

Winter Queer Student Luncheon



Vanessa Neal, Caitlin Malvar, and Dr. Terry Brown with Oso the dog.

Students gathered in the Penguin Student Lounge on January 14 for the Winter Queer Luncheon, an event designed to foster community, connection, and belonging. This term's guest speaker, Caitlin Malvar (they/them), didn't come alone—they were joined by their therapy dog, Oso, who has become somewhat of a Clark College celebrity.

Malvar, the Basic Needs Navigator in Clark's new Basic Needs Hub, delivered an address titled *"Be Where Your Feet Are."* Hosted each term by the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, the free luncheon provides a welcoming space for queer students and allies to come together.

About Caitlin Malvar

Growing up with two supportive and competitive parents who had played collegiate sports, Malvar's life centered around

playing basketball—including playing in high school and collegiate basketball at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff.

But then the pandemic hit. All activities—including basketball—paused. Eventually, when activities slowly started up, Malvar left the team. They earned a master's degree during COVID. Instead of a joyful commencement ceremony surrounded by classmates, family, and friends, they sat at a laptop and watched their name scroll down the screen.

Words of wisdom from Caitlin

- “Like all of you, COVID gave me downtime to reflect on what was important to me moving forward. After I graduated with my master's degree, it was the first time that my life wasn't planned by a basketball coach. I kept getting hung up on the idea that I have lived, breathed, and bled basketball for the last fifteen years of my life. How the hell would I do anything else? Am I anything else?”
- “Then I remembered I was a whole human being before basketball. Sure, my parents taught me to work hard, dedicate myself to my sports, and to win. With time and space to remember who I was before basketball, I remembered they also encouraged me to try new things, to appreciate the outdoors, to learn how to cook from scratch, and to be a great friend.”
- “During the next year, these were going to be the things I was intentional about reincorporating into my life.

With parental pressure to get a real-world job, Malvar decided that rather than move back home to Portland, Oregon to find

work, they would stay in Flagstaff, a small city in the northern Arizona mountains. They got a barista job in a small coffee shop.

Malvar said, “In many ways, this small coffee shop gave me my life back.” Then they recited a long list of how their first post-college job impacted their life:

“What could have just been coffee turned out to be ...



Caitlin Malvar with Oso in the Basic Needs Hub.

- Meeting people who would reignite my love for camping.
- Finding my first queer community.
- Trading lattes for freshly harvested vegetables to cook with.
- Discovering my furry best friend, Oso.

- Embracing creativity in new ways
- Mastering the art of pizza-making
- Learning how to live off the grid.
- Meeting the love of my life
- Finding friends who would visit us in Oregon, after we moved away.”

Malvar said, “Even now, I continue to learn that life is not a race. Life is not a competition. Life is not a game that you can win or lose.” And here’s a list of their lessons learned:

“For me, this life is about ...

- Building a home with those that I love and trust.
- Gathering friends around a table, sharing endless bowls of soup.
- Learning how to make things with my hands.
- Taking Oso on new adventures so he can have new dreams.
- Embracing my queer self – loving who I am and who I am becoming.
- Becoming more than I ever imagined. And in so many ways, it feels like it’s only just starting.”

Malvar said, “Slowing down and being where my feet were was the single most important thing I did when I finished school.”

Then Malvar invited everyone to visit Oso and them in the Basic Needs Hub.

Learn more about the Basic Needs Hub:

Located at Gaiser Hall GHL 216 Mondays through Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Contact: 360-992-2766 or email basicneeds@clark.edu

- Basic Needs Hub Opens
- Why Basic Needs are Essential by Dr. Edwards

Connect with the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ODEI):

- Diversity Center, Gaiser Hall 214
- 360-992-2292 or email: diversity@clark.edu
- www.clark.edu/cc/diversity

Save the Date: Next DEI luncheons

- **February 6 at noon:** Students of Color Luncheon in PUB 161
- **March 6 at noon:** Students with Disability Luncheon in PUB 161

Photos: Clark College/Susan Parrish