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November 15, 2023 / Special Print Edition: Celebrating Trans Awareness / Online Monday, Wednesday and Friday at albionpleiad.com

Opinion: Well-being Wednesday, Raising Awareness for Trans Students' Mental Health

Katherine Simpkins
Media Editor, Co-Marketing Coordinator

Transgender Awareness Week is Nov. 13-19; it precedes Transgender Day of Remembrance, an annual observance on Nov. 20 that honors the memory of transgender (trans) people whose lives were lost in acts of anti-trans violence. The week was established in 1999 to help raise visibility of trans people and address issues members of the community face, like discrimination, inaccessible hormone therapy and misgendering.

“Only you know who you are, and it’s such a joyous feeling when you know who you are. I hope everyone feels that at least once in their life.”

To celebrate the week, I want to highlight trans voices across Albion College and discuss mental health struggles specific to the community and the resources available to them.

I am a cisgender and bisexual woman. Cisgender, meaning that I was assigned female at birth and identify with the gender associated with that sex. Bisexual, meaning I love all types of people, not just one specific gender or sex.

Although I came out as bisexual at the age of 14, I wasn’t in a queer relationship until I was 18. During my first year at Albion, I met my first partner. He was assigned female at birth, presented masculine, used all pronouns and went by a shortened name to set himself apart from his birth name – also known as his dead name; a moniker that he no longer chooses to go by.

I didn’t care what his assigned sex or assumed gender was. I cared about him and our relationship. All that mattered to me was how I felt, and oh boy, was I in love.

Four months into our relationship, my partner told me that he wanted to use only he/him pronouns and start hormone replacement therapy (HRT). I wasn’t surprised; I’d seen his face light up every time someone accidentally called him a guy when he was still using all pronouns.

Seven months into our relationship, he finally had his first appointment for HRT. He asked me to be in the room when the doctor explained his HRT options. Eventually, they

came to a mutual decision that a weekly testosterone shot would help him achieve his gender presentation goals. I was there for his first shot and administered a few throughout the remainder of our relationship. I even sat with him to pick out what name he would go by; an experience I’ll never forget.

Before him, I never knew what it was like to love a trans person. Since him, I am now aware – to the extent a cisgendered person can be – of the challenges that trans people face and how laborious it is to try and be your true self.

Nico Alfahed, sophomore from Brooklyn Park, Minn., has experienced some of those challenges as a trans person.

“Although I have several mental health issues, I experience gender dysphoria daily – with it getting worse during depressive episodes,” Alfahed said.

According to the Mayo Clinic, gender dysphoria is a term that refers to the psychological distress that a person feels when their assigned sex at birth does not align with their gender identity. When a trans person experiences this, they most often seek gender-affirming care to ease the mental and physical stress associated with gender dysphoria.

Some examples of gender-affirming care include social affirmation with a change of name and/or pronouns and medical affirmation through surgical procedures or HRT. Physical practices can include changing hairstyles or binding one’s chest to prevent their chest from looking feminine. But, even these practices present challenges.

“It’s a struggle for self-image when people refuse to perceive me the way I want – it hurts.”

“I have extreme chest dysphoria, so I am a long-binding person averaging around 10 hours a day,” Alfahed said. “Binders are very uncomfortable to wear, and I wish I didn’t have to wear it.”

Even getting and receiving hormone therapy is a challenge that causes mental health distress.

“I was 18 when I started taking testosterone shots – before I ran out after five months, because I couldn’t find a provider in Michigan,” Alfahed said. “I was off of it for over six months before my mom started sending it to me via mail; this caused significant depression and anxiety.”



Brooklyn Park Minn. sophomore Nico Alfahed wears a white binder as he lifts his arm above his head. Alfahed struggles with gender dysphoria daily leading him to bind his chest for 10 hours a day (Photo illustration by Katherine Simpkins).

Although Alfahed discussed his struggles with being trans, he also emphasized the positive aspect of getting to be himself.

“I’ve actually experienced a loss of anxiety due to being trans. I was terrified of men and now that I look more masculine, I have less fear,” Alfahed said. “I feel now that I can stand my ground.”

