



# UNITED SHE STANDS

**A**s a licensed social worker and University of Findlay professor, Robin Walters-Powell's championing of gender diversity and accompanying supportive initiatives comes naturally, so much so that her volunteerism and academic research has focused on such efforts.

In 2009, when she began advising Findlay's then-new United club, a Student Government Association-sanctioned organization for LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and other) students, the "litmus test" for campus interest and involvement was a No Hate event, Walters-Powell said. Approximately 450 people participated, which provided encouragement for continuing activities.

"Quite quickly after that, we had a relationship panel where we had couples that represented every type of relationship on the panel, and that went over really well," said Walters-Powell, Ed.D., M.S.W., LISW-S.



**ROBIN WALTERS-POWELL, ED.D., ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AND SOCIAL WORK PROGRAM CHAIR**  
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## STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

Now, United represents one of the largest student groups at UF. As many as 500 consider themselves members, and bi-monthly meetings are attended by at least 25 individuals. “We always have the same people and then there are always 10 to 15 new people whom we’ve never seen before. So it’s actually a really active group,” she noted.

Far from fringe, LGBTQ+ students and their advocates, as supporters are called, constitute a substantial portion of the student body. Walters-Powell estimates that as many as one third either identify as LGBTQ+, or have family members or friends who do.

Walters-Powell, key students in positions of leadership for United, and other faculty and staff have been so instrumental in presenting and providing a welcoming environment that it has aided with student recruitment, housing, retention and community outreach.

The University’s mission has, since its inception, been grounded in Christian faith, which embraces hospitality and inclusion. In 2017, UF crafted a diversity statement that, in part, states, “We aspire to foster acceptance of, respect for, and appreciation of all persons in our campus community. We celebrate our commonalities and unique differences, and we acknowledge

that diversity broadens learning, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and prepares our students for meaningful lives and productive careers.” Along with religion, race and the other “many aspects of diversity,” gender is certainly considered a part of this philosophy, leaders maintain.

Also last year, the University of Findlay received three out of five stars from the Campus Pride Index, which lists colleges and universities throughout the nation that exhibit “institutional commitment to LGBTQ-inclusive policy program and practice.”

Gender-neutral housing and bathrooms have been added to campus, and other efforts are in the works, Walters-Powell said.

## COMMUNITY INCLUSION

More recently, Walters-Powell, along with United and Public Relations Student Society of America members have reached beyond the campus’ borders and into the City of Findlay by assisting with bringing community groups together for common causes. For instance, Walters-Powell handed the reins to Dr. Jasmine Bradley, M.D., a Findlay instructor, who is helping to spearhead a “lived equality” campaign that is focusing on fair housing and identification of LGBTQ+ friendly businesses.

“I have always been a champion of the underdog. I love working with students, and if I have passionate students who are wanting to accomplish something that seems impossible, I say, ‘Yes, let’s do this.’ I’m always up for that challenge,” Walters-Powell said.

Additionally, Walters-Powell has taken United students to Midwestern college student-oriented LGBTQ+ conferences, and has erected signage on campus that she maintains has drawn students to the institution.

Walters-Powell said she is happy to provide support, and to help such students see themselves on campus as grassroots activists.

“To me, I always say to students that it’s going to be really more meaningful to you because you’re going to be fighting for things that perhaps you take for granted currently in the place you live. I feel like there are a lot more things they want to do that I feel maybe will be interesting for our campus. For instance, they want to host a Pride celebration,” said Walters-Powell.

Faculty and staff support is also a key measure when it comes to inclusion. The University of Findlay was aided by a donation from an alumna who wished the funds to be earmarked for LGBTQ-specific initiatives. Therefore, a committee was created to help address matters and provide

support, Walters-Powell noted. A campus climate survey was conducted that targeted prevailing attitudes about different genders, and ongoing free training called Safe Space is provided for faculty and staff to be advocates for students.

## AVENUES OF INQUIRY

Walters-Powell’s campus and outreach measures also coincide with her academic research, which has focused on gender issues. Her dissertation encompassed a qualitative study on individuals who had announced their gender identity to friends and family, and the factors that enabled that occurrence. Specifically, her research looked at why traditional college-age students are more likely to “come out” at that time.

“At what point do they feel brave enough, or what is the tipping point where they’re able to go home and talk to their parents about those kinds of things?” she wondered. “I used social network theory, which looks at family, peers, education, spirituality and greater community. What are the pieces of

those that are risks and protective factors for those students that allowed them to feel like they can come out safely? And why is college so different than high school?”

Walters-Powell has extended this research internationally. Thanks to grant funding she and a handful of other UF professors have received from the Japan Foundation that enabled research into concepts of “co-existence,” she has been able to scrutinize how the Japanese LGBTQ culture compares to that within the United States. Her cross-cultural analysis revealed notable differences in attitudes and approaches. This month she is expected to present her findings at the Asian Network Conference, and nationally in Philadelphia and Austin, Texas.

At this point in her career and life, Walters-Powell said she is fulfilled.

“I feel like this campus in general is just very supportive,” she said. Helping United grow to become what it is today has been

“a great privilege,” she said. “The impact it has made on students’ lives has been pretty phenomenal,” Walters-Powell continued, and said she is looking forward to serving students well into the future.

Her LGBTQ research, dovetailing as it does with her advising and social work interests, makes her life all the more rewarding, she said.

**“I’M DEFINITELY AFFIRMED EVERY SINGLE DAY THAT I’M EXACTLY WHERE I’M SUPPOSED TO BE, AND DOING WHAT I’M SUPPOSED TO BE DOING.”**

“I love my job. I love everything about it, and I love the students. I’m definitely affirmed every single day that I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be, and doing what I’m supposed to be doing. I would never even think about going anyplace else,” she said.

