

LGBTQ@UTSC & the LGBTQ Lounge

Advice for New Student Leaders

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Introduction

I have Coordinated the group and activities in the Lounge during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 academic years, including the summer sessions. In that time I've helped create the Lounge, furnish and organize it, create funding for LGBTQ@UTSC, establish a library, network and develop a presence in the UTSC and Scarborough community, implement Orientation activities, create over 2,500 safer sex kits, and skyrocket our events from being only weekly meetings to being chalk-full of tri-campus parties, all-ages pubs, discussion nights, workshops, free lunches, and more.

Yet I have never worked entirely alone. I have had wonderful help from many friends, some of whom have graduated by now. I have learned too much along the way to put it down on paper, or to even be able to articulate, but it is my hope that I can get down at least the main ideas and concepts that I'd uncovered which made my life a lot easier, to the benefit of Queer UTSC.

It is my hope that this document will provide ideas, inspiration, support, and gratification for new student leaders for LGBTQ@UTSC or the LGBTQ Lounge at the University of Toronto Scarborough. This document focuses on my own experiences at Scarborough campus. It is an opportunity to share some things I think I've picked up, good or bad, in the hopes that you will consider the themes and how it fits with your own organizational style.

Take from this document what you want. At least, read through it to see what struggles and triumphs have gone on before you. It's a great way to get your feet wet at UTSC, a campus that I've come to love and treasure. Above all else, remember to have a lot of fun doing what you do! And don't be surprised if you get a hug, kiss, or thank-you for your effort and enthusiasm at the end of the year.

Getting People Involved

Planning and Brainstorming

As a great introduction to the group, and to each other, try having brainstorming/planning sessions once in a while (especially at the beginning of the terms). This open house concept will invite people to stop by and jot down their ideas. Have someone facilitate it who has experience doing such things, and ask questions such as, “What makes a good leader? Bad leader? What makes a safe space? Unsafe space? What made LGBTQ@UTSC fun last year? Boring? What do we need to do more of? If we had unlimited money what would you want us to do?”

These sessions should be as open and welcoming as possible. Include food and drinks, advertise well in advance, and it will serve as a fun and engaging alternative to drier ways of assessing needs (e.g. surveys, e-mail topics, etc).

Group Participation: Duty vs. Choice

There will always be people with different ideas of what ‘involvement’ or ‘volunteering’ means to them. They will contribute different amounts of time, contribute effort in different kinds of ways. There’s not much that phrasing of an e-mail or length between planning and implementation of an event will do to change people’s personal desires.

Some won’t want to get involved. Some will want to run everything. Some will help out once in a while. Some will always be there to do whatever needs to be done. And that’s all ok. There should be no hierarchy of “contribution” in the group. I often feel frustrated that only a handful actually want to do serious planning and organizing of events and activities; I remind myself that everyone has their own image of what “getting involved” looks like, and that’s alright.

It’s not people’s duty (read: responsibility) to be involved or to contribute their time, there’s no duty to do an info table, plan events, get food or drinks, show up at meetings, support us on a committee, or talk on the listserv. These

things are *chosen*. Any frustration with people's 'lack of interest' should not be made a personal issue, but should remain merely a reflection of a disconnect between one's desire and concrete means to an end.

Turnout

Weekly meetings' turnouts come and go throughout the year. The start of the year brings new faces that you'll never ever see again. People will also start dropping by the Lounge in the middle of the year. Friendships will be fleeting with some young faces. I always assume that people will try their best to get out of the group or the Lounge what they want. That means that everyone participates at their own pace and to their own discretion as mentioned above.

This will mean that some meetings will contain 5 people, all of whom hang out on a daily basis anyway. Some meetings will be full of new, unfamiliar people.

The Lounge has changed the way LGBTQ@UTSC's weekly meetings function. Or rather, the need has been altered, and the turnout changed accordingly. When we didn't have a Lounge our weekly meetings were pretty well attended if you look at it proportionately (e.g. of 20 students, 7 would attend). Now that we have a Lounge and our numbers have increased, we might still only see 5, 7, or 10 people at a meeting, even though the listserv contains (as of September 2004) over 60 people. The reason for the change is that people now stop in whenever they want and are able to structure *their own* social time. This is great! This is the purpose of a Lounge. It should provide personalized meaning for those who use the Lounge.

It's alright that meetings attract low numbers. That doesn't mean the parties will. Our largest 'party' was the Positive Space's 'Principal's Reception' in early 2004 which brought around 80-100 in total. Our other general parties bring between 30 and 60. Tri-campus parties have brought 20-30. These numbers are important to remember and they might serve as light benchmarks to understand who you're attracting and who you're not. Is it a matter of advertising? Probably a little. But most likely, probably not.

LGBTQ@UTSC people report ‘seeing’ queers all over campus who never go to a meeting, party, or event, or have heard of the listserv (though, who can really tell who’s queer, right?). Is this a fault of advertising? No, we advertise ourselves pretty well. It’s that these people aren’t looking for us, for whatever reason. And that’s ok. What I’m trying to say is that those who attend the parties and larger events *want* to attend them and are already a little connected to people inside the group or the listserv, or scan the bulletin board for our events. We attract those who look or who want to go. There’s no use feeling frustrated that some people don’t show up to our stuff but are out there, because there might not be anything that they can get from LGBTQ@UTSC or the Lounge.