Even though HRT is difficult to receive due to provider access, state laws and insurance restrictions, the daily struggle of being misgendered can be the most mentally challenging issue among trans students on campus. Sandy Montes de Oca, a senior from Waukegan Ill., struggles with being misgendered often.

“I have some trouble with people using my they/them pronouns, as I tend to dress more on the ‘femme’ side,” said Montes de Oca via email. “The number of times I’ve heard ‘but you look like a girl’ is infuriating and frustrating.”

Seph Cartier, Ortonville sophomore, has had similar experiences.

“It’s a struggle to be perceived as something that makes you comfortable because not everyone wants to listen to the pronouns we choose,” said Cartier. “It’s a struggle for self-image when people refuse to perceive me the way I want – it hurts.”

Imagine being called the wrong set of pronouns multiple times a day and facing the reality that some people don’t respect who you are as a person. When a student on our campus is misgendered, they feel invalidated and unseen. However, when it is a daily occurrence, it becomes a burden that can negatively impact their mental health and self-image.

According to Child Trends, “Ensuring that transgender people are referred to according to their identified genders, and with their chosen names, is a critical factor in establishing a supportive and safe environment.”

That’s not a burden trans folk should have to endure on their own. It’s important that they have individuals in their corner to advocate for them. Mikayla Campbell, director of the Anna Howard Shaw Center for Gender Equity, is one of those advocates for trans students on campus.

“In my role at the center, I am a non-mandated reporter, meaning that a student who has experienced gender-based discrimination can come talk to me about their options and what the process could look like,” Campbell said.

Campbell also can help students find community resources as well as campus resources that can help them address their mental health.

“That can look like finding the student a support group to join, or referring them to a therapist either on campus or through one

of our campus partners,” Campbell said via email. “What I can do at the center includes helping students find support groups and other resources off campus, helping students navigate the name change process (both legally and at the college level) and helping students navigate the Title IX process.”

There are also resources throughout the state of Michigan that can be beneficial for students.

“Planned Parenthood offers gender-affirming care and began offering hormone therapy in 2022. Also on their website, they offer many resources for transgender people including specific ones to Michigan,” Campbell said via email.

If a student wants to set up an appointment with Campbell, they can email her at mcampbell@albion.edu. Albion College’s Office of Belonging also has a tab for LGBTQ+ Resources that is accessible 24/7 with key information, including bias reporting, housing, health and wellness.

“We do not need to make it harder for anyone who is just trying to be themselves.”

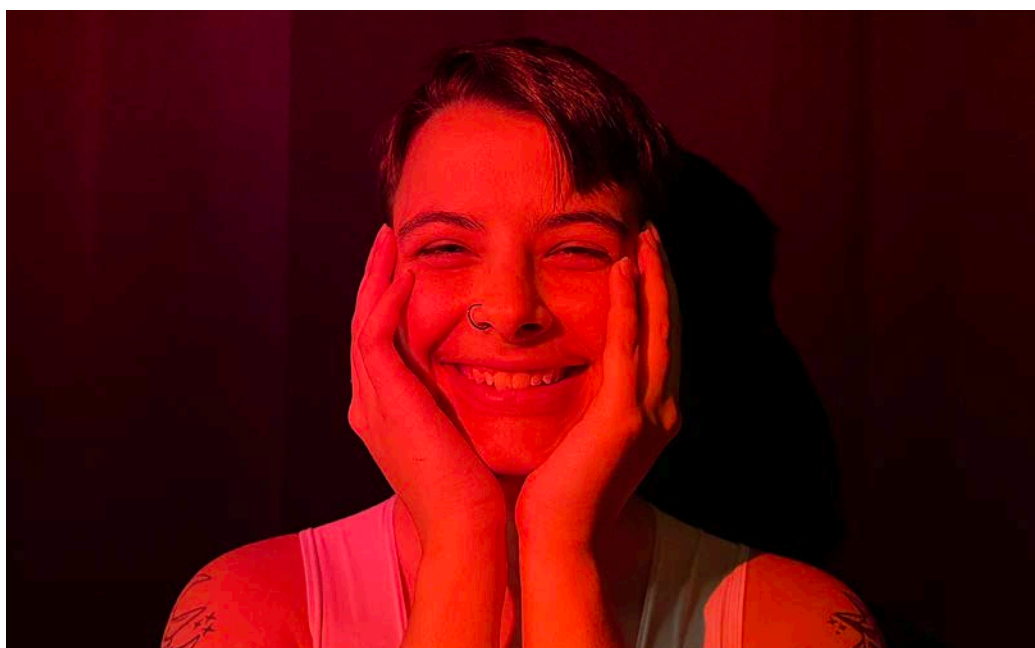
When thinking about the future of campus and the acceptance of transgender students, cisgender folk really need to step up their effort. Unless you have questioned your gender, you have no idea what it’s like to go through that process; we do not need to make it harder for anyone who is just trying to be themselves.

