

HGLC Launches \$1.5 Million Endowment Campaign for Visiting Professorship

Realizing a two-decade dream, HGLC has launched a \$1.5 million campaign to endow a visiting professorship at Harvard College in LGBT studies. Harvard Overseer and campaign co-chair, Mitchell Adams, AB '66, MBA '69, made the announcement at the Caucus' annual commencement dinner on June 7, 2007. With \$745,000 in gifts and pledges raised as of May 1, 2008, the campaign committee of 20 lead donors and Caucus leaders is aiming to reach its goal in late 2008 or early 2009 in time to celebrate HGLC's 25th anniversary.

Named after distinguished gay Harvard professor F.O. Matthiessen (1902-1950), founder of the field of American Studies, the F.O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship of Gender and Sexuality will enable Harvard to regularly invite eminent scholars studying issues related to sexuality or sexual minorities, and particularly to the LGBT community, to teach at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences for one semester. Each year the Dean of FAS will invite faculty members with an interest and expertise in LGBT studies to nominate eminent scholars for the professorship. The Matthiessen Professor may be appointed in any department, but will generally be associated or directly affiliated with the Committee on Degrees in Studies of Women, Gender and Sexuality.

In the fall of 2003, after years of advocacy by students and faculty, led by Professor Brad Epps, the FAS faculty unanimously approved the relaunching of Women's Studies as the Committee on Degrees in Studies of Women, Gender and Sexuality (WGS). Undergraduates are now able to concentrate in the field on one of two academic tracks offered by this degree-granting committee - either LGBT studies or women's studies. Soon after the vote the HGLC board decided that the time was right to call on the Harvard LGBT alumni/ae community to support the university's efforts.

Spearheaded by Warren Goldfarb, Bob Mack and Tom Parry, the group determined that a visiting professorship, as opposed to a full professorship, would make the most sense. Because LGBT studies is a relatively new and multidisciplinary field, the group felt it would be more effective to bring a variety of scholars to campus from a number of disciplines rather than funding one full-time professor. In addition, Harvard students and faculty would be exposed to cutting-edge ideas from the field as top scholars rotate through the position. The visiting professorship would also serve to audition new talent that Harvard might hire as WGS expands in the future. Finally, the Matthiessen Professorship would help grow the field of LGBT Studies as these visiting scholars return to their home institutions with this prestigious position on their resumes.

Because of F.O. Matthiessen's unique position as a prominent Harvard scholar and his inspiring commitment to his life partner, the group was drawn to the idea of naming the professorship after him. For the early to mid 20th century Matthiessen was an unusual example of a gay man who lived his sexuality as an "open secret." He and his partner, the much older artist, Russell Cheney, were together for 23 years until Cheney's death in 1945. Their friends and Matthiessen's Harvard colleagues understood the real nature of their relationship. By 1950, despondent over Cheney's loss and having been hounded

for his left-leaning political ideas by Joseph McCarthy and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Matthiessen leapt to his death from a Boston hotel room. His work in American Studies was groundbreaking. In the academic and literary community he is considered, "...the most eminent American literary critic of the first half of the 20th century." His most notable publications include *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman*, widely regarded as the foundational text of the field, and *Henry James: The Major Phase*. He also chaired the undergraduate program in History and Literature and was the first Senior Tutor of Eliot House. Both Harvard and the Caucus feel that F.O. Matthiessen is a fitting choice for a named chair in the emerging field of LGBT Studies.

Unfortunately, Harvard is behind other institutions in the field, such as Yale, Duke, the University of Chicago, the University of Pennsylvania, Berkeley, NYU, Brown and Rutgers, which offer a variety of compelling programs. The Matthiessen Visiting Professorship will not only augment the resources that Harvard is now committing to WGS, it will send a signal to other institutions and the world at large that Harvard alumni/ae and their considerable resources are fully behind the effort to grow the field of LGBT studies.

In its negotiations on the professorship, the Caucus received a significant level of support and cooperation from Harvard. A development officer has been assigned to the campaign giving us access to the full resources of the Harvard Development Office. More significantly, all gifts to the Matthiessen Professorship from Harvard and Radcliffe College alumni/ae will be credited to the alumna/us' class or reunion gift, a dispensation that is rarely granted. So, for instance, when the 25th Reunion comes calling asking for that big gift, a donation to the Matthiessen will count toward the reunion gift total.

Leadership gifts ranging from \$10,000 to \$250,000 are a crucial element in reaching our goal. The foundation of the campaign, however, is broad participation -- to the extent of their ability -- by all members and friends of the Harvard LGBT community. A high participation rate from our 4,600+ members, whether the gifts be as small as \$50, or via numerous \$100, \$500 or \$1,000 amounts, will go a long way toward endowing the professorship. For donors who are able to contribute large amounts, five-figure gifts are payable over three years and six-figure gifts are payable over five years. Gifts are payable to Harvard University, but for those who wish to remain anonymous to Harvard gifts may be made to the Open Gate, which in turn will pass them on to Harvard.

Harvard's embrace of LGBT studies is a turning point in the history of the institution. One of our early lead donors likened it to the moment when the parent of a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender child accepts their daughter or son for who they are. Harvard's core identity is based on what it teaches and, as the world's foremost university, when it embraces a field of study, it sends a powerful signal of legitimacy.

For the Harvard LGBT community, making the F.O. Matthiessen Visiting Professorship in Gender and Sexuality a reality is crucial to our place in the greater Harvard community. Quoting former Caucus president Bob Mack:

“Endowing this chair represents the maturation of the relationship of our community with Harvard itself. We have grown from a small band of dissidents to an accepted and respected part of Harvard's alumni population. But to earn a full place at the table with other minority groups we need to demonstrate that we have the muscle and interest to give back as well as to demand our rights.”

So please consider giving generously.