It’s also important to recognize not only who doesn’t show up, but who does. Thank people for attending and encourage them to come back with a friend or two. Allies are generally welcome to our events.

Finally, it is useful to sometime observe the attendance with a more critical eye. Are weekly meetings dominated by men? Is everyone white? Who is mixing with who, and who doesn’t seem to have any friends? As a leader your job is to try to make people feel comfortable, but also to break down barriers for others – who don’t attend – to make it easy and fun to get involved. Solutions could be women only hours (or trans only hours), or hold specific discussion nights with topics centering on ethnospecific issues.

Transparency & Communication

Transparency is a reflection of access that non-organizers have to information and details, and is also a reflection of ability (means to an end) that non-organizers have to participate in event planning and coordination.

Why is this important? In order for the group to function, members must feel welcome to not only attend but to give input, feedback, criticism, and ALSO PRAISE! Remember, all the events, activities, and programming you do is *for them*, so who better to advise you how to run your events and activities than to have them tell you? Indeed, they must be able to shape these things because

these events and activities contribute to the nature, spirit, and flow of the group. Giving access makes for happy members who want to get involved and attend.

It's also nice. Don't be so administrative. Transparency is a business-y word, for sure, but it has social and informal parts as well. It allows them to participate and share their ideas and wisdom. It also lets others learn how you run things, how you phrase things, and lets them vicariously learn how to be a leader, an organizer, an advocate, and a mentor. Similarly, don't assume you have all the skills or that you can't learn anything from anyone else; transparency has the nice side effect of letting others' experiences brush off onto you for you to take in. Indeed, transparency is quite a mutual skill-building exercise (see '*Skills Exchange*' below).

Communication is sharing knowledge. As the organizer you will know everything about your events, activities, long-term plans, and general nuances and direction of the group. Let others in on your vision, for it's theirs too. Let others see what's going on now and later. Part of transparency, communication fosters connectivity between everyone.

There are great ways to communicate and promote transparency. The listserv is a marvelous and easy way to do that. Posting the results of meetings on the listserv, after it happens, is a powerful way to encourage comments, openness, and others' help. Also be sure to post details about planning or business meetings at least a week in advance; the website is also a great place for this data. And don't neglect the bulletin board, especially for larger start-of-the-year meetings or end-of-the-term wrap-ups. Brainstorming sessions work best when others know when it's going to happen, and brainstorming doesn't always happen during set times at the meeting and by those who physically attend; give a variety of ways to be involved and participate, and I'm sure there are those who will take advantage of it.

But no one posts their responses on the listserv? That's alright. No one has to talk or give input. Simply that it was sent out is the goal. That others can learn about things before/after they happen, and that communication is an

ongoing thing, are the most important things that can happen as a result of good communication.

Leadership Development

Some say the true test of a leader is how well they encourage leadership in others. Why wouldn't you want to work with other dedicated, capable, intelligent people? It sure makes things easier and promotes a better Club/Lounge.

If you've got great experience doing certain tasks, encourage others to do it with you and let them see how you do it. You will benefit from having to demonstrate it and from their criticisms, comments, and praise. Don't hog the glory or the opportunities to develop skills, let others share it with you. Why would you explicitly deny this? The ability to gain experience is infinite.

Delegating responsibility is also a great way to ease the burden on yourself. In my experience there are only two or three people running everything. But it doesn't have to be like this, especially since there are clearly different kinds of participation and different ways to participate. Encourage others' personal contributions and continue to learn with them. Praise them for their help but DO IT SINCERELY! Consider a personal thank-you e-mail or a spontaneous, "It's great doing this with you, you make it fun" comment during your activity. But please do be sincere.

Ultimately, you want capable and experienced people to run things when you're not around. Your ultimate goal is to make sure things are running well when you leave. You can best do this by helping make opportunities for interested people to be involved and participate, by encouraging their efforts, and not being cocky or too 'all-mighty'. Trust me, you'll never stop learning from others, so don't shy away from the opportunity!

Outness

From time to time people will e-mail you saying that they're terrified of coming out and that they want your help, somehow. I was once asked to meet

someone in a private classroom, and we would turn the lights off while he wore a handkerchief over his face. My personal decision was not to attend this but to propose meeting at Tim Horton's instead, or else continue e-mail conversation. I made it clear that I cannot help him come out and that I'm just a student, like him; in my mind I reminded myself, amidst the saddening thoughts of this terribly frightened student, that I have no responsibility here to this student or their outness. What could meeting them in a darkened room truly do for them? Why did I need to be there? They didn't want *me* there with *my personal experiences*, they wanted just anybody to talk to. That sounds like a counselor, and I'm not a counselor.

Alternatively, others' experiences with internalized homophobia may seem obvious to us more privileged out queers. We may see someone's identification as straight as clearly untrue (following popular stereotypes, of course). We may also recognize common developments of queerness in others' stories of same-sex experimentation that mimicked our own. However, their experiences are quite different from our own and we shouldn't overlay our biases on them. Others' sexual identity (or gender identity) is their own construction and is not set by our perceptions; we know only our own experiences best and can own what comes from them, and not others'. We are not here to direct students' coming out or to facilitate it. The most we can do is provide events, programming, or referrals if asked. We are not counselors.