Cisgender individuals can support the creation of transgender-affirming spaces by actively educating themselves about trans issues, showing empathy and respect towards trans people and using inclusive language. We can amplify trans voices, challenge discrimination and promote understanding; ultimately helping to create safe and welcoming environments where trans people can express their authentic selves without fear of prejudice or exclusion.

To all the trans students, staff, friends and others around me: You deserve nothing but love, support and the ability to be your true self. I believe Montes de Oca said it best:

“Only you know who you are, and it’s such a joyous feeling when you know who you are. I hope everyone feels that at least once in their life.”

Visit albionpleiad.com to read more of Simpkins’ “Well-being Wednesday” column.



Alfahed smiles with his hands touching his face, lit by red lighting. Though being trans comes with struggles, Alfahed finds joy in his identity (Photo illustration by Katherine Simpkins).

AC Drip Hosts Masquerade Prom

Bella Bakeman
Editor-in-Chief

On Oct. 28, AC Drip partnered with the Black Student Alliance, the Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority and the Hermandad de SIA sorority to host a masquerade prom in Upper Baldwin. During the prom, nearly 100 students ate food, danced, took photos and voted for prom king and queen.

President of AC Drip and Chicago senior Dior Love said the inspiration for the prom came from current Albion College seniors, who graduated from high school in 2020.

“A lot of people wanted a prom because they didn’t get one in 2020 because of COVID,” Love said. “This was everybody’s opportunity to either go to prom or get a redo for the prom you already had.”

President of AKA and St. Louis senior Hollie Ballentine said that she was excited to have the opportunity to host events like this as a “leader on campus,” adding that hosting events like the prom is something that Love is “passionate about.”

Love said AC Drip’s mission is to “create a space where students can express themselves through their own clothing choices,” adding that AC Drip hosts events like the masquerade prom to give students the opportunity to dress up and be who they want to be and be comfortable in what they choose to wear.

One feature of the event was voting for prom king and queen. Ballentine said



Members of AC Drip and their friends pose in front of a backdrop in Upper Baldwin. On Oct. 28, AC Drip hosted a masquerade prom where students ate, danced and took photos (Photo illustration by Bella Bakeman).

nominations started two to three weeks before the prom and only attendees could vote for the winner.

Prom Queen and Detroit senior Skye Dickson said she did not think she would win.

“I really thought it was a joke. But, I’m really happy I won because I didn’t get a prom in high school,” Dickson said. “It made my mom cry.”

Prom King and Muskegon senior DaMario Chapman said he expected that he’d “come out on top,” later adding that he loved the prom.

“We had the Kiki ball last year, but there was something different about this one,” Chapman said.

Ballentine said she is very excited for the direction that AC Drip is going because there is so much “creativity and freedom” among the group.

Love said that although she is graduating in the spring, there are plenty of juniors, sophomores and first-year students on AC Drip’s ed-board who will carry on the torch.

Visit albionpleiad.com for more photos and coverage.



From left to right Detroit first-year Ja’Nice Davis smiles clutching her purse. Chicago senior Dior Love dances and shows off her nails. First-year Aijalon Wheaton smiles looking at Davis. Albion sophomore Atiyah Artis dances and throws her hands up in the air dancing with Chicago senior Eric Khadon (Photos by Bella Bakeman).

