

An Open Letter to the College Community

Dear CCP Lions,

I am writing to you today to share additional insight into the creation and unveiling of Community College of Philadelphia's new Mascot, Roary. After making a splash with their debut at the CCP Pride Party and Black & Gold Bash this past Tuesday, Roary experienced something that is a common occurrence for the many transgender and non-binary students, faculty, and staff on our campus (and in the world at large). They were misgendered.

Misgendering is a common microaggression experienced by transgender and intersex people every day, where people refer to them using language that invalidates or purposefully undermines their gender identity. In this case, many of the people in attendance referred to Roary using he/him pronouns, when they exclusively use they/them pronouns. I know that many people who misgendered Roary did not intend to do so, but were simply unaware that Roary is non-binary. This is something that we could have done better as a college, and we should have made a point to talk about Roary's identity and pronouns at the event more explicitly to ensure that people knew the correct way to refer to them. As they say, hindsight is 20/20, and we can't go back and do things differently with Roary's debut, but I feel compelled to address this so we can move forward in a way that makes this campus a safer place for the transgender and intersex community.

Roary was meant to represent everyone on this campus, regardless of gender. In fact, the decision to make Roary non-binary happened gradually, and came from conversations about having a male identified mascot representing our athletic teams, when most of our student athletes are women. We wanted the mascot to have a mane, like the iconic lions adorning the doors of the Mint Building, but we also did not want to contribute to the gender imbalance in collegiate sports, where the majority of mascots are male identified. We discussed having a pride of lions, one male, one female, and one non-binary lion, but the cost and logistics of having three mascots made this unfeasible. At this point, the Dean of Students asked for my advice, and I told him about a pride of lions in Botswana, where lions that were identified as female by scientists had higher levels of testosterone, grew manes, and exhibited behaviors usually attributed to male lions. I said that we could make Roary a part of this pride and use she/her pronouns despite the maned costume, or we could use they/them pronouns and use this as a teaching tool for the community while providing much needed representation for non-binary people on our campus. After further discussion with faculty, staff, and students, we decided to use they/them pronouns, but I wanted to ensure we did it correctly.

My biggest concern was making sure we used correct terminology to describe Roary's identity. When researching non-binary mascots, I found two previous examples: Wizard the Lizard at Truckee Meadows Community College, and Squiggles at the Please Touch Museum. However, as I looked at these mascots, I noticed that they never (or rarely) used pronouns to describe these mascots, and they did not provide a specific gender identity. I wanted to find the words that best describe Roary's identity based on the backstory we developed. Since Roary has biological traits that cannot be categorized as exclusively male or female, we decided to use a term that means "born with sex characteristics (including genitals, gonads and chromosome patterns) that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies" (United Nations Free & Equal, 2017). However, since intersex is a biological sex rather

than a gender identity, there are some intersex people who identify as a man or a woman, while others identify as non-binary. So it was also important to recognize Roary's non-binary identity if we were going to use they/them pronouns.

I am very excited that the college supported the decision to have a non-binary mascot, because they provide us with an opportunity to educate the college community on using correct pronouns and terminology for non-binary people. When I arrived at the college in July 2018, I was an openly queer person, but I had not come out as non-binary. As I started identifying as a non-binary transgender person, and using they/them pronouns for myself, I was also responsible for educating the campus community on LGBTQ+ Issues. As a result, I experienced what many transgender students already knew; the gender binary is ingrained in our society, and CCP is not exempt. I experienced people laughing at me and taking my picture without my consent when I wore a dress on Halloween last year, I often get stares when I walk through campus in femme clothing, and I am called "Mr," "Sir," and he/him/his pronouns pretty much every day. Despite this, I am happy to say, things are getting better on this campus.

I can't take credit for all the positive change on this campus, because it has been a collaborative effort with many faculty and staff members who have been doing this work since before I arrived on campus. Most of the credit should go to the amazing students who revitalized the LGBTQ+ Club, and continue to do amazing work for the College community. Over the past year, we have accomplished a lot:

- We created a process for the Chosen Name Policy, which allows students to change their first name in any college systems that do not require a legal name (ccp email, student ID cards, class rosters, etc.)
- We compiled an Out List of LGBTQ+ Faculty and Staff, to increase visibility and provide an additional resource for LGBTQ+ Students who feel like they do not know who they can talk to on campus.
- We worked with the LGBTQ+ Club, Legal Studies Department, the Mayor's Office for LGBTQ+ Affairs, and the Pennsylvania Bar Association to develop a free clinic to provide legal assistance to LGBTQ+ folks who want to legally change their name and gender marker.
- We developed multiple trainings through the Diversity Certificate Program that focus on LGBTQ+ competency, and have created a specific training for trans competent customer service, available to any department who requests a training. As of June 2019, over 200 faculty, staff, and student staff members have attended these trainings.
- Alongside the LGBTQ+ Club, we developed a new format for the annual LGBTQ+ Conference to focus on the education of allies and the empowerment of LGBTQ+ members of the campus community.
- In the 2018-19 academic year, we had social and educational events every month. Including our flagship events: the Coming Out Night Drag Show, World AIDS Day, The Masc We Wear, and The LGBTQ+ Education and Empowerment Conference.

We know we still have a long way to go, and the MarcDavid LGBTQ Center is committed to making this campus a safer place for LGBTQ+ students, staff, and faculty. We will continue the work we have done over the past year, as we improve and expand our current programs and initiatives. We have

also identified several key areas for improvement and will be prioritizing the following new initiatives as we move forward:

- Increasing the visibility of the MarcDavid LGBTQ Center on campus to ensure that all LGBTQ+ students, faculty, and staff know that there is a resource for them on campus.
- Compiling a list of all gender neutral restrooms on campus to make them easier to find. We also recognize that the gender neutral restrooms on this campus are very strange in the way they were converted from gendered multi-stall restrooms into all gender single use restrooms, and we are looking for ways to renovate these restrooms to make them less awkward and more comfortable.
- Developing an educational campaign using Roary to teach the college community how to use and respect people's correct pronouns.
- Creating an anonymous support group for transgender students on campus.
- Recording our LGBTQ+ 101, Transgender 101, and other trainings in order to post them on our website.
- Developing an online module for educating students on LGBTQ+ Issues as part of New Student Orientation.
- Working with vendors of our student information databases to include non-binary genders and pronouns.

When I sat down to write this letter, I did not think it would be three pages long, and I thank those of you who took the time to read through to the end. I hope you all grow to love Roary as your new mascot, and I hope they become an effective teaching tool to make this campus a safer place. Also, I encourage anyone who wants to learn more about LGBTQ+ issues, or who needs support as an LGBTQ+ person, to stop by my office or attend one of our events. Our office in S1-19 is open from 10 am – 6pm Monday – Thursday, and 10 am – 5 pm on Friday. The first event of the Fall Semester will be the Second Annual Coming Out Night Drag Show on Thursday, October 10th at 7pm in The Great Hall (S2-19). I hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vin Scarfo', written in a cursive style.

Mx. Vincent E. Scarfo, M.Ed.
Coordinator, MarcDavid LGBTQ Center
Pronouns: They/Them

Works Cited

United Nations Free & Equal (2017, May) Fact Sheet: Intersex. Retrieved from <https://www.unfe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/UNFE-Intersex.pdf>