Once in a while it is discussed how public or private the Lounge should be kept. Arguments usually go that it should be very public to create maximal awareness among the student body, to encourage the best use of the space; or that it should be kept private because it is a privilege as a student group to have space, or because we do not want to make the space 'too out'. My personal inclinations are a mix of both.

I do not think we are too privileged as a student group to have a space. While other groups, of course, don't have a space (except ABCS, SCSU, SCAA, the Underground, the Women's Centre, by the way), other groups such as ABCS, SCSU, or the Underground are not groups mobilized around their status

as marginalized groups. That we can create a space for ourselves is (1) phenomenal and (2) much needed! We should not forget the work that went into getting it and furnishing it, and continually developing it, and at the same time while we should remember that we are among the few that have a space, let us not forget what it's like to be queer and isolated on campus. What others call privileged I call marginalized with initiative and drive.

As for making the space 'too out' I am mixed. I believe the position of the Lounge should depend on students' wishes and only by that. I was overwhelmingly told, in 2004 when we were given the opportunity to move to the B-Wing, that the Lounge should stay where it is. People like its privacy. Respect that and keep it in mind when you discuss where the Lounge should be in the future.

Different Ideas

Sometimes people will have weird ideas or, frankly, bad ideas. Experience will teach you what ideas will float and what won't, which events will attract people and which won't. Kiss-ins are one example. Often proposed, who will attend? Two or three volunteer on a listserv of 60, and those two or three are the ones that proposed the idea. Then again, maybe it only takes two or three to do a kiss-in ...?

Use your judgment. A great way to see if you should follow through with an ambiguous idea is to ask others. "What do others think? How are others feeling about this? Does anyone want to take this up?" are great questions to ask in a group to feel out what a collective thinks. Often they will tell you if things are good or not.

Wrap-ups and Debriefing

After a great event, tell people about it! Send a quick e-mail to the listserv and include names of those who helped out (if you're going to use names, be sure to remember EVERYONE!). Tell them how much fun you had, or reflect any

positive comments you heard during the night back to the group. We love successes.

It might be a good idea, every month or every other month, to hold 'debrief' sessions for keyholders. Here they can get together and chat about what happened during their shifts, if anyone caused any trouble or said anything offensive, or just spread some positive gossip about what's been going on! It is an opportunity to get support and share ideas as to what worked and what didn't work as greeters, facilitators, enforcers of ground rules, or whatever.

Allies Running the Show?

An important question. Allies should always be made explicitly welcome, except in the case of some more sensitive meetings or if it is requested for particular gatherings or nights. Allies should be made to understand that their role is to support us in ways that will work best for us, and if that means taking a backseat to our queer organizers or by not attending our discussions on coming out, then so be it.

They shouldn't be organizing queer-specific events. That work should be left to us, after all, we're quite capable, right? They can always build such skills in other groups on campus or the city, while our opportunities to do the same in a comfortable, supportive atmosphere are must less prevalent. They must recognize the privilege they hold and should be willing to step back. However, they can always plan ally nights or ally events, or even ally discussion groups; this is a great way to have them talk about their experiences as an ally and what alternatives they can do to support us.

Networking

SCSU

The SCSU can provide money. Submit early. Plan your events for the year and submit your money requests as early as possible. Don't forget the 'miscellaneous' part of your event budgets. Factor about 15%-30% of the total budget into misc. It will help cover unforeseen costs.

The SCSU also has committees now, it seems. Interesting, huh? Not really. The VP Students and Equity is an interesting position but I wonder what use it will be. Then again, that's for you and the membership to decide, right? Remember that you should be the one directing these 'democratically elected representatives' and not the other way around; student representatives should respond to what others tell them.

Make friends with the SCSU! Stop by offices, say hello for no reason. Bring chocolate. Invite them to parties. You'll find they're usually friendly and, despite some odd politics from some of them (this is inevitable), stay on their good side. Allies are helpful when you need to register complaints, suggest changes, enlist support, or ask for advice.

If anyone knows me, though, they know I'm very weary of the "student politician mentality". It is quite easy to develop this however I see it most often from the SCSU. It is the idea that they are the masters of their own castles and that they enjoy being the gatekeepers of their own knowledge, initiatives, and projects. Is this a fault? It can certainly interfere with receiving criticism or direction, two things a democratically student-elected body ought to be experts on.

Student Affairs

Yien, Tom, and Vinitha are amazingly nice and supportive people. Go to them! Make them your friends. Tom, especially, will have great advice for you and is a part of every single functioning piece of UTSC. Need inside knowledge? Ask him. Tom is an open book and is willing to give information, though at times it is coded.

Submit your Lounge receipts to Yien. She is always great to talk to. Don't be shy about just walking in and sitting down to chat!

