was your journey toward discovering your queer identity?**

"By the time I was 5 or 6, I knew."

"Society tells us what's acceptable. Parents have opinions. But I can re-embrace who I am. I feel a lot of us are constantly evolving."

"I was in a toxic relationship because I was uncomfortable with who I was."

### **What are some of the ways you have found to build community and support within the LGBTIQ+ community? And within Clark College?**

"In the college's Queer Agenda, we are about creating a safe space where people could be themselves and make friends."

"It was through the amazing people at the Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion where I started to find community."

"I spent a lot of time in the Diversity Center, connecting with others. That's when you find the most genuine people. You find the commonalities."

"Community doesn't just have to be in a physical space. I may not have a large in-person community, but I have developed a community online."

### **What are some of the challenges you've**

**had?**

“Being part of the community, but still not feeling completely welcome.”

“I want to feel not just comfortable, but safe. I felt safer in Portland but moved to Vancouver. I don’t go out to eat in Vancouver.”

**What are some ways you have found to advocate for the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community?**

“For me, it’s showing up for others in the way I didn’t have.”

“I’m visible to my students.”

“My advocacy doesn’t necessarily come from standing with a sign that says Black Lives Matter or Love is Love—although I have done that—but it’s relationships. How we treat each other.”

**What advice would you give your younger self or other people about being part of the LGBTIQ+ community?**

“I have a good friend who in his late 30s attempted suicide several times. He decided in his 40s to live authentically. It is never too late to be yourself.”

“Find queer content you can identify with.”

“For Pride Month, let’s focus less on ‘Love is love’ and more on ‘Trans people are dying.’”

“I’ve always been the weird kid who didn’t have friends. I never went to any school dances. Don’t wait for an invitation that’s not going to come. Just go. Do the thing.”

“You have to walk through your own life. Find a way that’s comfortable for you.”

To learn more, visit the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion’s website.

*Photo: Clark College/Susan Parrish*