

VCCCD's support of its LGBTQ+ community is ongoing

By Oscar Cobian
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Supporting Ventura County Community College District's LGBTQ+ community is an ongoing effort. It's sometimes easy to feel we have come a long way on LGBTQ+ issues and, indeed, there are many hard-earned gains the queer community and its allies have secured over the years.

Nevertheless, much work remains. That's why Oxnard College and our sister colleges, Moorpark and Ventura, are committed to ensuring LGBTQ+ students and employees feel welcome and supported.

Unfortunately, for many LGBTQ+ residents throughout Ventura County, coming out even today is not always the easiest or safest option.

This was underscored by a 2016 study reported by Pink News, which found Oxnard to be among the nation's 10 worst cities for anti-gay rhetoric on Twitter.

Sadly, this is not surprising for many residents who often feel unwelcome in their own homes and communities. Tragically, Oxnard experienced a particularly dark chapter in 2008 when a queer student named Lawrence King was shot and killed at E.O. Green Junior High School.

For one queer student at Oxnard College, King's murder was a formative experience: "The shooting impacted every queer kid in Oxnard, and it frightened me. I felt like I couldn't show my grief or support because my family and faith community would figure out who I really was and alienate me."

This student (who uses the pronouns they/them/their) has yet to come out to their family and wishes to remain anonymous; they spent years caring for a sick parent while feeling trapped by family and faith. "Latinos are often raised with strong gender norms — you know what's expected of you."

Eventually, this anonymous person found a more inclusive space at Oxnard College, where they've excelled in class, became involved in

student life and even launched a new LGBTQ+ club. "Oxnard College is a safe place for me," they said. "I can be myself and explore who I am — it's helped me start using my voice to advocate for others."

The work of supporting our LGBTQ+ students runs throughout each Ventura County community college. Our district recently received nearly a quarter-million dollars from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office to expand college services for LGBTQ+ students. These funds have helped grow support groups and campus clubs and have expanded mental-health services and employee trainings.

Additionally, this spring, Ventura, Oxnard and Moorpark colleges plan to co-host a Lavender Commencement Ceremony to celebrate our LGBTQ+ graduates.

Additional steps to support Ventura County Community College District students include the implementation of a Preferred Name Policy to give students the option of using a first name other than their legal one.

Oxnard College also launched a pronoun guide to affirm students' identities, and in 2022 we became the first higher-education institution in Ventura County to raise the LGBTQ+ Progress Pride flag. We've also expanded our cur-



Oscar Cobian

riculum to include the course Introduction to LGBTQ+ Studies as part of the college's social justice studies curriculum.

Cristian Rosete is another LGBTQ+ student at Oxnard College who has found acceptance and support on our campus. But Cristian hasn't always been accepted. In high school, his father presented an ultimatum: "Either stop being gay or move."

So, Cristian moved. "My father grew up in Mexico," Cristian says. "He lived in a town that beat up men they suspected of being gay. So, culturally, it was hard for him to accept me."

Cristian became an unaccompanied youth and moved into a crowded group house where he found supportive friends but also began experiencing abuse from his partner. He eventually made his way to

Oxnard College, where things began to click. Cristian became a club president, was elected to student government, and began working for the STEM Center.

"I love Oxnard College. Everyone is here because they want to uplift the community and break generational traumas like mine to help people grow," he says.

Oxnard College is only one partner in this important work, and there remains much to improve upon and grow. We are grateful to local organizations showing our community the way forward, such as the Diversity Collective VC, Oxnard LGBTQ Community, PFLAG Ventura, The Pride Clinic and the Coalition for Family Harmony, among others.

Together, each of us can help build a Ventura County in which we can all take pride.

— Oscar Cobian (he/him/his), Ed.D., is acting president of Oxnard College. For more information about the Ventura County Community College District's LGBTQ+ community, visit vcccd.edu/students/lgbtq.

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