Positive Space

In my experience, though others (non-students) will disagree with me, the PS committee is largely student-driven. Without student initiatives and involvement it is prone to collapse, though I don't think the same can be said for staff involvement, for example. Attend and bring the information back to the listserv, website, or wherever. But remember it is yet another planning atmosphere, so those who aren't involved in LGBTQ@UTSC/Lounge things probably won't get involved in PS things.

LGBTOUT, OUT@UTM, etc.

These groups should be networked with. Produce tri-campus parties (orgies). They are fairly popular and are great to have on the club's event listings for the year. Consider finding a way to help OUT@UTM out financially. As I understand their funding they are certainly not as lucky as we are.

Don't worry about getting too involved with LGBTOUT unless you want to. There is no need to attend their GMs, to be best friends with their coordinators (yearly turnover makes it awkward sometimes), or to be a student leader on their turf. LGBTOUT runs itself fine with you, and you should attend to LGBTQ@UTSC anyways, right?

GTA & Community Partnerships

I've found great allies in Toronto Public Health. Find and love Leanne Cusitar, she will be the best friend, mentor, and advocate you will find in the GTA. There are several other nurses/sexual educators in TPH that are also pretty good. TPH historically has provided condoms/lube/gloves for safer sex kits and has done a few workshops, so continue the friendship!

Also remember Nadia Bellows who currently Coordinates TEACH. She lives in the area, though works downtown in Planned Parenthood Toronto (PPT).

Invite her to events, ask for her help, and develop initiatives with her. She will do great workshops on anti-oppression, anti-homophobia, for both students and service providers (e.g. SCSU, Health & Wellness, or anyone who is not a student!)

East Metro Youth Services (EMYS) is located at Ellesmere and Markham, not too far away. Consider contacting them to discuss joint initiatives such as workshops, events, or info booths at UTSC events. They are currently trying to resurrect their queer/trans/questioning youthgroup (formerly “Out and Proud”) so it could be an avenue into a local youth group.

Speaking of youth groups, there’s: Yaaha, scarborough/east york; Yeehaw (tentatively!), east york; whatever Out and Proud will turn into, scarborough/east york, and a new one through Toronto Parks and Rec for east york/malvern area. That’s a lot of youth! A lot of younger folks who, like UTSC, do not have access to resources, information, role models, or events that are downtown-focused. Consider reaching out with information resources or inviting them to all-ages events (workshops, parties, or whatever). Yaaha has been a guest of UTSC a few times, there’s no need to stop now.

The Lounge: Cliques

Be wary of the Lounge Clique. This clique may be formed along ethnoracial lines, class lines, or gender lines. Cliques are alright and friendship circles are alright, so long as it doesn’t dominate the space and by implication make newcomers feel unwelcome. Consider identity-specific activities to infuse the Lounge with those who don’t usually attend (e.g. women-only hours, women-only discussion nights). Also try larger mix and mingles at times or dates that are more convenient for those who usually don’t attend events or meetings.

Where & How to Advertise?

Be creative. Make posters, banners, signs, chants, chalk the sidewalk, get on the intranet, the SCSU/LGBTOUT forum, but above all else, E-MAIL and PHYSICALLY TELL PEOPLE! These two ways are, in my experience, the best

ways. You've no idea how many people you reach by forwarding e-mails, because people forward to their friends, who forward to their friends, and so on. Imagine what e-mailing listservs of hundreds of people does!

Word of mouth can't be underestimated. Meet people, talk to people, encourage people to come, make them your friends so that you look forward to their company at the next event and vice versa. Whether it's to the Lounge in general or to the next all-ages pub, people will feel welcome if they are welcomed and invited, or if they can expect you there looking forward to seeing them. Be genuine and social and they will come to you, not because there's cheap alcohol, but because they're looking forward to a fun time.

Historically, rez has been neglected. Try to negotiate strategies with the SRC or RAs, or at least poster around. Never underestimate the power a single poster will have on a captive audience.

Also consider advertising (free, I believe) with fab or Xtra!. They have community listings that have other support groups/social groups, why not the Lounge in Scarborough? Also inform the LGB Youthline of our existence since they might get callers wondering what resources are available in Scarborough; similarly, get yourself on the SOY (Supporting Our Youth) listserv and let them know about what's going on in Scarborough, too.

When to Advertise?

Weekly meetings need around a week to catch people who infrequently check e-mail, are only in school once a week to see your posters, or who will meet someone in the group who can tell them about the event.

Larger parties should have at least two weeks in advance of notice or at least an alert of some kind, "Expect details on a party the last week of September!" And please do plan events early enough that the first business meeting takes place in the 1st/2nd week of school, the first party takes place in the 3rd or 4th week of school, and the final parties take place whenever people don't have exams or trips out of the country.

Also ask around when religious/cultural dates are that people may wish to observe. It is important to understand the populations you're planning for and to remember that their schedule is not necessarily the same as yours. As a white [supposed-to-be-]catholic it was a huge but simplistic learning curve for me to not have a Christmas Dinner, both because of its date and because of its title.

Group Structure

Hierarchy?