‘Outlet for Imagination:’ Exploring the Innovation Lab

Killian Altayeb
Staff Writer



One of three plastic 3D printers displayed at the entrance of the Innovation Lab. The lab has resources for students to both practice their creativity and learn (Photo by Killian Altayeb).

Since it first opened its doors in Feb. of 2022, Albion College’s 3D Innovation Lab has grown in a variety of ways. In the words of the Director of Instructional Technology and Web Development, Sarah Noah, it’s become a “good way for anyone to learn, no matter what your major is.”

“We want students to enter a different realm when they walk in. We have virtual reality, 3D printing, 3D design, but you also have the innovative stuff here” Noah said. “Students should come in and constantly learn something new.”

Hudsonville sophomore and Innovation Club Vice President Jeremy Timmer said that the “materials in the lab are used for more than expanding creativity.”

“3D innovation is so broad, and I think that’s what makes it so awesome,” Timmer said.

“It’s limited only to what you can think of. I think it’s very powerful.”

Besides the various plastic 3D printers and virtual reality, the Innovation Lab also has an SLA Resin Printer, which produces structures made of cured resin. Unlike materials made using the plastic printers, which contain gaps in between fibers, the resin printer creates dense, solid structures.

Those interested in further engagement with the printers and the world of 3D innovation are free to join the Innovation Club, which meets every other Thursday from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. in the Innovation Lab – found in the Mudd side of the Library.

The club itself “opens up the lab for students to come in and learn more about 3D innovation and creates a space to express their originality and uniqueness through what they can create,” said Timmer.

Student Supervisor and Marshall senior Shannon Barba said that 3D mediums are a form of artistic expression.

“It gives an outlet for your imagination,” Barba said. “It allows you to have ideas and implement those ideas in the same way art students draw out concepts.”

Sometimes, ideas that club members come up with are used outside of the lab. Last spring, the Innovation Club competed in a bridge building competition against Jackson College. Meanwhile, those not interested in competitions have the opportunity to learn and gain new skills.

Timmer recently taught club members how to use Tinkercad, a platform known for creating models for 3D printing and constructive solid geometry.

Timmer also plans to teach members how to use Fusion 360, which they say is “a step up from Tinkercad.”

For hesitant students – or those who are not yet a part of the club – Barba said he wants everyone to know that the lab is a space for them to use.

“I really believe that there’s something here for everyone, and something here that everyone can enjoy because everyone has an imagination,” Barba said. “I want to promote the space as a place where students can come, hang out and they can work.”

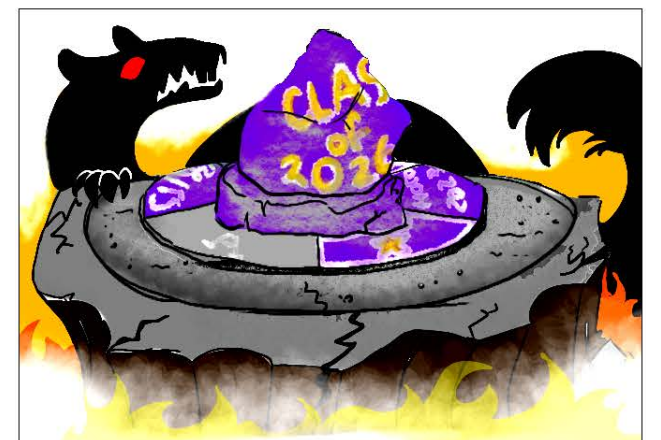
“Students should come in and constantly learn something new.”

In the words of Noah, “Learn about the machines and you can learn about design through that process. It’s there for you to explore.”

Students interested in utilizing the lab’s equipment can schedule a visit or contact the technology department at insttech@albion.edu.

Sarah Noah is the chair of the Media Board, which is the publisher of *The Pleiad*.

Why Isn’t Anyone Painting the Rock?



Bonnie Lord
Managing Editor

Painting the rock is a tradition at Albion College to advertise for events, advocate for issues and generally inform campus. As time passes and the world moves on, the future wonders why no one on campus ever repainted the rock after Homecoming weekend (Illustration by Bonnie Lord).

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