Should there be a hierarchy in LGBTQ@UTSC? Here are some reasons not to:

- (1) they are fixed, unchangeable positions: what if someone only wants to plan only one or two events, but is otherwise the most dedicated member? There is no flexibility for people to come and go to be involved as they choose.
- (2) they are formal and intimidating: hierarchy brings routine and structure which are essential to maintaining it. How does this make meetings or participation meaningful for others or, for that matter, fun?
- (3) exclusionary: though 'democratically elected', decisions are ultimately top-down. Those who are in positions to make decisions and carry out orders do so, and those who had not been elected to those positions are involved when and if and how the higher-ups say so. This stifles creativity, communication, and transparency.
- (4) Power play? Who gets elected, and why? Is this a social thing, a popularity contest? What recourse is there to remove the elected positions? There should be a diversity of organizers and ideas, hierarchies do nothing to encourage this.

Collectivism

Collectivism is what the Women's Centre does. While there can be elected/appointed/acclaimed positions, decisions are made in group meetings with group input, criticism, and (hopefully) consensus. This is not majority-rules, this is consensus building. There are great articles on the 'net on how to encourage and maintain a collective in group organizing, I encourage you to seek them out and read them.

Collectivism encourages everyone to be involved. It also recognizes the need for some stable centering force (in the elected positions) for continuity and

as a powerhouse of enthusiasm, interest, and drive – something a club needs from time to time!

However, I feel that there can be an even more open structure than this. There are still elected positions, so people are still restricted to their portfolios (see LGBTQOUT's structure). If interest comes and goes, while others develop the skills or interest in the meantime, they will always be set on the outside because they are not in an elected position.

Working Group

This laissez-faire system should be great for a group that wants maximum personal participation. The working group may only have an elected chair to move meeting along, distribute minutes, be administratively-oriented. The planning happens in sub-groups that form from the main group; the main group meets infrequently, perhaps every other month, while the sub-groups meet as needed. Everything is open to everyone, so projects are passed by the larger working group and delegated to smaller sub-groups. The thinking goes that those who are interested in planning event X will join sub-group X to see it through. The sub-groups will evaporate when the events are done, new ones will be built to satisfy ongoing needs, and everyone comes and goes as they wish.

It is also big on group consensus and on an open exchange of information, criticism, and skills. Because it doesn't require any elected positions – except for the chair – the group is as active as members designate. It is completely person-driven in all aspects.

However, there is a lack of continuity, except that which the chair can provide. It also works best when there are more than two people running events, although it is flexible enough to run with two people and still adhere to its written-out structure. It is also unclear who would have power over money and cheque-writing. It can quickly become a collective. I would favor this model over others as I have seen it in action. It is very goal-oriented and will exist for only as long as its membership is interested, and I think that's quite fair.

Meetings: Business or Pleasure?

Be clear what kinds of weekly/monthly/whatever meetings you're doing! Are they to discuss the group agreement, the constitution, or the keyholder list? Or is it the weekly social? People do NOT like to be surprised (see *Business Meetings!* in the section on "What I Shouldn't Have Done, but Did") nor do they appreciate having their social time taken up by what you think is important.

Let people decide what meetings they want. Every once in a while, even if there's no interest, propose and plan *a separate* business meeting. It gives an opportunity for the goal-oriented of us to get involved and figure out what to do with our energy. And please, don't interrupt weekly meetings with minutes, 'quick business', or even event listings. People don't care! The Lounge lets them browse the event listings at their leisure, as does the listserv & website. If they want to know they'll ask, or go to a business meeting.

Accountability

Who are you accountable to?

Ultimately, to everyone else. Don't forget that. You plan events and programming for them. You attend committee meeting for them. You argue for more queer programming for them. It's all for them. And if they don't like what you're doing, you must listen, it's your job as a leader. They are likely not criticizing your personality so much as where you put effort or how it was organized. It's humbling, I think, to have others direct what you do. It's one of the hardest lessons as a student leader I had to learn, and continue to learn today.

There's a clear distinction, in my mind, between a leader and an administrator. An administrator decides without consultation, and organizes everything themselves. A leader, on the other hand, lets others decide for them, and organizes with the help of others. Which one are you?

Conflict

Eventually, someone won't like what you do. Someone will hate what you do, talk about you when you're not around. And sometimes, your friends won't defend you (even though you think they should). Being a leader gives you a double status, not only as simply a student, like everyone else, but also this other authoritative distinction that you won't shake until you stop planning events. Because of this your friends need not defend you because you're truly not a part of that social network, at that time, you're only the Club Coordinator.

Deal with criticism. It's alright to hear it. Discuss it. Learn why others are saying what they are and find out what you can do to make them happier. It's your duty to represent their needs and work towards providing opportunities to make their social life a bit better, but ultimately it's not your job to make sure they have a good time. Sometimes their criticisms are really their dissatisfaction with what they thought of your event. Did others like it, or did they raise a serious issue? This is a very contextual thing.

And eventually someone will hate you. Will tell you off, whether on a listserv or in person. Clearly it is awkward but remember that you're still in a bit of a leadership capacity. Your goal ought to be to diffuse conflict but not to bow to it. That distinction is a fine line and I can't explain it on paper. Flaming you, insulting you, and putting you down, however, is not appropriate. Stop it firmly and consistently, though not negatively or mutually hurtfully.

An example of this was when a student told me off our listserv once a year for two years, culminating in him leaving the listserv (though, the second time I had him removed). The first time he 'took care of himself' and got himself off the listserv, where he was causing some annoyance, but the second time he flamed me on and off the listserv and complained to Student Affairs and the SCSU about me. I responded by moderating his posts, responding with concise and clear text stating what I was doing and its conditions; after being flamed again I removed him. It was not time for discussion nor was it time to 'diffuse conflict'. His attitude and words were not only in violation of the listserv policy but were hurtful to me as a person. In a leadership capacity (and, in this case, the listserv

moderator), taking criticism is different from being flamed or abused. My actions were swift and clear, and ultimately this student was allowed access to the listserv again (and always had access to the Lounge and student club events).

In closing, during an event such as this I didn't feel it necessary to explain all of this on the listserv, or my decision, or what went on 'behind the scenes' with the SCSU or Student Affairs. There is no need to embarrass students or to make it more difficult for them to reintegrate themselves in the future, if they want to.

Anti-Oppression

What is Anti-Oppression?

Anti-oppression, in a nutshell, is a political framework from which you can organize programming, support, and interaction with others. It posits that (1) there ARE systemic powers that are granted to some and not others (privilege), (2) those who belong to the dominant groups contribute to that systemic power if only because of their inclusion in that system, (3) power dynamics affect us all across our many identity categories.

This means understanding that there is a lot of diversity within each of us. We are more than single-identity carriers. I am more than queer, I am queer, white, agnostic, Polish, 2nd generation, middle-class, able-bodied, english-speaking, with a certain body type. It also means that we all feel the world different on the basis of sexual orientation (l/g/b/t/q, also two-spirited, though I don't think this is a subordinate identity of sexual orientation), gender identity (transfolk & intersexed), race/ethnicity/culture, size (body size), ability (abilities/disabilities, visible or invisible), religion, class (socioeconomic class, e.g. determined by earning power, access to money, and ability to *get* access to money), 'citizenship' ('non-Canadians', 'illegal immigrants', etc), and probably a whole lot more. Not only do marginalized identities affect the structure of our personal worlds, but also privileged identities. Keep in mind that there are two sides to the coin.

This is a complex and very contextual issue. As a leader who will encounter all kinds of people with all kinds of memberships in different things mentioned above, it is *your responsibility to inform yourself* about what anti-oppression looks like and, similarly, what oppression looks like. Learn what your identities mean to you, and what it means to others, and you're one step closer to organizing more inclusive and sensitive events that allow people to participate with the least amount of barriers. Remember, also, that being out is a privilege, as is organizing events and being a gatekeeper of knowledge. Put this way, what will you do with your privilege, help get others involved, or sit back and autocratically plan the year?

There are a lot of great articles online, and in the minds of many others. Attend workshops, talk to more experienced people who work within this model (e.g. social workers, like Leanne Cusitar), and learn what you need to know.

Why is Anti-Oppression Important?

It includes anti-racism, sexism, transphobia, biphobia, sizeism, classism, ageism, etc. etc. It is an all-encompassing ideology. It is good because it remembers all of these things as complex interactions.

Remember, too, that there is diversity within diversity. We are queers in a straight world. But some of us are trans in a queer world, or disabled in an able-bodied world *in addition* to other qualities. Ignoring these differences serves to continue to marginalize individuals within our communities. As a marginalized communities, queers certainly know what it's like to be on the fringes, but there are always those among us who are on the 'edge' even more. Remember them, talk to them, ask them what you can do for them.

Be clear, however, that it's not a statistical numbers game of "who's more oppressed". You cannot and ought not compare identity categories because the issues are too complex to compress to word descriptors and then compare, as if equally weighted. Anti-oppression (and oppression, and privilege), although a systemic thing, is still very contextual. Just because someone is disabled, don't pour over how they "must be so oppressed". Learn their experiences and their ideas around their own life. Let them tell you their issues, don't decide for them who has privilege and who has marginalized status.

You and the “Students”

Being Humble

I quickly found myself referring to the membership as “students”. What am I? I’m a student too, so why did I create this divide? A leader should remember their place and understand the access they have that others don’t, but at the same time you can acknowledge this and still remain on (relatively) equal footing with others. Don’t create a divide between you and them, they’re probably not as likely to attend the events you plan if they don’t like you, because part of going to events is having fun and being with friends.

Also don’t sit with your agenda open, your hands folded in your lap, and your mind churning through formal dialog and “What shouldn’t I tell them about this? What can I keep for myself?” Don’t be so administrative, you’re working with your friends, people who are around your own age (older or younger), the only difference is that you have the inclination to book rooms or order food. Why are you so special? Think about it.

Being Available

Being a gatekeeper of knowledge and organizing drive makes you a commodity and, more importantly, makes you have skills that others don’t have. Share your knowledge by being available. Post your Lounge hours with your name, e-mail the list when that is; reply to e-mail promptly and thoroughly, and always encourage more questions, comments, criticisms, or complaints. If people e-mail the student club/lounge and want to chat, meet with them. See what you can do for them, learn what they want out of LGBTQ@UTSC/The Lounge, and see how you can develop an equal partnership.

The worst that could happen is that someone doesn’t like the kinds of events you plan and you’ll hear about it. If you’re not available you won’t even know how others feel, and won’t have the benefit of an outsider’s critique of what you’re doing.

Development of Skills through Experience

Events turn out crappy? Feel like you're flying by your ears? Think you just had a great business meeting but, as you'll hear later, everyone else thought it was awful? Afraid that people will see that you lack some skills in some areas and won't attend ever again?

These fears are justified. No one's an expert and you shouldn't claim or pretend to be. Acknowledge to yourself and others what you can and can't do, what you don't like to do, and what you need help with. You're not supposed to be a monolithic powerhouse of organizing energy. As for help, delegate responsibilities, or take a backseat to event planning where you need to.

You'll learn a lot of great skills by working with others, whether students, staff, faculty, or whoever. They'll have great experiences and will know what works and what doesn't. Be sure to keep yourself open to learning and criticism and, in time, you'll feel very confident to plan events, activities, lead discussions, and handle group discord.

When I first began things in 2002 I thought I was hot shit. After all, I was the one doing everything, I was the one making posters, I was the one that sat in meetings with the SCSU. But know what I've learned since then? Others didn't like my posters (they all had only pictures of white people on them), and going to SCSU meetings are generally useless (the same information can be gleaned in an hour conversation with any of them). I wasn't hot shit, I was very young and very naïve. And most of all, while I thought I planned a lot of events, while it was more than LGBTQ@UTSC's previous years, it was really only four or five things. Not very many at all, in retrospect!

I planned nearly twice as many events my second year of doing things. Why? Because planning parties became easy to me. I knew who to go to, how to advertise, who to invite, etc. And the turnout was good. My second year of doing stuff (my 3rd year of university) flowed very nicely and, had I continued during my final year of university, for my third year of coordinating, I'm sure the events would only get better. Give yourself time to learn and adjust to things. It will happen.

'Skills Exchange'

This is a concept that has fueled the latter part of my second year of coordinating. It is the concept that you can learn a great deal from others, and they from you. I originally had the idea that "I would plan for people" was enough. I soon learned that, to me, this assumed that I had all the knowledge I needed and that I was a head above others because of this.

Skills Exchange posits that not only do you have skills that you can use on projects, but others have skills too. You can both learn from each other. This evens out the power dynamics a little between coordinators and the membership, I've found. Encouraging others to organize and seeing what I can learn from them really opened my eyes to a few ways of doing things. And the kinds of things I learned were not administrative (who to advertise to, how to do it, etc.) but were social. How to work with people, how to talk to people, and the power that friendship has in making popular events.

UTSC Community

Community Capacity Building?

A bit of a change from Skills Exchange, this concept posits that within a certain context, there is someone with skills, and a community that is without development. You will develop that community so that it has services, programming, and a social network that will sustain itself and will not need your help again. For example there is an LGBTQ population at UTSC and there is you as an organizer. Community capacity building believes that you can use your skills to help develop a social, educational, or political network amongst people that, when you leave, will sustain itself; once developed, once its capacity (potential) has been reached, it will be in a great place.

However, the power transfer is really only one-way. YOU develop the community. YOUR skills change things. In reality I feel that this is very one-sided and incomplete. Communities are full of dedicated, skilled people who are just waiting for an opportunity to strut their stuff. Don't assume you're the be-all and end-all to the developing queerness at UTSC. You should facilitate and encourage development and be able to step back and watch, or even continue to help out but learn at the same time (through skills exchange).

Long-Term Visions?

Do you have a long-term vision for Queer UTSC? What does that look like? How will you know when you get there?

Consult the membership. Ask what they'd like to see in the next ten years. How will it come about? What will have to change so that it can happen? And then work towards it.

My long-term vision includes having a vibrant women and trans population take part in events, discussions, and group organizing. It includes the Lounge being moved to a more central yet still private space. It includes stable funding for years to come, established contacts so that coordinators must do little to reach out and advertise, and projects that are large and well-known like frosh events, *truly popular* tri-campus parties, and very well-attended pub events.

How will we reach it? I don't know. Maybe it's a numbers game, maybe UTSC needs physically more students to increase LGBTQ@UTSC's numbers at events. I'm not sure. But it is certainly a great goal to work towards.

What I Never Got to Do, But Wanted to

Move the Lounge

As mentioned above, I would love to have the Lounge in a more central location (read: out of the portables). As I understand it the portables are temporary structures that may be torn down in the next 3-5 years. What will happen then? We must plan for it and I wonder why we can't move now instead of then.

Ultimately, however, my choices and your choices should be guided by what the membership wants. If they want privacy, find privacy. It is a disservice to actuate your own goals (or other queer faculty or staff's goals) over the students' goals. Remember who you are, a student. Work from there!

Establish Awards/Recognition for Outgoing LGBTQ Student(s)

Wouldn't this be great? Upon graduation, the more productive queers would get an award to recognize the dedication and personal triumph. Or even, why limit it to 'productive queers'? Give one to all queers for 'surviving' the university experience with an acknowledgement that the environment is not always the most comfortable or welcoming.

Of course, there are logistical problems. Often people are not out enough to receive such an award. Where will the money come from? Who will pick the students? Where is it commemorated or written down, and who has access to that list?

Consider an outgoing students' "thank-you" lunch or dinner, instead. Why not thank the elders among us?

Women/Trans Only Hours

There *are* women around and there *must* be trans around (or intersexed, or two-spirited). In my university career I haven't found any I2T students at UTSC. Do they exist? Maybe they went downtown or elsewhere, I'm not sure. I might think instead that they are not 'out' enough to attend our events.

Remembering this marginalized population and encouraging women only or trans

only hours is one step in the right direction to breaking own barriers and facilitating development of those communities.

Of course, clearly it should be women or trans who attend or plan women or trans events/hours. Don't let the men take over. There are certainly capable individuals out there to do your planning, you just need to find them.

Newcomer Events/Meetings

Newcomers to UTSC must feel at least a little intimidated. Throw them into the mix of the seasoned Lounge veterans and pre-existing circle of friends, and everything may look like one big clique.

One way around this is to create newcomer-only events (e.g. 1st year social) or newcomer-only Lounge hours. This way they won't be intimidated by the territory and history of the older members. Newcomer-only activities/hours should be attended by one or two seasoned people, only, to facilitate meetings and conversation. Gradually, the newcomers will feel comfortable enough (hopefully) to seek out the other regular meetings or activities, with their newfound friends and sense of involvement in the club at their side.

Hold More 'Consultation' Meetings

I should have held more meetings to consult others. I relied on the listserv and informal discussions too much to help direct my actions. This fails because there are some who are not on the listserv (or who are but won't speak) or who are not part of my social circles who have ideas, input, and enthusiasm. How are they supposed to get involved? There should be a diversity of ways for people to get involved and show support or interest, and consultation meetings are certainly one way of doing it.

Challenge Language

I'm a stickler for anti-oppression, of course, so I'm all for challenging such things. Often people think I'm either too radical or too "politically correct", or even infringing on their freedom of speech (though hatespeech and systemic

degradation are not freedoms). I should have challenged words and language more often. Words by men like bitch, cunt, whore, fag hag; words by able-bodied people like stupid, lame, retard, moron, idiot; words by white people like FOB, chink, nigger; words by Christian people like kyke; the list goes on and on, believe me.

They are pretty offensive and should have no place in a Lounge, a place where we're supposed to remember that these words affect us quite differently. There are places on the internet to find anti-oppressive arguments in favor of 'policing' language, I won't put them here, go search them out.

Don't be afraid of challenging people, asking them to use respectful language. They may not like you but, ultimately, you'll end up protecting the more marginalized that aren't in the room or who don't feel comfortable speaking up and shooting down a word that clearly attacks them.

What I Shouldn't have Done, but Did

There are, of course, *many* moments I had where I thought, "That was a stupid thing to say" or, "I shouldn't have done that" and also, "I never should have let him say those things".

Business Meetings!

I've said a lot about this above already, so I won't repeat it. Don't mix business meeting with social meetings! Be clear about what will happen.

Filled the Lounge with FAB

Although fab magazine certainly represents a particular population (gay white male, probably on Church St.), it is actually representative of only a tiny minority at UTSC. Fab is easy to get and that contributes to its reach all the way into Scarborough. We should remember that this magazine caters to one of many different kinds of people, and others include women, transfolk, people of color, or men who weigh more than 110lbs. Find representation for these people to!

Don't inundate the Lounge with fab and remember that gay white males are shown more readily than others on tv, in the newspaper, and as stereotypes of what it means to be gay or queer. It is easy to find GWMs, try to find others too, since they're the primary users of the Lounge.

Key Resources

Here are my favorite resources for you to read and spread around!

Feminist Theories (including info on gendered speech and 'taking up space')

http://www.brocku.ca/english/courses/2F55/some_theories.html

van Dijk, Teun. "Denying Racism: Elite Discourse and Racism"

<http://www.discourse-in-society.org/OldArticles/Denying%20racism%20-%20Elite%20discourse%20and%20racism.pdf>

Metro Network for Social Justice (get on their listserv! great GTA listings)

<http://www.mnsj.org/index.htm>

Anti-Racist Organizing: Reflecting on Lessons from Quebec City, 2001

<http://colours.mahost.org/articles/hwang3.html>

National Consortium of Directors of LGBT Resources in Higher Education

<http://www.lgbtcampus.org/resources/index.html>

This is a huge compilation of statistics on Queer drop-in centres, staffing patterns, income & budgets; how to establish 'safe-zones'; FAQs about starting up groups or centres; articles and studies on making universities safer/better for queers; and more!!

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Campus Organizing: A Comprehensive Manual

<http://www.thetaskforce.org/downloads/campus/campusman.pdf>

HUGE and impressive resource! Read it!

Gender Education & Advocacy: Distributed Gender Education

<http://www.gender.org/resources/files.html>

LGBTOUT: Community Links page (huge!)

<http://www.lgbtout.com/external.shtml>

Sex, Celebration, and Justice: A Keynote for Queer Disability Conference 2002 (wow...)

http://www.bentvoices.org/bentvoices/clare_keynote.htm